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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

Faculty of Design, Visual Communications.

Family Life in the films of Jim Sheridan

By Helen Sheridan.

Submitted to the faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in
candidacy for the Degree of B.Des in Visual Communications.

Dublin, 1999.

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INTRODUCTION

The films of Jim Sheridan contain many themes but through this thesis I hope to explore one aspect that is most prominent and that is the depiction of family life. By discussing this in two main themes (father/son relationships and mother/son relationships) I hope to give some explanation as to why he depicts Irish families as he does.

By taking into account Ireland's position as a post colonial country and the effects that colonisation has had on our society I feel that the reader will better understand how our history has also affected depictions of the family.

I will also discuss Sheridan's own family background and how this may influence his portrayals.

The society which a person is working in and a person's own background are perhaps the two most powerful areas of influence for any artist but especially for film makers. By taking these into account I hope the reader will be given a thorough understanding of Sheridan's influences.

INTRODUCTION

The film of Jim Sheridan contains many themes but through this thesis I hope to explore one aspect that is most prominent and that is the depiction of family life. By discussing this in two main themes (father/son relationships and mother/son relationships) I hope to give some explanation as to why he depicts Irish families as he does. By taking into account Ireland's position as a post colonial country and the effects that colonisation has had on our society, I feel that the reader will better understand how our history has also affected depictions of the family.

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CHAPTER ONE

Post colonial theory and the Irish family

Ireland's past and in particular its colonial past have had an enormous effect on the Irish family which has in turn affected the depiction of Irish families in film. By studying some of the theories written about Ireland as a post colonial country we may be given an insight into how and why Irish men, women and families are depicted as they are. Firstly what needs to be addressed is:

What exactly is post colonialism and post colonial theory?

The definition of post colonialism is still ambiguous and is still being addressed today. There are many theories about post colonialism from what is considered a colonised country to when a country can be regarded as being post colonial.

Theodore Allen in The Empire writes back, one book which attempts to give an explanation of these theories, ask the question, when is a country considered post colonial? (in Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1989, page 2) The word post suggests some sense of closure and implies that this term refers to periods after the imperial coloniser has departed. However, some theorists describe the period of post colonialism as being effective as of the moment that the coloniser has occupied the colonised state or country. This is simply one attempt at pinpointing the moment of transformation from pre colonial to post colonial. This period could also be broken into four stages as described by Thomas Mc Evilly. Firstly the "pre colonial" stage is described as idyllic and is often idealised during periods of revolt. Secondly there is the experience of oppression and colonisation which inevitably leads to the third phase, the rejection by the colonised people of the identity forced upon it by the coloniser. The final stage is effective from the moment that the coloniser departs (in Gibbons, 1996, page 172)

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Therefore Allen in *The British writer's book* one book which attempts to give an explanation of these theories, asks the question: when is a country considered post colonial? (in Ashworth, C. (ed.), *The British writer's book*, page 3). The word post suggests some sense of closure and implies that this term refers to periods after the imperial colonial has departed. However, some theorists describe the period of post colonialism as being effective as of the moment that the coloniser has occupied the colonised state or country. This is simply one attempt at pinpointing the moment of transition from pre colonial to post colonial. This period could also be broken into four stages as described by Thomas McEvilly. Firstly the "pre colonial" stage is described as idyllic and is often idealised during periods of revolt. Secondly there is the experience of oppression and colonisation which inevitably leads to the third phase, the rejection by the colonised people of the identity forced upon it by the coloniser. The final stage is effective from the moment that the coloniser departs (in Gibbons, 1990, page 12).

In the case of Irish history the period of post colonialism could be described in a number

ber of ways. According to the authors of The Empire Writes Back 1922 could be considered a significant year as Ireland became a Free State and began its political phase free from its imperial coloniser. If the moment of post colonialism is described as the point of occupation perhaps Ireland could have been post colonial as of the arrival of Strongbow in the twelfth century. If Thomas Mc Evilly's theory is accepted than Ireland would fall into the final category where the coloniser has departed the colony. Here also the moment of post colonialism is hard to define as the existence of the six counties complicates this view. It becomes difficult to place Ireland into any of these four categories if the coloniser has not fully departed. The term post in relation to the colonisation of Ireland can be misunderstood as Anne Mc Clintock describes how the existence of the six counties complicates this

"Ireland may at a pinch be post colonial but for the inhabitants of British occupied Northern Irelandthere may be nothing post about colonialism at all"(in Gibbons, 1996, page 179)

By studying these theories it becomes obvious that post colonialism and theories that attempt to explain the effects of colonisation are often inconsistent. It is often difficult to apply every theory to the Irish situation. Therefore, it is only necessary to discuss certain theories which are applicable to the Irish context. It is for this reason that when the term post colonial is used in this thesis I will be taking the view that a country becomes colonial from the moment that the coloniser occupies the state or country and that it becomes post colonial from the moment that the occupier departs. By accepting this view Southern Ireland can be considered post colonial since the coloniser has departed. In the case of Northern Ireland, as I have already mentioned, this is a more complicated situation since the Nationalists believe that they live in a colony and the Unionists believe that they live in Great Britain.

There exist certain theorists who question whether Ireland could be considered post colonial at all. In relation to these views Theodore Allen argues that colonisation is not exclusively a third world problem. Simply because Ireland is situated in Europe and is

set of ways. According to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, 1989 could be considered a significant year as Ireland became a Free State and began its political independence from its imperial coloniser. If the moment of post-colonialism is described as the point of decolonisation, perhaps Ireland could have been post-colonial as of the arrival of Strongbow in the twelfth century. If Thomas Kuhn's theory is accepted, then Ireland would fall into the final category, where the coloniser has departed the colony. Here also the moment of post-colonialism is hard to define as the existence of the six counties complicates this view. It becomes difficult to place Ireland into any of these four categories if the coloniser has not fully departed. The term post in relation to the colonisation of Ireland can be misunderstood as Anne McClintock describes how the existence of the six counties complicates this.

Ireland is not at a point of post-colonialism but for the Irish nationalists of British-occupied Northern Ireland, there may be nothing post about colonialism still. (McClintock, 1995, page 179)

By studying these theories it becomes obvious that post-colonialism and theories that attempt to explain the effects of colonisation are often inconsistent. It is often difficult to apply every theory to the Irish situation. Therefore it is only necessary to discuss certain theories which are applicable to the Irish context. It is for this reason that when the term post-colonial is used in this thesis, I will be taking the view that a country becomes colonial from the moment that the coloniser occupies the state or country and that it becomes post-colonial from the moment that the occupier departs. By accepting this view, Southern Ireland can be considered post-colonial since the coloniser has departed. In the case of Northern Ireland, as I have already mentioned, this is a more complicated situation since the nationalists believe that they live in a colony and the Unionists believe that they live in Great Britain.

There exist certain theorists who question whether Ireland could be considered post-colonial at all. In relation to these views Theodore Allen argues that colonisation is not exclusively a third world problem. Simply because Ireland is situated in Europe and is

predominately white does not make it any less subject to colonisation than any third world country. The fact is that in the case of Ireland (both North and South) history cannot be re-written and the effects of colonisation cannot be removed in an attempt to revert back to a pre colonial Ireland as described by Thomas Mc Evilly. This position is explored in The Empire Writes Back where the final chapter concludes by saying that (in Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1989, page 196)

“It is not possible to return or to rediscover an absolute pre colonial colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise”(Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1989, page 196)

In order to understand these effects it's helpful to know a little about Irish colonial history to explain why Irish people have been described as they are. Throughout Ireland's political and revolutionary history from the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century, to the period of English supremacy in the eighteenth century, to the eventual setting up of the Free State in 1922 Irish people and society have altered in accordance with these movements. While Irish society was going through periods of strain and pressure so too were the people of Ireland. The Anglo-Norman period (around the twelfth century) commenced when Richard Strongbow, second Earl of Pembroke, succeeded to the kingdom of Leinster. Following this event various Anglo-Norman lords settled in Ireland claiming land as their own. However, over the next three centuries these settlers integrated with the local Irish and as a result the English monarchy had little influence over Irish laws or politics. It was during this era that the English authority became concentrated in the area around and including Dublin known as the Pale. This era is seen as the foundation of future conflict in Irish history even though the average daily lives of the majority of Irish people were little affected by the English settlers.

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It was not until the first plantations of Leinster and Offaly in the sixteenth century that

who had begun to attack the Pale, Queen Mary of England announced a scheme known as plantation. This system implemented several concepts which would prove detrimental to the future of Irish people. These were principally the removal of Irish Lords from their land and the institution of English Lords in their place, the rejection of Gaelic laws and customs and the use of English rather than Irish in daily life. Although this plantation was considered ineffective by the English monarchy it acted as a framework for further plantations. As a result, by the start of the seventeenth century both Munster and Ulster had been planted along with Laois and Offaly. The Ulster plantation along with the Cromwellian settlements were considered huge successes mainly due to the large number of Anglican and Presbyterian English which settled in Ireland. The Cromwellian plantation was considered the most ferocious of all. This scheme ordered all Irish Catholics to surrender their land to Protestant English and with the act of settlement those Catholics were to be transplanted

“To Hell or to Connaught”(Collins, 1978, page 153)

The effects of these plantations on Irish society were numerous. In 1600 over 90% of land owners were Catholic whereas by 1700 this figure had dropped to 15% (Collins, 1978, page 153). The division of Irish who were Catholic and planters who were Protestant was the main distinction between different people in Ireland at the time. This mark of division is still relevant in the Irish society of the twentieth century. But what consequence would these events have had and could still have on Irish men and women? Before the final plantation of Ulster a period lasted known as the nine years war which was marked by the Battle of Kinsale. Here the last of the Gaelic Lords were defeated by the English and fled the country in an event known as the Flight of the Earls. Here the native Irish literally fled from their colonial oppressor. This could have only have been a disappointing blow for Irish people of the time, but also for the Irish people in subsequent years who looked to the past for the causes of their oppression. When they realised that the one collection of people who should have defended their land instead partook in a mass exodus from their native home they could only have felt deceived.

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To Hell or to Connaught (O'Brien, 1978, page 132)

The effects of these plantations on Irish society were enormous. In 1500 over 70% of land owners were Catholic whereas by 1700 this figure had dropped to 15% (O'Brien, 1978, page 133). The division of Irish who were Catholic and planters who were Protestant was the main distinction between different people in Ireland at the time. This mark of division is still relevant in the Irish society of the twentieth century. But what consequences would these events have had and could still have on Irish men and women? Before the first plantation of Ulster a period lasted known as the nine years war which was marked by the Battle of Kinsale. After the loss of the Catholic lords were defeated by the English and then the country in an event known as the flight of the Earls. Here the native Irish lords fled from their colonial oppressors. This could have only have been a disappointing blow for Irish people of the time, but also for the Irish people in subsequent years who looked to the past for the success of their oppression. When they realised that the one collection of people who should have defended their land instead perished in a mass exodus from their native home they could only have felt deceived.

Declan Kiberd in Inventing Ireland described one effect which could have been relevant in this situation. He describes the Irish male (and in particular the Irish father) of this phase in Ireland's post colonial history as a defeated man. This could have been due to years of oppression where the Irish male did little to relieve his oppressive situation and anything he did do was of little consequence. He felt that he had accepted English rule and as a result he spent his time lamenting the heroes of the past, of pre-colonial Ireland. He also goes on to explain that this defeatist attitude caused the Irish male to question his masculinity and he felt that he would never be given a chance to prove his valour as the heroes of pre colonial Ireland had (Kiberd, 1996, page 380).

During the seventeenth century and eighteenth century a number of revolutionary societies were set up to try to overthrow English rule in Ireland and gain Catholic Emancipation. The principal revolutionary society in the 1700s was Wolfe Tone and the United Irish Men whose failed rebellion at Vinegar Hill, acted as a catalyst for the passage of the Act of Union in 1801. This act officially united both the Irish and English parliaments. From this union onwards Irish colonial history was preoccupied with religious and civic freedom but in practice it was marked by a series of failed revolts. That is not to say that there were no positive steps towards emancipation; after all by the middle of the 1800s Irish Catholics were allowed to hold local office and to sit in parliament. However, the average daily lives of the peasant Irish Catholics were little affected by these changes.

These events along with the famine and failed rebellions by the Fenians and Robert Emmet simply added to the sense of failure and defeat which already existed in Irish society. As a result of his feeling of deficiency in public life the Irish father began to search for power in his domestic life. In his social and political life the Irish male was part of a fiercely patriarchal system. The tyranny which he felt here and his impotence outside of domestic spheres would cause the Irish father to search for power in his family life but this autocratic male is often considered the weakest male of all who concealed his underlying weakness striving for power and aggression over respect and

authority. His search for power in his domestic situation may have proved fruitful but he may have failed to gain any sense of respect or authority.

“Patriarchal values exist in societies where men, lacking true authority settle for mere power”(Kiberd, 1996, page 391)

By the start of the twentieth century rebellion was firmly on the minds of Irish men. It felt necessary to build upon the reforms which had been implemented in previous centuries and perhaps feel and see the results of rebellion. The civil and religious restrictions which had been lifted with the Catholic Emancipation Act seventy one years earlier were simply not enough and a complete split from England was considered necessary. Sinn Fein is perhaps the primary organisation which emerged during this period in Ireland's fight against colonisation. Founded in 1902 it was set up as a direct result of the failure of the Home Rule Bill and the public disgrace of Charles Stewart Parnell. The distinction between these two movements was principally that the leaders of the Sinn Fein party proclaimed total national independence, rather than mere political autonomy, as their objective.

The one landmark event in the struggle for total national independence is the Easter Rebellion of 1916. It was during this period that the failed rebellions of previous centuries reached a climax in the form of this Rising. Although this rebellion was considered a failure it acted as a catalyst for a series of events which lead to the establishment of the Free State in 1922. It is from this era onwards that Ireland entered the post colonial phase.

This new aggression in the form of an elevated number of rebellions caused the Irish son's relationship with his father to go through a period of stress. Declan Kiberd explains that in a colony during revolution, revolt of sons against fathers is common but it is a futile gesture since the fathers themselves do not control the means of power in society. One reason for this revolt is often explained as an underlying search for authority. Unfortunately, as I have already explained, the father could not provide this

authority. His search for power in his domestic situation may have proved fruitful but he may have failed to gain any sense of respect or authority.

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This new aggression in the form of an elevated number of rebellions caused the Irish man's relationship with his father to go through a period of stress. Declan Kiberich explains that in a colony, during revolutionary times, the father is seen as a tyrant but it is a father figure since the fathers themselves do not control the reins of power in society. One reason for this revolt is often explained as an underlying search for authority. Unfortunately, as I have already explained, the father could not provide this

image for his son and as a result in the years leading up to and during the founding moments of the new Irish state, Irish sons began to reject the codes laid down by their fathers. This rejection is more of a conflict against the absence of a figure of authority, such as a father, than against the father's ideas (Kiberd, 1996, page 389). The fact that this rebellion of sons against fathers reached a climax during the phase of post colonialism where Ireland was beginning to gain some sense of freedom may suggest the belief in

“A new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never
previously existed was about to win it's freedom” (Gibbons, 1996,
page 179)

To prove that he was far better than his predecessors, the Irish man who had lived in the past, this rebellion lead the child to strive for greater things than his father had achieved. Irish sons viewed their fathers as a symbol of the oppressed or rather as a symbol of the effects of an oppressive coloniser. By rebelling against their fathers they were in turn rebelling against the coloniser. Kiberd goes on to discuss how a number of the great Irish literary figures, Yeats, Joyce, Synge, O'Casey have all depicted father/son relationships and how the theme of rebellion is a common one. All of these writers were working in a phase of Irish history where Irish people were still fighting for freedom or beginning to gain some sense of it. If this is taken into account it is no wonder that Irish sons were depicted not so much as rebels against authority as rebels in need of figures of authority. When they looked to the one person who should have been able to provide a convincing representation of control and dignity and realised that he couldn't they rebelled in fear that their own destiny may turn out the same. Perhaps if the Irish father had been able to provide this image for his son this rebellion would not have taken place.

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(Kiberd, 1996, page 385)

This conflict between father and son also had an effect on the Irish mother's relationship with her family. From 1916 onwards the father's aggression in domestic spheres increased even further and his role outside of the home continued. During this era the mother/son relationship became vitally important in the overall structure of the family unit. It is often the one relationship which is portrayed as a happy loving one.

However, this intense relationship may signify the inherent inability of the Irish father to develop relationships with his children. The withdrawal from his role of father and rejection of his children left the mother in need of emotional relationships and so her son became her kind of emotional crutch.

Historically the country of Ireland has itself been depicted as a woman, "Mother Ireland"(Innes, 1993, page 18). This image has sorrowful rather than celebratory connotations. Mother Ireland is often shown as a beautiful weeping woman whose sons have gone out to defend her. Margareth McCurtin, a historian who has done much research into this symbol suggests that it

"is a symbol of surrender and helplessness...it is an image of a country as a woman being subdued, her rights taken from her"

(Derry Film and Video, 1988, Mother Ireland)

The fact that Ireland is a celtic culture and therefore "feminine" may have added to this metaphor. At the same time countries of germanic origin such as England are described as a fatherland. As a result it seemed necessary for these dominant, virile races to control the feminine races such as Ireland. Professor of post-colonial literatures in the University of Kent, C.L. Innes is preoccupied with this metaphor of Ireland as a woman subdued and attempts to explain how an why this depiction may have come about. It is surprising to discover that it was not until the start of the eighteenth century that Ireland began to be described as a Motherland. Even up until the seventeenth century the name "t-athradh" (Innes, 1993, page 18) (fatherland) was used to denote Ireland

This conflict between father and son also had an effect on the Irish mother's relation-
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The fact that Ireland is a Celtic culture and therefore "feminine" may have added to this
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and Innes contemplates the notion that this reversal of images may have its roots in the rise of colonial oppression.

“the more colonial oppressed the Irish became in historical reality the more spiritualised became the mythical ideal of the Motherland.” (Innes, 1993, page 18)

During the revolutionary period of 1916 Irish women were encouraged to fight alongside the men and even before this period societies such as the Ladies Land League and the Irish Women’s Workers Union were actively participating in the struggle for civil and political rights. Even in the founding moments of the new Irish state women were supported by the Dail when it came to voting and standing for election, a step which was considered very progressive and advanced even by the standards of other European countries.

Nevertheless these reforms did not have much effect since Irish women through out political history have taken a backseat in relation to life outside of the home. One reason for this may be because of the change in society of the New State and in independent Ireland. Martin McCabe describes this society as “hyper-masculine” (McCabe, 1994, page 49). As I have already described the defeated man in social and political life felt the need to control his family, now he many have been given a chance to

“assert power and control over the nation” (McCabe, 1994, page 49)

This ideology is most evident in the newly drafted constitution of 1937 which stated that

“without the contribution of women in the home the goal of the nation could not be achieved”(Derry Film and Video, 1988, Mother Ireland)

and James emphasizes the notion that this reversal of images may have its roots in the use of colonial oppression.

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During the revolutionary period of 1916 Irish women were encouraged to fight along with the men and even before this period women such as the Ladies I and League and the Irish Women's Workers' Union were actively participating in the struggle for civil and political rights. Even in the founding moments of the new Irish state women were supported by the Oath when it came to voting and standing for election, a step which was considered very progressive and advanced even by the standards of other European countries.

Nevertheless these reforms did not have much effect since Irish women through out political history have taken a back seat in relation to the outside of the home. The reason for this may be because of the change in society of the New State and in independent Ireland. Martin McQuinn described this society as 'hyper-masculine' (McQuinn 1994, page 49). As I have already described the detached man in social and political life, the need to control his family now he may have been given a chance to

assert power and control over the nation (McQuinn 1994, page 49).

This ideology is most evident in the newly drafted constitution of 1937 which stated that

"...that the contribution of women in the home is the goal of the nation could not be achieved (Dunne, Flynn and Vanecko 1988, page 180).

It was obvious that a new era was emerging in relation to Irish women and in an attempt to reconfirm the Irish masculine identity, Irish women became oppressed, being condemned to the home. Another reason for this tyranny may be due to another "new" ideology which emerged in independent Ireland. In fact this ideology was hardly new at all, instead an effort was made to revert back to the pre colonial Ireland which I have described earlier in this chapter. This regression attempted to look to the past instead of inventing a new future for themselves. This may be partly because of a fear of freedom (and an uncertain future) which had been fought so strongly for. Perhaps the only way to control this fear was to try to revert back to the nostalgic society which existed before colonisation. This was impossible since the effects of colonisation cannot be removed. This change happened unconsciously, in practice those who promised freedom from oppression through rebellion and politics were transformed into the conservatives of the new state. As a result, autocracy and censorship were embraced by the new leaders along with a vision of an Ireland peopled with virile, masculine leaders and passive, motherly females. It is not surprising that these ideas found their way into Irish society and eventually from there to literature, art and film. Many feminists believe that these gender representations are simply a reflection of a society where men have power and control and the case of Ireland after 1922 may reinforce this idea (Nelmes, 1992, page 228)

It was not until the 1960s that some kind of change began in Irish society. This change may have occurred due to the large number of external influences from other societies around the world and also due to economic changes within Ireland itself. These were brought to Ireland via many forms one of which was the television. These changes did not happen overnight, but gradually

In an interview Jim Sheridan's younger brother Peter expressed how even as a child he recognised these changes. He explained how, in 1922, Ireland was a society on the verge of change also. In the 1960s instead of regressing as the society of the 1920s did these changes were approved and embraced. In his autobiography "44" (the number of his childhood home was '44' Seville Place) Peter describes his first encounter with the

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plays of O'Casey, and how they struck a familiar cord with him

"In the play the characters paraded into the tenement just like so many had paraded into our lives in the kitchen of 44....People searching for father figures and heroes. Answers that fed their delusions. It was like ten years of 44 realised in under two hours. It was the history of the black and tan war and the tragedy of a society that stood in the shadow of a gunman"(Sheridan, unpublished)

I questioned Peter about how these plays, although they were written in the 1920s, could have reflected what was going on in his own family life in the 1960s. He explained that just as O' Casey's plays were a metaphor for what was happening in the Irish society of the 1920s so too was his family for the 1960s

"These enormous changes in society, one element was television.....but Da embraced that change. the television was like inviting in the world the uncertainty of change, of the future"(Sheridan, 1998)

He recalls (in a B.B.C. interview) how on New Years Eve 1960 his father and uncle got up on the roof to install the aerial that would introduce the family to television.

"The introduction of television was a huge thing for our house, not only for our house but for the entire community of Ireland to this world that was out there"(Omnibus, 1998)

To Ireland, television was simply a part of that change. It was not the case that overnight everyone bought a television and society altered. As a child in the 1960s these feelings of change were not expressible but looking back as an adult it seems fitting that this new medium, television, was introduced to the Sheridan family on New Years Eve 1960.

plays of O'Casey and how they struck a familiar cord with him

In the play, the characters are not the kind of people that you
and played out in the streets of the people's theatre for
and of the people and the people, it was the people who were
a part of the people's life and the people who were the people
black and white and the people of the people, the people of the people
of a people's theatre, the people of the people.

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could have reflected what was going on in his own family life in the 1960s. He
explained that just as O'Casey's plays were a metaphor for what was happening in the
Irish society of the 1930s so too was his family for the 1960s.

These characters, though, in a way, are not the kind of people that
the people of the people, the people of the people, the people of the people,
the people of the people, the people of the people, the people of the people.

He recalls (in a H.B.C. interview) how on New Year's Eve 1960 his father and uncle got
up on the roof to install the aerial that would introduce the family to television.

The installation of television was a big thing for the people, not
only for the people but for the people's community in Ireland and the world.
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ting that this new medium television was introduced to the Stinson family on New
Year's Eve 1960.

CHAPTER TWO

The influence of Sheridan's background on his films

Before I begin to discuss how Jim Sheridan portrays family life in his movies I feel it is necessary to know a little about his own family background, after all as Sheridan himself said

“ the terrible thing about true stories is that you seem to impose on material that you didn't invent, but everybody brings to stories their own background”(Omnibus, 1998)

Sheridan was born and grew up in the North side of Dublin in 1949, the eldest son of Anna and Peter Sheridan. He grew up in what was considered the working class area of Seville Place with his five brothers and one sister. However, in 1967 five brothers became four after the untimely death of his ten year old brother, Frankie. As a means of coming to terms with his son's death, Sheridan's father set up the drama group S.L.O.T players (after the parish of Saint Laurence O' Toole). Sheridan was eighteen at the time and he and his brothers and sister embraced this new medium, perhaps due to the recent family tragedy.

“He set up the drama group 'cause he wanted to get out of the house, in the drama group it brought us back together as a family on stage, it was mad, we couldn't be a family at home but on stage we could work it out” (Omnibus, 1998)

Whilst at University College Dublin studying English and Philosophy, he, his brother Peter and some fellow class mates (including Neil Jordan) spent one summer running the Project Arts Centre. Later they ran it on a full time basis. During a period of Irish theatre when the conservative Abbey was the primary outlet for the performing arts, the Sheridan brothers developed a more “alternative theatre”(Brochure for premier of My Left Foot). By the start of the eighties Jim Sheridan decided to go to America to “make it”(Omnibus, 1998). It was here that he became the artistic director of the Irish arts centre, a small community theatre in the West Side of Manhattan, a position which he held

for seven years. It was here that Sheridan met Noel Pearson, who was a theatre producer at the time, and developed the idea for My Left Foot. Sheridan and his brother Peter had previously made Down All the Days, a stage adaptation of Christy Brown's life, and felt that it was a compelling enough story to turn into a film. It was this film which transported Sheridan's career from the stage to the screen when he went on to direct My Left Foot, a film which gained five Oscar nominations (winning two) and numerous other awards. It was after this success that Sheridan's film career took off and with four subsequent films and a cluster of awards he has become one of the leading figures on the Irish and the world's film stage. However, what I am primarily concerned with is his relationship with his family (his mother and father) and how they may have influenced his depiction of family life in his films. When I began this area of research I found that there is little or no published material on this subject. I was inevitably drawn to the source (Jim Sheridan himself and his family) in order to gather information, after all this is perhaps the most accurate and unedited information of all.

Recently Sheridan's brother Peter has written his autobiography, "44" (due to be published in March 1999), and although it is an account of his own childhood experiences growing up in 44 Seville Place it must undoubtedly be a reflection of his brother Jim's. This was my primary source for information along with interviews carried out by myself and various television stations. In an interview with Peter Sheridan (08/12/1998) I asked him what his influences were and how much he draws on his own family background. His experience, when writing any story, family based or not, is to get back to the "core, the emotion of a situation"(Sheridan, 1998). He tries not to get sidetracked by history, language, detail or what society has in the past told us to portray.

"When I read a story or see a character on stage I want to feel the
emotion so much so that it's like a kick in the guts"(Sheridan, 1998)

By telling a story or portraying a character, by getting back to the emotion of the situation this creates a story which is universal. In this context being universal is not about telling a story which appeals to all cultures, it's about portraying life through a medium

that everyone can understand no matter what family background, culturally or socially they come from. That medium is emotion. Even in America there were positive reactions to Peter's autobiography, where the readers recognised aspects of their own family in his. In a sense if you concentrate on your emotional experiences people will respond to them. This may also be due to the fact that the family is often the one social institution with which people can fully identify so it is no wonder that by portraying family life on screen through emotions that people will respond.

However, how many of these emotions rooted in family life may be a reflection of your own feelings and emotions? Sheridan himself explained how he may "re-invent" some of these feelings when making a film

"It's an exorcism of feelings, isn't it, making pictures. You're putting emotions out there and you're living them again or re-inventing them and in ways they disappear from you and you become abstracted from themyou know it's like oh I've lived that life now I'll get on to the next one"(Omnibus, 1998)

Jim Sheridan has expressed how he has drawn on aspects of his own family life when developing a film script. He has used the North Side of Dublin, where he grew up, as a location for all of his films and has used Irish stories and Irish life as his inspiration. Being Irish himself could characters from his reality influence his depiction on screen?. He explains how to him there were some aspects of his own parent's personalities in the characters in My Left Foot.

"It's an amalgamation of Christy Brown's Mother and my Mother, his Father and my Father.....I draw on my own father to create the other characters. They don't fit exactly hand in glove"(Omnibus, 1998)

When I questioned him about this he explained to me that he felt that Christy's story was more like the story of Oedipus in that Christy blamed his father, perhaps unconsciously, for his defects, as did Oedipus. He also went on to explain that certain aspects of his parent's characters were used to develop the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Brown, but having said that "you couldn't say that a character on screen is exactly like some-

one you know”(Sheridan, 1999). Christy Brown’s life, as it is shown in My Left Foot, is a story about feelings and as I have explained earlier there is a certain universality about emotions when it comes to family life. It is no wonder that Jim Sheridan, and perhaps most people, may have recognised elements of their family in Christy’s. When Sheridan was making The Field Richard Harris, who played the character of “The Bull” McCabe, believed that through the character of “The Bull” that Sheridan was fighting with his father and that he “got in the way”. When questioned about this Sheridan explained

“I would say that the Field is more me working out my relationship with myself than my Father. The Richard Harris character is my Father but he wasn’t like that. That was just the exaggerated aspects that a child picks up”(Omnibus, 1998)

Into the West, is the only film written by Sheridan which he did not direct. When writing the script for this film Sheridan decided to blend aspects of his Mother’s childhood with the original story. “Her Mother died while giving birth to her”, Sheridan explains, “and I think that she always blamed herself for her Mother’s death”(Sheridan, 1999). It is for this reason that in the film the two boys are brought on a type of therapeutic search for their Mother “even though she’s unattainable in a way”(Sheridan, 1999). With In the Name of the Father Sheridan described how the character of Guiseppe reminded him of his own Father

“I consciously wanted to make a film about a good father, so I was also conscious of remembering the good aspects of my own father. I started thinking of my Da and Gerry’s Da and you know the way he followed Gerry around out of concern and he was always looking out for him. It reminded me of my own Father” (Sheridan, 1999)

From these reactions by Sheridan it would seem that he does realise the universality of family life but that when writing a script it is not as simple as a character on screen

one you know" (Sheridan, 1999). Christy Brown's life as it is shown in *My Left Foot* is a story about feelings and as I have explained earlier there is a certain unity about emotions when it comes to family life. It is no wonder that Jim Sheridan and perhaps most people, may have recognized elements of their family in Christy's. When Sheridan was making *The Field*, Richard Harris, who played the character of "The Bull" Mc Carber, believed that through the character of "The Bull" that Sheridan was fighting with his father and that he "got in the way". When questioned about this Sheridan explained:

"I would say that the Field is a very personal work and my relationship with my father was the main reason for it. The Field is a very personal work and my relationship with my father was the main reason for it. The Field is a very personal work and my relationship with my father was the main reason for it." (Sheridan, 1999)

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"I consciously wanted to make a film about a good father, so I was also conscious of remembering the good aspects of my own father. I started making it up. I'm not sure if it was a good idea or not, but I was always looking out for him. He remained as he was, over the years." (Sheridan, 1999)

From these reactions by Sheridan it would seem that he does realize the universality of family life but that when writing a script it is not as simple as a character on screen.

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CHAPTER THREE

Father figures and Father/son relationships

Jim Sheridan himself has said how important his parents were in shaping his personality

“ my relationship with my parents in many ways defines me, it certainly makes me who I am”(Omnibus, 1998)

How important an influence would his parents and his family life be, along with influences from history, in shaping his portrayals in his movies? To try to answer this question I will be taking two main themes when I discuss the movies. These are the depiction of father figures/father son relationships and mothers/mother son relationships.

Father figures and Father / Son relationships

In many of Jim Sheridan's films the theme of father/son relationships is a central theme of the main plot. My Left Foot (1989), The Field (1991) and In the Name of the Father (1994), his first three movies, were primarily concerned with this subject and to a lesser extent Into the West (1992) and The Boxer (1998). In Sheridan's first movie, My Left Foot, this theme along with the mother/son relationship are the film's main subjects. The movie is constructed as a “three-act play”(Byrne, 1997, page 116) where the main character, Christy, born with cerebral palsy into a poor, working class Dublin family, is faced with a courageous struggle and finally pulls through. Sheridan himself described how he felt an affinity with the character of Christy and how he was drawn to his story.

“The thing I was interested in was making a story not about physical disabilities but about emotional disabilities and finding how I could empathise with Christy”(Omnibus, 1998)

The film is based on a true story, the life of Christy Brown who, like Sheridan, was

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iv

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The film I was interested in was not only a story about a man

and his family but also a story about a man who was

at odds with himself (1998)

The film is based on a true story: the life of Christy Brown who, like Sheridan, was

born in Dublin and grew up in a working class area. He was also born in the 1930s and grew up in 1940s and 1950s Ireland, a society which was gripped by the fear and apprehension of socioeconomic change.

The film begins with Christy's (Daniel Day-Lewis) childhood where the main story is his struggle for recognition and understanding by his family. This is finally achieved when Christy proves his literacy by writing "Mother" on the living room floor with his left foot. We are then presented with a series of events which show Christy growing up alongside his brothers and sisters with his Mother (Brenda Fricker) and Father (Ray Mc Anally) as two important figures in his life. These events are told to us through two plots - one being the use of flashbacks (to present Christy's life) as a nurse reads Christy's autobiography and the other the interplay between the nurse (Ruth McCabe) and Christy (the woman he eventually married).

The movie, which is set in the 1940s, 50s and 60s portrays a poor, urban, Dublin family and a father who is a product of this lifestyle. Some of the ideas discussed in the first chapter could be applied to Mr. Brown and to his relationship with Christy. If a number of adjectives were to be applied to the character of Mr. Brown they would most likely be stubborn, argumentative, temperamental and inebriated and his relationship with Christy would be characterised as antagonistic. He is often more of a hindrance to his family than a help. The first time we are given an insight into his character is in the first flashback where the camera shows the determined stride of a man's feet, those of Mr. Brown, as he enters the hospital ward (where Christy is born). The camera gradually pans back to show us Mr. Brown's expressionless face as the nurse explains that there have been some complications.

The next scene brings us to the local pub where Mr. Brown sits in silence. The only other people there are local men who begin to taunt Mr. Brown about the birth of his "vegetable" son. One asks

"Will you put him in a home?"

To which Mr. Brown replies

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The movie which is set in the 1940s, 50s and 60s begins a poor urban Dublin family and a father who is a product of this lifestyle. Some of the ideas discussed in the first chapter could be applied to Mr. Brown and to his relationship with Christy. If a number of adjectives were to be applied to the character of Mr. Brown they would most likely be stubborn, argumentative, temperamental and insensitive and his relationship with Christy would be characterised as antagonistic. He is often more of a hindrance to his family than a help. The first time we are given an insight into his character is in the first flashback where the camera shows the determined stride of a man's feet those of Mr. Brown as he enters the hospital ward (where Christy is born). The camera gradually pans back to show us Mr. Brown's expressionless face as the nurse explains that there have been some complications.

The next scene brings us to the local pub where Mr. Brown sits in silence. The only other people there are local men who begin to taunt Mr. Brown about the birth of his "vegetable" son. One asks:

"Will you put him in a home?"

To which Mr. Brown replies:

“He’ll go in a coffin before any son of mine’ll go in a home”

This answer may at first seem to be a way for Mr Brown to defend his son’s honour but in actual fact it is an answer which is given more to protect his own ego than his son’s. It is after some personal remarks from one man in particular that Mr. Brown explodes in anger, headbutting the individual, throwing back his drink and storming out of the pub. This introduction of events gives us an insight into the more prominent aspects of his personality: a man who seeks refuge in the pub when a family crisis arises, who is often drunk and finds violence as a means of solving an argument. There are scenes of affection associated with his character but by and large he is a hindrance to his family.

The first time we see Mr. Brown and his son in the same scene or hear him speak to Christy is when Christy (played by the child actor Hugh O’ Connor) is approximately ten or eleven years old. Mr. Brown is shown disregarding his son, as everyone says goodbye to Christy he only acknowledges him after being provoked by his wife. Again the first time Christy is shown picking up some chalk and beginning to write the reaction from Mr. Brown is the same. This scene begins where one of Christy’s sisters who is writing her homework needs to know what twenty five percent of a quarter is. Mr. Brown doesn’t know. It is with this that Christy reacts scrawling one sixteenth on the floor. Unfortunately no one recognises Christy’s rudimentary form of writing but the father’s reaction is the most dismissive of all.

“That’s only an auld squiggle”

When Mrs. Brown who is not convinced voices her opinion Mr. Brown replies

“Don’t be getting notions into your head woman, the child’s a cripple
.....It won’t do anyone any good putting notions into his head”

The first time that we see Mr. Brown showing recognition of Christy is in a similar scene to the one just described. Here though the father is less dismissive of his son. The scene begins in a similar manner to the previous one where Christy picks up the chalk

This answer may at first seem to be a way for Mr. Brown to defend his son's honor, but in actual fact it is an answer which is given more to protect his own ego than his son's. It is after some personal remarks from one man in particular that Mr. Brown explodes in anger, headbutting the individual, throwing back the drink and storming out of the pub. This introduction of events gives us an insight into the more prominent aspects of his personality: a man who seeks refuge in the pub when a family crisis arises, who is often drunk and finds violence as a means of solving an argument. There are scenes of affection associated with his character but by and large he is a hindrance to his family.

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It is a kind of a new world.

When Mr. Brown who is not convinced voices his opinion Mr. Brown replies:

That's the way it is, your son's a good boy, the child is a good boy.
It won't be long before you'll be a good boy, your son's a good boy.

The first time that we see Mr. Brown showing recognition of Christy is in a similar scene to the one just described. Here though the father is less dismissive of his son. The scene begins in a similar manner to the previous one where Christy picks up the chalk.

with his left foot and with determination begins to draw. Yet again his father does not understand his son's untidy "A" and shows Christy how to draw a triangle. Unlike the previous scene Christy does not accept his father's misjudgment and he defiantly rubs out what his father has drawn. Mr. Brown is furious and for the first time there is an antagonistic exchange of glances between father and son. Mr Brown steps back, stares at his son in anger who stares back. Mrs. Brown who senses a violent end hands him some money and tries to send him to the pub, his favourite refuge. He pushes her away

"I don't need a drink, all I need is to be obeyed in my own house"

and it is with this that Christy proves his worth and even his superiority to his father. He pushes himself out into the middle of the living room floor, the family stands back in silence, and even with his physical difficulties he manages to scrawl "Mother" on the floor. The father's reaction here is different

"Sweet Jesus, Jesus suffering ChristHe's a Brown, he's a Brown
all right"

As he lifts his son over his shoulder and carries him out of the living room and into the local pub, this is like Christy's baptism into the Brown household. The scene which follows where Christy is held aloft to the crowd in the pub to the proud introduction of his father

"This is Christy Brown, my sonGenius"

was a dramatic device which never actually happened added by Jim Sheridan as a means of softening the character of Mr. Brown. It is a clever means of doing this as it acts almost as a contrast to the earlier scene where Mr. Brown condemned his child in the same pub. Sheridan explained to me that in Christy's autobiography, which the film was based on, that Mr. Brown was described as much more violent and autocratic. He explained

"I thought that such a dark character would be unbelievable.....
that bit where he lifts Christy up over his shoulder is most

with his left foot and with determination begins to draw. Just again his father does not understand his son's anxiety "A" and shows Christy how to draw a triangle. I think the previous scene Christy does not accept his father's misadventure and he definitely lets out what his father has drawn. Mr. Brown is furious and for the first time there is an antagonistic exchange of glances between father and son. Mr. Brown steps back, stares at his son in anger who stands back. Mr. Brown who senses a violent end hands him some money and tries to send him to the public house to get a drink. He pushes him away.

Don't need a drink, all I need is to be happy in my own house.

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Brown looks down at his son, Christy, and his face is a mask of horror.

Alighting

As he lifts his son over his shoulder and carries him out of the living room and into the local pub, this is like Christy's baptism into the Brown household. The scene which follows Mrs. Christy is held apart in the crowd in the pub to the proud introduction of his father.

The first time Christy is seen in the pub.

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I thought that such a dark character would be acceptable.

but he wrote for the Christy pub, so his shoulder is more

people's favourite part so I needed to add things like that to make the character more identifiable for the film audience"(Sheridan,1999)

From this point onwards Mr. Brown is less dismissive of his son. That is not to say that their relationship becomes any less of a conflict, if anything it becomes more so as Mr. Brown becomes more aware of his son's presence in the household. There are a number of scenes where the father flares up in anger - when he discovers that his wife has been hiding money for Christy's wheelchair, when Christy jokes about the family eating porridge and when one of the daughters becomes pregnant. As usual he retreats to the pub. By studying these scenes and bearing in mind the description of the Irish male by Kiberd it is not surprising that Christy's relationship with his father could be described as antagonistic. Christy, perhaps in an attempt to avoid becoming like his father strives for success. In fact he is shown to be the most successful of his family. Christy who becomes a successful painter and writer excels in a career which would be considered unattainable for a bricklayer's son. There is also a conflict here in relation to class. Christy who is from a working class family surpasses all expectations of a child from this background. This is perhaps due to the change in society which I discussed in chapter one. Christy is portrayed as the Irish son who rebelled in fear that his fate would turn out the same as his father's. Terry Byrne describes the root of this conflict as the "Generation gap" (Byrne, 1997, page 118) which existed in the Irish society of the time. Here the younger Irish saw a more glowing future for themselves both financially and socially. Kiberd is also aware of the conflict which occurs in a society where this generation gap exists. He says

"This revolt of artistic son against unsatisfactory father was a leitmotif of the early years of the twentieth century.....the breakneck speed of change in society gave added force to the concept of generation and the gap which had always separated fathers from sons grew so wide as to suggest that the young and old inhabited totally different cultures" (Kiberd, 1996, page 383)

people's behavior but so I needed to add things like that to make
the character more identifiable for the film audience" (Shelton 1990).

From this point onwards Mr Brown is less dismissive of his son. That is not to say that
their relationship becomes any less of a conflict at anything. It becomes more so as Mr
Brown becomes more aware of his son's presence in the household. There are a num-
ber of scenes where the father flares up in anger - when he discovers that his wife has
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"The revolt of the son against the father was a
feature of the early years of the twentieth century. The
backward speed of change in society gave added force to the
concept of generation and the gap which had always separated
father from son grew so wide as to suggest that the young
and old inhabited totally different cultures" (Kibbey 1990, page 283).

This idea could also apply to the father/son relationship in the Brown family where Christy, the artistic son, seems to inhabit a different class to his father. Byrne does accept that Christy is the one child who over indulges in “drink and emotion” (Byrne, 1997, page 118) and there are several references to him becoming more like his father.

“Your Father will never be dead, Christy”

Nonetheless, Byrne suggests that these events are portrayed as obvious flaws in Christy’s personality and it is this which differentiates him from his father.

With Sheridan’s second film, The Field (1990), the theme of father/son relationships is omnipresent yet again. Here though it is a slightly different relationship than in My Left Foot. This is mainly due to a different setting socially (the Field is a rural film). This film is set in the years before the second world war (the 1940s) when Irish society was still feeling the effects of past events (there are numerous references to emigration and the famine). The script for this film is based on the play of the same name which was written in 1965 by John B. Keane. Keane based his story on an actual murder which was still unsolved by the time that the play was first performed in the Olympia Theatre, Dublin. The play, unlike the film, was set in the 1960s and when I questioned Sheridan about his reasons for this change he explained that he “had to get back to a more primitive time” (Sheridan, 1999). He felt that the character of the Bull (Richard Harris) would be more plausible if the film was set in the 1940s as Irish society was still in turmoil then and more importantly Irish people were “still unsure of themselves” (Sheridan, 1999).

The field in question is a small patch of land which the Bull and his ancestors turned into a fertile, grassy field. At the beginning of the film the field belongs to a local widow and the Bull simply rents it from her. It is when the widow decides to sell the field that the plot takes shape as a wealthy Irish-American (Tom Berringer) arrives in the village to buy the land. His intention is to cover the field with concrete in order to create a road to a local quarry. It is with this that the Bull erupts in anger. To him the

His loss could also apply to the father-son relationship in the Brown family where
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Your father will never be dead, Christ

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the village to buy the land. His intention is to cut off the field with concrete in order to
create a road to a local quarry. It is with this that the Bull erupts in anger. To him the

field is part of his past and hopefully part of his future. He expresses this wish to his son in an early scene in the film

“Our Father’s, Father’s, Father’s, Fathers dug that soil with
their bare hands, built these walls.....our souls is buried down
there and your son’s, son’s, sons will take care of it”

The fact that the Bull’s main rival for the Field is an Irish-American only makes the rage worse for the Bull. He sees this man as a symbol of all of the people who left the land during the famine years (1845-1850) and deserted the Irish who stayed. This is one reason why the Bull refuses to give up the land and the other is because of his son. Throughout the film he expresses a wish for his son to carry on in his footsteps. This is all important for the Bull not because his son wants it too but because of issues personal to the Bull - the death of his mother on the land

“If you think I’m going to face my mother in heaven or hell
without that field you’ve another thing coming”

and the death of his first born son, Sheamie who would have been the heir to the McCabe land. We learn that Sheamie actually committed suicide by hanging because of pressure and harsh words from his father about inheriting the land. The Bull seems obsessed about this and it manifests itself when the Yank arrives on the scene. As a result the Yank becomes his type of surrogate son. There are several confrontations between the Bull, the American and the local Priest (who has sided with the latter) where we are given an insight into what drives the Bull’s obsession. The final battle occurs when the Bull and his son Tadhg (Sean Bean) intend to simply frighten their adversary but in a fit of rage the Bull kills him and his body is thrown into a lake. The next morning without the competition the Bull buys ‘his’ field. However he learns that his son has run away with the tinkers daughter (Jenny Conroy) and in doing so has given up his claim to the land. As the Bull’s world comes crashing down around him, in a fit of insanity he drives his cattle towards the nearby cliffs and sends them and his

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his son has run away with the baker's daughter (Jenny Conroy) and is doing so has
given up his claim to the land. As the Bull's world comes crashing down around him
in a fit of insanity he drives his cattle towards the nearby cliffs and sends them and his

son over the edge. The final scene shows the Bull raging at the waves with his walking stick in an attempt to stop them from taking his son's body.

The father figure in this film had differences and similarities to the father in My Left Foot. The main character, the Bull McCabe is portrayed as obsessive, threatening and violent. Some of these adjectives could be used to describe the character of Mr. Brown but in the case of the Bull these traits are used to intimidate both his family and the local community. His son Tadhg, unlike Christy, is feeble and unenthusiastic but it is still the father/son conflict which makes their relationship similar to the one in My Left Foot. Like Christy, Tadhg does not want to end up like his father and by the end of the film he too rejects the goals which his father had set for him. The idea of the generation gap could also apply here. Throughout the film there are several references to the famine and the effect that emigration had on later generations. The father/son relationship in this film could also have been aggravated by these events. Kiberd explains this idea

"There were, however, certain pressures in Ireland which gave that revolt an added urgency. The fathers were often broken men, and emigration had robbed the community of potential innovators" (Kiberd, 1996, page 383)

Throughout the film the Bull is shown as the decision maker of the family and the one who is there to teach his son lessons in life. Some of his more memorable lessons include

"What use is a field without a man to farm it?"

"Never trust a woman who has no contact with the earth"

"Never kill an animal"

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The father figure in this film has differences and similarities to the father in *My Left Foot*. The main character, the Bull McCarra, is portrayed as obsessive, threatening and violent. Some of these adjectives could be used to describe the character of John Brown but in the case of the Bull these traits are used to intimidate both his family and the local community. His son, Tadg, unlike Christy, is feeble and unambitious but it is still the father-son conflict which makes their relationship similar to the one in *My Left Foot*. Like Christy, Tadg does not want to end up like his father and by the end of the film he too rejects the goals which his father had set for him. The idea of the generation gap could also apply here. Throughout the film there are several references to the famine and the effect that emigration had on later generations. The father-son relationship in this film could also have been generated by these events. Kibben explains this

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"There were, however, common pressures to Ireland which gave that revolt an added urgency. The fathers were often broken in it, and emigration had robbed the country of potential manpower." (Kibben, 1990, page 587)

Throughout the film the Bull is shown as the decision maker of the family and the one who is there to teach his son lessons in life. Some of his more memorable lessons

include

"With me as a field without a wife to farm it."

"Never that a woman who has no contact with the cash."

"Never kill an animal."

Although he is portrayed as knowledgeable it is the Bull's insanity which overtakes this aspect of his personality and the audience continually questions the motives behind his advice. By the end of the film the audience realises that it his madness that inspires this advice and not his concern for his son's welfare. In one scene in particular the American and Tadhg are engaged in a test of strengths in the form of a ceili dance. Tadhg is pushed by his father as he sees this as a reflection of the strength of the McCabe family. When I questioned Sheridan about the relationship between the Bull and the American he explained that the Yank was like

“The memory of the Bull's son returned or maybe the person
that the other son wasn't or what the Bull wanted him to be”
(Sheridan, 1999)

With this explanation the ceili dance could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the Bull who sees the American as his dead son, Sheamie, pushes Tadhg to prove that he hasn't got “a bad strain in him” like he believed Sheamie had. Also it could have been used for Tadhg to prove to his father that he was as strong as his older brother. The Bull, as his wife explained, had been living with the memory of his dead son for the last thirteen years and that it was “crippling Tadhg”. With the memory of Sheamie becoming personified in the form of the Yank there may have been an urge for Tadhg to compete with him to prove his strength to his father. This scene ends where Tadhg has gone too far, failed his father and injured his potential fiancée. The film continues to show Tadhg in this manner and the father as the instigator of his failed actions.

It is interesting that the villain in this film is not Irish. As I have already said the American for the Bull symbolised those who deserted the land, but perhaps it is because he removed himself from post colonial Ireland that he is the one person who does not fear change. He drives a car whereas the local Irish use horses and carts, he speaks of concrete, roads and hydroelectric power. He even says to the priest

“You always see the past, I see something else”

Although he is portrayed as knowledgeable it is the Bull's insanity which overrules this aspect of his personality, and the audience continually questions the motives behind his advice. By the end of the film the audience realises that it is madness that inspires this advice and not his concern for his son's welfare. In one scene in particular the American and Taddy are engaged in a test of strength in the form of a cello dance. Taddy is pushed by his father as he sees this as a reflection of the strength of the Mc Coy family. When I questioned Shennan about the relationship between the Bull and the American he explained that the rank was like:

The memory of the Bull's son returned to me by the person
that the other son was not for what the Bull wanted him to be.
(Shennan, 1997)

With this explanation the cello dance could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the Bull who sees the American as his dead son, Shennan, pushes Taddy to prove that he hasn't got "a bad snail in him" like he believed Shennan had. Also it could have been used for Taddy to prove to his father that he was as strong as his older brother. The Bull as his wife explained, had been living with the memory of his dead son for the last thirteen years and that it was "upside Taddy". With the memory of Shennan becoming part of the family of the Bull there may have been an urge for Taddy to compete with him to prove his strength to his father. This scene ends where Taddy has gone too far, broken his father and injured his potential chance. The film continues to show Taddy in this manner and the father as the instigator of his father's actions.

It is interesting that the villain in this film is not Irish. As I have already said the American for the Bull symbolised those who deserted the land, but perhaps it is because he removed himself from good colonial Ireland that he is the one person who does not fear change. The other men whereas the land Irish use horses and carts, the speak of concrete roads and hydroelectric power. He even says to the priest:

You always see the priest, I see something else.

It is his acceptance of change that frightens and angers the Bull so much, as it shakes the planned future that he had for himself and more importantly for his son. What the Bull fails to do is to ask his son what he wants, to him there is no option and his son fails to tell him until it's too late. Here, as with the year in which the play is set, Sheridan took some liberty with Keane's play. In his version the returned yank was a returned Irish immigrant from Britain. Perhaps to make the film more appealing to an American audience Sheridan felt the need change the background of this character. This distortion from the original play could "in a very fundamental way alter the nature of the conflict"(Byrne, 1997, page 123). The speeches made by the Bull about the famine and its effect seem inconsistent if he is making them to an American whereas to an Irish immigrant they may have seemed more appropriate. However, in the context of this thesis this detail is not a major one.

The ultimate test that the Bull arranges for his son comes towards the end of the film. The Bull, to scare off the Yank organises a fist fight between him and his son. As the fight begins the father stands aside and watches as his son who, becoming more and more bloody fails him again. The Bull grabs both men and expresses for the first time his true feelings for his son

"Will I ever make a man of you you try to steal my land
and you, how can you look after the land"

This series of tests which the Bull confronts his son with may at first seem to portray him as a strong, tenacious character with a weak ineffectual son. In actual fact it depicts a deranged father and a rather normal if somewhat lazy son. For his own gain he convinces himself that he wants the field for his son and not for himself. This could not be more untrue as he has a nagging guilt over the death of his first son and the death of his mother on the land. To disguise his guilt he uses his son as a scapegoat.

As I have explained already there is another father/son relationship which is present in the film and that is between the Bull and the Yank. Although the Yank is not the Bull's

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"Will I ever see a man of your colour to seal my hand
and feel how can you look after the land"

This scene is first when the Bull confronts his son with rage in first scene to portray him as a strong, fearless character. In a weak, ineffectual son. In actual fact it depicts a damaged father and a character who is somewhat lost for his own gain. He convinces himself that he wants the field for his son and not for himself. This could not be more untrue as he has a nagging guilt over the death of his first son and the death of his mother on the land. To disguise his guilt he uses his son as a scapegoat. As I have explained already there is another father-son relationship which is present in the film and that is between the Bull and the Yank. Although the Yank is not the Bull's

son there is an implied father/son relationship between the two men. This is most evident in several scenes where the Bull speaks of or remembers his eldest son, Sheamie which involve the Yank in some form.

In an early scene the Bull, who has just left mass, goes to Sheamie's grave to pray. As he kneels down the Yank enters passing between the graves. As he is shown doing this the Bird (John Hurt) is heard as a voice over telling Tadhg of his brother. At first this scene may be disregarded by the viewer but if subsequent scenes are taken into account it is obvious what Sheridan intended. The Yank is like the Bull's son returned. This is particularly obvious in the fight scene between the Yank and Tadhg. When The Bull beats him to death he repeats over and over

"Sheamie, Sheamie, Sheamie"

until the Yank lies dead by the river. As dawn approaches the Bull, convinced that the body is still alive, holds the Yank upright. At this stage The Bull, who has obviously been overcome with insanity, talks to the dead body as if it's his child

"One more step, just one more step..... 13 years, 6 months,
24 days"

This is in direct reference to the previous scene where Tadhg asks how old Sheamie was when he died. The Bull answers instantly

"13 years, 6 months, 24 days"

The fact that the Bull repeats these words to the Yank would indicate that he is reminded of his dead son as he sees the dead body. The last time that we see the Bull reacting to the same body is when it has been retrieved from the lake. As it hangs from the crane's cord the Bull, who looks on, mutters his son's name - Sheamie. Here again the manner of Sheamie's death, suicide by hanging, is indicated in the suspended body of

son there is an implied father-son relationship between the two men. This is most evident in several scenes where the Bull speaks of or remembers his eldest son, Shesha, which involve the Yank in some form.

In an early scene the Bull, who has just left mass, goes to Shesha's grave to bury. As he kneels down the Yank enters passing between the graves. As he is shown doing this the first (John Hurt) is heard as a voice over telling Tadj of his brother. At first this scene may be disregarded by the viewer, but it subsequently serves as taken into account it is obvious what Shesha intended. The Yank is like the Bull's son returned. This is particularly obvious in the fight scene between the Yank and Tadj. When the Bull beats him to death he repeats over and over

"Shesha, Shesha, Shesha"

until the Yank lies dead by the river. As dawn approaches the Bull, convinced that the body is still alive, holds the Yank upright. At this stage the Bull, who has obviously been overcome with insanity, talks to the dead body as if it's his child.

"One more step, just one more step... 13 years, 6 months."

"34 days"

This is in direct relation to the previous scene where Tadj asks how old Shesha was when he died. The Bull answers instantly.

"13 years, 6 months, 34 days"

The fact that the Bull repeats these words to the Yank would indicate that he is reminding of his dead son as he sees the dead body. The last time that we see the Bull's seeing to the same body is when it has been removed from the lake. As it hangs from the crane's cord the Bull, who looks on, mutters his son's name - Shesha. Here again the manner of Shesha's death, suicide by hanging, is indicated in the suspended body of

the Yank.

In The Name of The Father, Sheridan's third film was a departure from the Pearson/Sheridan team which had made My Left Foot and The Field but it implemented some of the structural ideas which were used in My Left Foot. This film uses the three act format where the main character's story is presented to us through the use of flashbacks. The film is based on a true story, the conviction of four people known as the Guildford Four who were convicted of the Guildford pub bombings in 1974.

The story begins in a similar manner to My Left Foot where Gerry Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis) is heard as a voice over talking to his English attorney, Garreth Pierce (Emma Thompson). This introduction brings us to the first flashback, in the City of Belfast, where the story begins. Gerry who is a petty thief spends his time stealing metal to make some money. After a violent encounter with the I.R.A and the R.U.C. Gerry is sent to London to live with an aunt in the hope that he will be kept out of trouble. It is on the boat to England that he meets his old friend, Paul Hill (John Lynch). When the pair arrive in London they decide to look up a mutual friend, Paddy Armstrong (Mark Sheppard) who lives in a hippy squat and the pair decide to move in. However, when the provisional I.R.A's bombing campaign worsens in London the two feel unwelcome in the squat and they decide to leave. In one important scene an English hippy starts an argument with them (this character will appear later on in the plot). While sitting on a park bench deciding where to go, they meet another Irish man called Charlie Burke, a character who will prove crucial in confirming Conlon and Hill's innocence. With nowhere to go, the pair wander the streets of London until they find a set of keys to a prostitute's flat. While inside Gerry steals £700 from her and after splitting it with Hill he returns to Belfast.

It is in Belfast that Gerry is arrested for terrorism and brought to London for questioning. Meanwhile Hill, Armstrong and his girlfriend are arrested and charged with the same crime. While in questioning, each character is abused physically and mentally until they sign a confession for the bombings. Gerry is the last to sign, claiming his

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When the pair arrive in London they decide to look up a mutual friend, Paddy
 Armstrong (Mark Sheppard) who lives in a hippy square and the pair decide to move in.
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innocence throughout a gruelling interrogation at the hands of the British police. It is when one R.U.C. officer threatens to kill Guiseppe (Pete Postlethwaite), Gerry's father that he breaks down and signs a confession. The four characters are convinced that it would be "laughed at in court". Unfortunately this was not the case and they were each sentenced to 30 years in prison along with members of the Conlon family (including his father). They were believed to be expert bomb makers and spies and were charged with conspiracy to murder.

It is after this that the second act of the film begins where the story is mainly concerned with the relationship between father and son. This relationship begins with Gerry resenting his father and refusing to engage in his means of seeking justice and ends where a strong bond develops between the two men. Nevertheless Guiseppe becomes more ill (he developed a lung disease as a result of working as a painter in Belfast's shipyards) and he eventually dies. It is with this that the third act begins where Gerry, to seek justice for himself and more importantly for his father, begins to focus his attention on gaining an appeal. This is achieved after 15 years in prison. At the trial Conlon's attorney, Ms. Pierce produces a statement taken by an Inspector Dixon from Charlie Burke, the homeless man which Conlon and Hill had met at the time of the bombings. This statement was also labelled "not to be shown to the defence" and signed by Mr. Dixon. With this new evidence the judge could only find the defendants not guilty and the charges are thrown out of court. Unfortunately the charges against Guiseppe Conlon were not dropped and the detectives in charge of the case were never arrested or disciplined.

It is obvious from the title of this film that it would be concerned with more than a political story and the events dealt with in the second act of the film confirm the viewer's suspicion. Jim Sheridan himself expressed how politics are not his primary concern when telling a story

"Politics isn't actually a great motor for art....it's the hot air of society. There are greater things at play"(Omnibus, 1998)

innocence throughout a grueling interrogation at the hands of the British police. It is when one RUC officer threatens to kill Gimpsey (Pete Postlethwaite), Gerry's father, that he breaks down and signs a confession. The four characters are convinced that it would be "hanged in court." Unfortunately this was not the case and they were each sentenced to 30 years in prison along with members of the Conlon family (including his father). They were believed to be expert bomb makers and spies and were charged with conspiracy to murder.

It is after this that the second act of the film begins where the story is mainly concerned with the relationship between father and son. This relationship begins with Gerry resenting his father and refusing to engage in the means of seeking justice and ends where a strong bond develops between the two men, nevertheless Gimpsey becomes more ill (he developed a lung disease as a result of working as a painter in Belfast's shipyards) and he eventually dies. It is with this that the third act begins where Gerry, to seek justice for himself and more importantly for his father, begins to focus his attention on gaining an appeal. This is achieved after 15 years in prison. At the trial Conlon's attorney, Aislinn, produces a statement taken by an Inspector Dixon from Charlie Burke, the porter's room which Conlon and Hill had met at the time of the bombing. This statement was also labelled "not to be shown to the defence" and signed by Aislinn Dixon. With this new evidence the judge could only find the defendants not guilty and the charges are thrown out of court. Unfortunately the charges against Gimpsey Conlon were not dropped and the detectives in charge of the case were never arrested or disciplined.

It is obvious from the title of this film that it would be concerned with more than a political story and the events dealt with in the second act of the film confirm the story as a suspicion. Jim Sheridan himself expressed how politics are not his primary concern when telling a story.

"Politics are actually a distraction for me... it's the hot air of society. There are great things at play" (Sheridan, 1998).

What Sheridan is concerned with is the relationship between Gerry and his father and how it is transformed throughout their incarceration. Here again Sheridan understands the universality of a story which has its roots in emotion and family relationships

“Nobody is interested in an injustice story. It’s a difficult story to tell. But the father/son story is not so difficult” (Omnibus, 1998)

An introduction to this relationship is presented to us in the first few scenes of the film where Gerry has had a run in with the I.R.A. It is Guiseppe who, waving a white handkerchief, comes to his son’s aid. The following scenes where his Father saves him from a beating shows a typical father/son relationship. Guiseppe asks

“Did you start all this?”

Gerry shrugs his shoulders dismissively. Their relationship in the first act would not be described as close or affectionate even though Guiseppe is portrayed as caring and concerned for his son’s future. He has this advice for Gerry when he is about to board the boat for England

“Go and live, go and live son. That’s the best advice I can give you”

Gerry’s character is presented as a typical rebellious teenager, although he argues with his father and even resents him, he eventually develops a love for him.

Sheridan has expressed how he consciously wanted to make a film about a good father and his brother, Peter told me how he feels that in the past Irish fathers were portrayed as negative characters. His experience was different and it was for this reason that Sheridan found himself recognising the character of Guiseppe

What Sheridan is concerned with is the relationship between Gerty and his father and how it is transformed throughout their interaction. Here again Sheridan understands the universality of a story which has its roots in emotion and family relationships.

Anybody is interested in an emotional story. It's a difficult story to tell. But the father-son story is not so difficult. (Gunn, 1998)

An introduction to this relationship is presented to us in the first few scenes of the film where Gerty has had a run in with the IRA. It is Quincey who, waving a white handkerchief, comes to his son's aid. The following scene where his father saves him from a beating shows a typical father-son relationship. Quincey asks:

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Sheridan has expressed how he consciously wanted to make a film about a good father and his broken boy. He told me how he feels that in the past Irish fathers were portrayed as negative characters. His experience was different and it was for this reason that Sheridan found himself re-examining the character of Quincey.

“ I could see in Gerry Conlon’ s father many of the aspects of
my own father”(Omnibus, 1998)

The character which Sheridan has chosen to portray could not be more different from the characters of the Bull or Mr. Brown. There is a conflict between father and son but it is a conflict which is resolved in the film. Gerry makes several statements which would lead us to believe that he resents his father. This is because Guiseppe, a Catholic living in Belfast, could only acquire subservient jobs. Even in 1970s Northern Ireland the situation with regard to the employment of Catholics was not very favourable. Gerry felt that his father had been too passive and did little to improve his situation.

Kiberd described this situation in relation to the Irish society which was “on the brink of revolution”(Kiberd, 1998, page 381). If the society in Northern Ireland is considered to be on the brink of revolution also (Gerry describes it as total chaos) it may explain why Gerry felt the need to rebel. Kiberd describes what may happen in this situation

“The Irish *risorgimento* was, among other things a revolt by
angry sons against discredited fathers. The fathers had lost face,
either because they had compromised with the occupying
English in return for safe positions as policemen or petty clerks,
or because they had retreated into the demanding cycle of alcoholism
and unemployment”(Kiberd, 1998, page 381)

In the case of the Conlon family, Gerry felt that his father had compromised and had accepted a safe position. We begin to understand that Gerry feels this way when his father, who has just saved him from the I.R.A., reveals his disgust at his son’s stealing. “We never had a thief in our family”. To which Gerry replies “We never had nothing in our family”. When his father tells him to get a job like his, Gerry, who is convinced that he cannot, answers back “you want me to work as a bookies clerk!!!”

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"I could see in Gerry Conlon's statement of the aspects of

He is obviously unimpressed by his father's choice of employment and blames this on their low standard of living. These sentiments are repeated throughout the film by Gerry. In one scene in particular Gerry remembers an incident when his father's breathing was particularly bad. Gerry has sided with the I.R.A. prisoner, Joe Mc Andrew (Don Baker) and, much to the disgust of his father, he prefers his violent means of seeking justice. It is this which provokes Gerry and he lashes out at his father

"At least he fights back which is more than you ever did.....
why did you have to be sick all your life Guiseppe It was
the fumes from working in the paint shed did that to you.....
It was the only job a Catholic could get and you didn't even
fight back then..... You've been a victim all your life. It's about
time you fought back"

Even with these outbursts from Gerry his father is still considered a positive character. The fact that he does not fight back through violence adds to this as it is nonviolence that eventually proves the Guildford Four innocent. Unfortunately it takes a serious event for Gerry to realise this. Mc Andrew, in revenge for a failed protest and a period in solitary confinement sets fire to the chief prison warden. It is with this event that Gerry realises the cool, ruthlessness of the I.R.A and the effects of their violent methods. During this period in the film an alternative father/son relationship develops(between Gerry and Mc Andrew) where Gerry must choose who his role model will be. Ultimately he chooses Guiseppe. As he enters the prison cell he stands behind his father as he seals another letter of protest. He places his hand on his father's shoulder and agrees to help with the campaign. From this point onwards the relationship between the two men undergoes a transformation. Gerry is no longer flooded with bitter memories. From here on as Gerry reminisces there is a different tone to his words. He tells his father that he always remembers the smell of tobacco from his hands

"When I want to feel happy I remember the smell of tobacco"

It is obviously influenced by his father's choice of employment and places this on their low standard of living. These sentiments are repeated throughout the film by Gerry. In one scene in particular Gerry remembers an incident when his father's breathing was particularly bad. Gerry has sided with the IRA, perhaps Joe McAndrew (Don Baker) and much to the disgust of his father, he pretends his violent means of seeking justice. It is this which provokes Gerry and his father out in his father's

"At least he fights back which is more than you ever did."
"What do you have to be sick on your life? ... It was the black from working in the paint shop that is even."
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"When I want to feel happy I remember the smell of tobacco."

It is not long after this scene that Guiseppe dies and although it is a sombre period in the film it causes Gerry to campaign even more passionately than before. This is to clear his name but more importantly his father's. In the final triumphant scene Gerry proves his devotion to him when, to the television cameras, he says

"I watched my father die in a British prison for something he didn't do I will fight on in the name of my father and of the truth"

It is not hard to understand why Gerry pulls through and reaches a reconciliation with his father. Throughout the film he is portrayed as a loving, supportive and faithful man. Perhaps Gerry is right about him succumbing to the society in Northern Ireland and maybe he could be considered a petty clerk. It is because he supports his son throughout their incarceration that is a more prominent aspect of his personality.

From the moment that we see Guiseppe dodging the rioters petrol bombs as he waves a white handkerchief we realise that he is a different character to the previous portrayals of father figures. It is Guiseppe who travels to London to help his son and when he too is imprisoned he is constantly positive and faithful towards Gerry. During their incarceration it is he who is concerned about Gerry's drug taking and who starts the campaign to prove their innocence. Gerry however does not accept that these are positive efforts and we realise this after the two men are placed in a cell. Gerry who is understandably frustrated at his imprisonment lashes out at his father

"Why do you always follow me when I do something wrong?,
why can't you follow me when I do something right..... I could
never do anything good enough for you"

Guiseppe patiently listens as his son pours out his emotions and as Gerry breaks down he holds him

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"Why do you always follow me when I do something wrong?
I can't even follow his when I do something right... I could never do anything good enough for you."

Giuseppe patiently listens as his son pours out his emotions and as Gerry breaks down he holds him.

“Just relaxit’s not your fault”

Guisseppe's character continues to be portrayed in this manner and it is often the little phrases or words of encouragement that reveal this. For example he says to Gerry “Don’t despair son”, to his wife Sarah “you’ve a good son there” and to Mc Andrew “Oh don’t be sorry for us, just be sorry for the people you’ve killed....they were God’s children”. Gerry realises that it is purely out of encouragement that his father follows him. This is proved to us the last time that we see the two men together where Gerry, alone in his cell, can’t help but remember his father. They are memories which are happy ones, and by the end of the film it is Gerry’s passionate appeal which reconfirms the viewer’s faith in him.

Just relax... it's not your fault.

Gunsberg's character continues to be portrayed in this manner and it is often the little phrases or words of encouragement that reveal that. For example he says to Gerry "Don't despair son", to his wife Sarah "you're a good son there", and to his Andrew "Oh don't be sorry for us, just be sorry for the people you've killed... they were God's children". Gerry realizes that it is precisely one of encouragement that his father follows him. This is proved to us the last time that we see the two men together where Gerry alone in his cell, can't help but remember his father. They are memories which are happy ones and by the end of the film it is Gerry's passionate appeal which redeems the viewer's faith in him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mothers, women and Mother/son relationships

The second most prominent theme which runs through Jim Sheridan's films is the theme of mother/son relationships. This is most evident in My Left Foot (1989) and Into the West (1990). With The Boxer (1998) what Sheridan is primarily concerned with is the depiction of women and in particular prisoners' wives and how they function in the society of Northern Ireland.

Mothers, women and mother/son relationships

With Sheridan's film My Left Foot the second most prominent theme after the theme of father/son relationships is the treatment of Christy's relationship with his mother. This relationship could not be more different to the one Christy has with his father.

In the film's first act where Mr. Brown pays little attention to his son it is Mrs. Brown who tends to his needs. Not only are his physical needs taken care of by her (she feeds him and carries him around) but his emotional needs also (she is the only one who can communicate with Christy and gives him encouragement). Both of these fundamental requirements are neglected by his father.

In the first act this is most evident when Christy shows some sign of literacy by writing for the first time. Where as Mr. Brown dismisses his son's attempt as a "squiggle" Mrs. Brown's reaction is in complete contrast

"Go on, go on Christy, make your mark.....there's something
in that"

Throughout the film she is Christy's main form of encouragement and the principal mediator when Mr. Brown and Christy argue. Her role in the family is clearly defined throughout. She is there to keep the peace, to stop her husband from drinking the family into debt and to help Christy when he is overcome with depression. These are all

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Women and children in Ireland

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Women and children in Ireland

With Sheridan's film *My Left Foot* the second most prominent theme after the theme of mother-son relationships is the treatment of Christy's relationship with his mother. This relationship could not be more different to the one Christy has with his father. In the film's first act where Mr. Brown pays little attention to his son it is Mrs. Brown who tends to his needs. Not only are his physical needs taken care of by her (she feeds him and carries him around) but his emotional needs also (she is the only one who can communicate with Christy and gives him encouragement). Both of these fundamental

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Throughout the film she is Christy's main form of encouragement and the principal mediator when Mr. Brown and Christy argue. Her role in the family is clearly defined. In addition, she is there to keep the peace, to stop her husband from mistreating the family into debt and to help Christy when he is overcome with depression. These are all

things that Mr. Brown continually fails to do.

Apart from encouraging her son she is the practical member of the Brown family. She realises the need for Christy to have a wheelchair and even though her family have to survive on porridge she secretly hides money up the chimney for her son. Towards the end of the film when Christy's depression worsens she fights on and has this advice for her son

"You get more like your father every day, all hard on the outside
putty on the insideit's in here (she points to her heart) battles
are won, not in the pub.....right, if you've given up I haven't"

It is with this that she begins to build a room for her son in the hope that he will continue to pursue his creative talents. In one of her most memorable scenes, the most prominent aspect of her personality is depicted. Here she expresses her compassionate and sacrificial nature

"you have me heart broken Christy Brown, sometimes I think
you are me heart.....look if I could give you my legs I'd gladly
take yours"

With Christy's mother being this type of character it is not surprising that he is very close to his mother. However, as Kiberd realises, this close relationship may have a more sinister implication for the Irish family. He describes how similar mother/son relationships have been a leitmotif of Irish literature. Irish women, he explains, had been denied emotional fulfilment from their husbands and as a result they sought what they were denied from their sons. "Perhaps the mother play of the century", Peter Sheridan explained, "is Juno and the Paycock"(Sheridan, 1998). The character of Juno in this play has striking similarities to that of Mrs. Brown and a description of the Boyle family could easily be mistaken for that of the Browns. In this play it is Juno, like Mrs. Brown, who tries to keep the family sane. She is also the one who supports

things that Mr Brown continually fails to do.

Again from encouraging her son she is the practical member of the Brown family. She realises the need for Christy to have a watchman and even though her family has to survive on potatoes she secretly hides money up the chimney for her son. Towards the end of the film when Christy's depression worsens she fights on and has this say to her son:

"You get more life / you fight every day / all hand on the outside
 push on the inside / it's in here / she points to her belly / beliefs
 are won / not in the night / when it / you've given up / I haven't."

It is with this that she begins to build a room for her son in the hope that he will continue to pursue his creative talents. In one of her most memorable scenes, the most prominent aspect of her personality is depicted. Here she expresses her compassion and sacrificial nature:

"You have me beat broken Christ / How a soulless I think
 for the the heart / look it / I could give you my legs / I could
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With Christy's mother being this type of character it is not surprising that he is very close to his mother. However as Kibben realises, this close relationship may have a more sinister implication for the Irish family. He describes how similar mother-son relationships have been a trait of Irish literature. Irish women, he explains, had been denied emotional fulfilment from their husbands and as a result they sought what they were denied from their sons. "Perhaps the mother play of the country," Peter Sheridan explained, "is Jane and the Pigcock" (Sheridan, 1992). The character of Jane in this play has striking similarities to that of Mrs. Brown and a description of the Boyle family could easily be mistaken for that of the Browns. In one play it is Jane like Mrs. Brown, who tries to keep the family sane. She is also the one who supports

her daughter when she is left pregnant and then disowned by her father. Mary her daughter cries out "My poor little child that'll have no father". But it is perhaps Juno's infamous eulogy on Irish mothers which reflects a similar positive view of Mrs. Brown (and a negative one of Irish fathers)

"It'll have what's far betther - it'll have two mothers"(O' Casey, 1925, page 71)

With Into the West there is also a prominent mother/son theme. Although this film was not directed by Sheridan the script was written by him and in it he implemented many ideas which are personal to him and his family. It is for this reason that I will also consider it a Sheridan film. Unlike Sheridan's earlier films this is an original story which is not based on any book or play. However, Sheridan explained that he blended elements of his own Mother's childhood into the original story. It was this that inspired the mother/son relationship.

In this film the mother is presented to us symbolically as a white horse which the two main characters, Tito Reilly (Ciaran Fitzgerald) and Ossie Reilly (Ruaidhri Conroy) befriend. From the moment that the white horse appears in the film we understand that it is more than just an ordinary animal. As an elderly man, the boy's grandfather is seen travelling the countryside of Ireland; the horse, as if from out of nowhere appears before him. Here and in subsequent scenes, magical music plays as the horse appears and he seems to have human qualities. It understands the boys and responds to them and often the camera focuses on his eyes as if there is a personality behind them. In particular there is a close relationship between the younger boy, Ossie, and the horse. The first time that we see them together is when the boy's grandfather returns from his travels with the white horse following. The horse who does not obey Papa (Gabriel Byrne), his father, seems to have an affinity with Ossie. At this stage in the film we do not realise what the horse actually represents but by the end of the film it is not surprising that Ossie and Tir na Nog are so comfortable together. Ossie's mother died while giving birth to him but Ossie does not know of this. Throughout the film the two boys

her daughter when she is left pregnant and then disowned by her father. Many of the characters cry out "My poor little child that I have no father". But it is perhaps Jane's infamous eulogy on Irish mothers which reflects a similar positive view of Mrs. Brown (and a negative one of Irish fathers)

"It is love what's for father. It is love two mothers" (O. Casey, 1932)

page 11

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In this film the mother is presented to us symbolically as a white horse with the two main characters, Tim Kelly (Ciaran Frawley) and Oisín Kelly (Randal O'Connor). Before the movie starts the white horse appears in the film we understand that it is more than just an ordinary animal. As an elderly man, the boy's grandfather is seen travelling the countryside of Ireland; the horse, as if from out of nowhere appears before him. Here and in subsequent scenes, musical music plays as the horse appears and he seems to have human qualities. It understands the boy's needs and responds to them and often the camera focuses on his eyes as if there is a personality behind them. In particular there is a close relationship between the younger boy, Oisín, and the horse. The first time that we see them together is when the boy's grandfather returns from his travels with the white horse following. The horse who does not obey Papa (Gabriel Byrne), his father, seems to have an affinity with Oisín. At this stage in the film we do not realise what the horse actually represents but by the end of the film it is not surprising that Oisín and Tim are so comfortable together. Oisín's mother died while giving birth to him but Oisín does not know of this. Throughout the film the two boys

are brought on a journey by the horse which reveals events from their past and Ossie finally learns of his mother. Since her death his father, known as Papa Reilly, has turned to drink for comfort, has settled in a block of flats and given up travelling ("the old ways"). He seems unconcerned about the boys when they bring the horse into the tiny flat either because he is drunk or hungover. It is this which causes the film's plot to take shape as the police arrive to remove the horse from the flat. There is total chaos. The horse understandably panics, kicks the walls and furniture as the police try to sedate him. Eventually the police succeed in capturing the horse which is sold illegally by them to a County Meath landowner. The two boys cannot forget their horse and after two weeks of searching for him they see him on television as the star horse of the Showjumping World Championships. It is here that their adventure "into the West" begins when they steal the horse and set off on their travels all the while pursued by the police and the wealthy landowner.

The journey which the boys undertake progresses and as they travel further and further from the urban landscape of Dublin to the rural West it becomes increasingly obvious that the horse is in fact the boy's "Spirit Mother"(Cleary, 1995, page 154). She is the one who is navigating their journey and as Papa (who has now undertaken a search for his sons) follows he too is brought back to the Ireland of his past. The journey continues until the boys reach the sea at the West of Ireland and with the police and the landowner in pursuit the horse's only option is to ride into the raging Atlantic where Ossie is submerged by the waves. As he is shown sinking beneath the sea the audience believes that he will drown until his mother's apparition appears beneath the waves and draws him to the surface. His father then saves him and brings him back to the shore and to the traditional travelling community which is waiting there. In Joe Cleary's Into Which West?, he describes their journey thus,

"The journey on which they have been, conducted by the Spirit-Mother, has been one of psychic and spiritual regeneration, a voyage of rehabilitation which culminates in the rejection of the city and the alienated mode of existence with which it is

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The journey on which they have been embarked by the
 spirit mother has been one of pain and spiritual redemption in
 a world of repression with a community in the region of
 the city and the island of existence with which it is

associated”(Cleary, 1995, page 154)

Cleary argues that throughout the film there are two main symbols, one being the West and the other being the white horse. The ‘ West’ in this film is more than a mere destination for the two boys rather it acts as a means of escapism from the male/urban setting of Dublin to a female/rural setting. At the beginning of the film the boy’s main figure of authority is Papa, a person who is associated with the the decrepit landscape of the city. As the boys embark on their journey away from this landscape with the mysterious horse they come ever closer to understanding their Spirit Mother. Throughout the film there are numerous references to the boys travelling to the “West” not to any particular destination (no town or county is mentioned) but rather to a mythical, celtic pre-colonial-industrial world. Cleary uses this description to explain his idea

“The most striking point which such representations have in common is their strongly vectorial bias. They describe not a place but a direction, a penetration or an approach, a movement from the East to the West, into or towards an unknown Celtic world.” (Cleary, 1995, page 155)

It is interesting, after reading Cleary’s argument on the West to consider Ireland and post colonial theory and the origins of Mother Ireland which I have discussed in chapter one. If Dublin (urban Ireland) and the East are associated with the masculine autocracy of post treaty Ireland, then perhaps the West, or the desire to travel there could express a desire to revert back to the more feminine society of pre colonial Ireland. Ossie and Tito could not understand the finer details of post colonial theory, they only know that the towers of Dublin do not satisfy their emotional needs. They do not understand that the journey which the horse brings them on is therapeutic in that it brings the feminine aspect into their lives, an aspect that was missing since their mother’s death. Also for Papa it helps him to come to terms with the loss of Mary, his wife. By the end of the film he has rejected urban life, Ossie has seen his mother for the first time and the travelling community has accepted all three back into their clan.

Cleary argues that throughout the film there are two main symbols, one being the West and the other being the white horses. The 'West' in the film is more than a mere destination for the two boys; rather it acts as a means of escapism from the male-dominated world of Dublin to a feminized setting. At the beginning of the film the boys' main thing of interest is Papa, a person who is associated with the dream landscape of the city. As the boys embark on their journey away from this landscape with the mystique of Papa, they come ever closer to understanding their spirit Mother. Throughout the film there are numerous references to the boys' travelling to the 'West', not in any particular direction (no town or county is mentioned) but rather to a mythical, collective post-colonial world. Cleary uses this description to explain the idea

The most striking point which such representations have in common is that they are essentially male. They describe not a place but a function, a penetration of an approach, a movement from the East to the West into or towards an unknown Celtic world (Cleary, 1987, page 155)

It is interesting after reading Cleary's argument on the West to consider Ireland and post-colonial theory, and the origins of Mother Ireland which I have discussed in chapter one. In Dublin (urban Ireland) and the East are associated with the masculine image of a post-war, Ireland, then perhaps the West, or the desire to travel there could express a desire to revolt back to the more feminine society of pre-colonial Ireland. Oats and Tito could not understand the first details of post-colonial theory, they only knew that the towers of Dublin do not satisfy their emotional needs. They do not understand that the journey which the boys bring them on is important in that it brings the feminine aspect into their lives, an aspect that was missing since their mother's death. Also for Papa it helps him to come to terms with the loss of Mary, his wife. By the end of the film he has rejected these life. Oats has seen his mother for the first time and the travelling community has accepted all three back into their clan.

Metaphorically, Papa's journey could be described as Ireland's obsession with the traumatic events from the past and the one way to overcome the effects of these events is to embark on a quest away from the masculine towards the feminine (Cleary, 1995, page 158). This idea is further explained when Cleary writes

“What Sheridan's film offers its audience is an essentially pessimistic vision of a fallen modernity, a world of mourning and melancholia, redeemed only by the supernatural intervention of the spirit-mother”(Cleary, 1995, page 163)

The fact that the community which is depicted in Into the West is a travelling community is essential in making the plot work under post-colonial terms. The traditional travellers who are free from the constraints of city life exist in a world where the clan is all important. However, this clan is different from the male dominated world of the city, rather this community is resided over by the spirit mother where the pre colonial ideas of Ireland's past are still enforced. These pre-colonial ideas are described by Cleary as “pre-capitalist” (but essentially the idea is the same) and this travelling society is considered a “matriarchate”. This he explains is further strengthened

“by the fact that it is the returned spirit of the dead mother that lures her fallen family out of the city and takes it on a journey that will draw it back into the embrace of the larger community of their unfallen kin”(Cleary, 1995, page 161)

When I questioned Sheridan about where the inspiration for the film came from he explained that he invented it as a story about his own mother's life. The character of Ossie is based on his mother and he explained that his grandmother, died while giving birth to her. In her absence his grandfather, who could not cope, sent her away to live with relations. He felt that she blamed herself for her mother's death and it is for this reason that in the film the two boys are brought on a type of search for her (Sheridan, 1999). He does realise that the search for a physical mother is impossible since in reali-

Metaphorically, Pope's journey could be described as Ireland's obsession with the transatlantic events from the past and the one way to overcome the effects of these events is to embark on a quest away from the ancestral towards the feminine (Cleary, 1993, page 158). This idea is further explained when Cleary writes:

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ty and in the film she died in childbirth but as an explanation to this Cleary remarks

“Into the West is a fantasy about a return to the world of the archaic mother, the pre-oedipal mother who comes long before the appearance of the father and the distinctions and hierarchies that the law-of-the father inauguratesthe father represents the hard line of authority..... while the mother represents the affectional, soft side, providing sanctuary and harmony”

(Cleary, 1995, page161)

Sheridan's most recent film, The Boxer, which was released in 1998, brought together the Sheridan/Lappin team which had made In the Name of the Father and actor Daniel Day-Lewis stars in the lead role as Danny Boy Flynn. The film, which is set in Belfast in the late 1980s, begins where Danny is released from prison after serving 14 years. Upon his release he returns to the neighbourhood in West Belfast (where he grew up), where his teenage sweetheart has married his best friend and is now raising their son, Liam (Ciaran Fitzgerald). Danny who realises that he never stopped loving her begins to catch brief moments with Maggie (Emily Watson). However, Maggie, who is caught in the role of prisoner's wife and daughter of the I.R.A. leader, must live up to the unblemished role that the society which she lives in has set for her.

“in a world where violence is a way of life the most dangerous thing they can do is fall in love”(Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished)

At an early stage in the film Danny meets his old boxing trainer, Ike Weir (Ken Stott) and the two decide to reform the old boxing club, the Holy Family, which they had run before Danny's imprisonment. This non-sectarian club enrages Harry (Gerard Mc Sorley), the violent side of the local I.R.A., and this teamed with Danny's forbidden love for Maggie is the motive for Harry's abhorrence of him. Harry becomes more enraged as Maggie's father, Joe Hamill (the leader of the political section of the I.R.A.) played by Brian Cox, is in favour of non violence and he declares a ceasefire. Harry's

son died aged just 13 years as a result of I.R.A involvement and Harry and his wife believe that the ceasefire is a "sell-out".

Throughout the film Danny takes part in several non-sectarian boxing fights and for a brief moment Catholics and Protestants are united in a common response, the passion of a boxing match. This unity is quickly shattered as Harry kills a local police officer, after one such match, in a car bomb explosion. The Nationalist and Unionist spectators quickly turn on each other and a street riot ensues. During this riot Liam burns down the boxing club in retaliation as he believes that Danny will steal his mother from him. As he and Ike sift through the remains of the club Danny decides to go to London to compete. The fight which Danny encounters here is distinct in that, when he returns to Belfast, he is filled with a new optimism and ardour for his relationship with Maggie to work, even in the society of West Belfast. The reason for this courage, as Daniel Day-Lewis explains, may be because of the very nature of boxing

"Boxing brings fear out into the open in a very clear way, it puts you in an enclosed space where you confront things that are fearful, face-to-face with someone trying to hurt you"

(Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished)

and Mc Guigan, Day-Lewis' boxing coach for the film, also expressed these sentiments

"Boxing forces the fighter to answer his innermost fears and feelings, you must face questions about your courage, your nature. Ultimately it's about character"(Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished)

The London fight, where Danny must choose between beating his opponent unconscious and losing the fight, may have resulted in him confronting his fears for his relationship with Maggie. When he returns a new energy is instilled in him and he refuses to be caged by the cultural taboos which restricted him and Maggie in the early part of the film. In the closing scenes as Maggie, Danny and Liam return from Ike's funeral

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Boxing brings you out into the world in a very clear way, it puts you in an enclosed space where you control things that are outside, face-to-face with someone trying to hurt you.
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and Mr. Cillian Day-Lewis, boxing coach for the film, also expressed these sentiments

Boxing forces the fighter to answer his opponent fears and feelings, you must face questions about your courage, your name.
Ultimately it's about character. (Brochure, Unpublished)

The London fight, where Danny must choose between beating his opponent unconscious and losing the fight may have resulted in him confronting his fears for his relationship with Maggie. When he returns a new energy is manifested in him and he refuses to be caged by the animal labours which restricted him and Maggie in the early part of the film, in the closing scene as Maggie, Danny and Liam return from the funeral.

(Harry killed him in Danny's absence), Harry and his band of I.R.A. men trap their car and begin to assault Danny. He is dragged into a van and taken to the dockland area of Belfast where the I.R.A. will finish him off. As he is tied up, facing the wall the designated assassin turns at the last minute and shoots Harry (we learn later that Maggie's father organised this turn of events). In the closing moments of the film Maggie, who was in pursuit of the I.R.A., arrives to rescue Danny and bring him home where the audience hopes that they can now live happily as a family.

With this film what I am fundamentally concerned with is the representation of women and how they function in this society. Sheridan understands how

"Ireland is still very male dominated even today and especially in a war situation like in Northern Ireland women very much slip into the background. In The Boxer they are trapped by the role of prisoners' wives but not just by this by the society in which they live"(Sheridan, 1999)

This film which is set in the 1980s is the most contemporary of all of Sheridan's films to date, but as Sheridan explained, in a war situation attitudes towards women are hardly modern at all. In a society where war and violence are a way of life and male values and ideas are enforced the female viewpoint often goes unnoticed.

The fact that there are very few Irish female directors does not help in expressing an alternative view of Irish women. In Laura Mulvey's article Visual pleasure and narrative cinema she tries to explain, using psychoanalytic analysis, the influence of men and particularly the male viewpoint upon cinema. Mulvey believes that the traditional devices used to tell a story through film have been established through decades of male film makers. Even now film makers feel trapped into using certain methods of narration that result in women being portrayed as subordinates in a passive role. These codes and practices are so inbred that they go quite unnoticed by film makers and audiences. Our society has developed under these codes and so we accept the messages that films

(Harry killed him in Danny's absence). Harry and his band of IRA men trap them and begin to assault Danny. He is dragged into a van and taken to the dockland area of Belfast where the IRA will finish him off. As he is tied up, facing the wall, the deaf-mute assassin turns at the last minute and shoots Harry (we learn later that Maggie's father organised this line of events). In the closing moments of the film Maggie, who was in pursuit of the IRA, arrives to rescue Danny and bring him home where the audience hopes that they can now live happily as a family.

With this film what I am fundamentally concerned with is the representation of women and how they function in this society. Sheridan understands how

"Ireland is still very male dominated as in today and especially in a war situation like in Northern Ireland women very much slip into the background in *The Field* they are trapped by the mix of men's wives but not men by the society in which they live" (Sheridan, 1993).

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give out since they are a reflection of the ideologies which exist in our society. As Laura Mulvey points out

“Film reflects society.....and society influences our understanding of film”(in Nelmes, 1996, page 231)

In The Boxer women play quite a prominent role in the film's plot unlike many films set during times of war. “In many ways it's about the emergence of women in this society” Sheridan explains “It's about the love and the feminine coming into the society - the gentle” (Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished). The feminine aspect to this film is presented to us as the character of Maggie. Although she plays an important role in the plot, it is the male characters who really determine her destiny. The significance of the role of prisoner's wife is highlighted early on in the film. Maggie's father, in a wedding speech says

“I know that when I was inside it was easy to do my time
because I had a strong woman behind me. My wifestood
by me and remained faithful to the cause and now my daughter
.... keeps the house together until Thomas returns. And you
women who who stood by your men will be remembered as the
strongest of the district”

Maggie is under constant surveillance from the I.R.A and others in her community. There is tremendous pressure on her and the other prisoners' wives to remain faithful so the moral of the prisoners will be boosted. As a result “all of the women are watched as a kind of self censorship”(Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished). It is for this reason that Maggie is unable to determine her own fate but also because of the patriarchal society (where she lives) in which her Father and the other I.R.A. members are stronger masculine figures. Jill Nelmes describes patriarchal societies, “where women generally take a subservient role” and if such a society is represented through the medium of film it is not surprising that female characters “have usually taken supportive roles rather

give out since they are a reflection of the ideologies which exist in our society. As

Laura Mulvey points out

"This reflects society... and society influences our understanding

of film" (in *Screening the Past*, page 21)

In *The Hours* women play a prominent role in the film's plot unlike many films set during times of war. In many ways it's about the emergence of women in this society. "Shonda explains: 'It's about the love and the feminine coming into the society... the gender' (ibid. ch. 1, The Hours, unpublished). The feminine aspect to this film is presented to us as the character of Maggie. Although she plays an important role in the film it is the male characters who really determine her destiny. The significance of the role of prisoner's wife is highlighted early on in the film. Maggie's father, in a wedding

speech says

"I know that what was needed was easy to do in times
because I had a strong woman behind me. As wife, I took
care and remained faithful to the cause and now my daughter
has to do this alone. I hope you will be inspired as the
woman who stood by you men will be inspired as the
strongest of the nation."

Maggie is under constant surveillance from the IRA and others in her community. There is tremendous pressure on her and the other prisoners' wives to remain faithful so the trust of the prisoners will be boosted. As a result, all of the women are watched as a kind of self-censoring (ibid. ch. 1, The Hours, unpublished). It is for this reason that Maggie is unable to determine her own fate but also because of the patriarchal society (where she lives) in which her father and the other IRA members are stronger masculine figures. Jill James describes patriarchal societies, "where women generally take a supportive role" and it is such a society is represented through the medium of film it is not surprising that female characters "have usually taken supportive roles rather

than key, decision making ones" (Nelmes, 1996, page 228)

Having said that, Maggie does show some awareness of her desperate situation when to her father she says

"I'm the prisoner here, you and your politics have made sure of that"

and she does show some strength of character. Watson says of her

"She's strong and she's weakshe's been brought up within the political structure of the I.R.A.....As the ideal prisoner's wife, she must behave in an exemplary fashion, but suddenly she begins to realise that's not what she wants to be or do. She's forced to choose what she wants, to grow strong really"(Brochure, The Boxer, unpublished)

Maggie does develop into a stronger character by the end of the film when she rejects the role of prisoner's wife and she and Danny drive home to, hopefully, start a new life together. Unfortunately, the patriarchal society of Northern Ireland which she must return to goes unchanged by the end of the film. As a result there is still an unsettling feeling about how their life will transpire in this environment.

Having said that, I agree does show some awareness of her desperate situation when to her father she says:

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"She's strong, and she's weak... she's been brought in within
the political structure of the L.A. As the ideal prisoner,
while she must believe in an exemplary fashion, but evidently
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return to goes unchanged by the end of the film. As a result, there is still an underlying
feeling about how their life will transpire in this environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I have found from my analysis that Irish society and in particular Ireland as a post colonial society, has had an effect on the Irish family. These effects have been portrayed throughout Irish literary history but now since the emergence of cinema they too have influenced film.

In the films discussed, by Jim Sheridan, it is obvious that colonisation and past events from Irish history have been two major influences. Also it is inevitable that an author's own family background will have some effect on the portrayal of family life, after all the family is perhaps the single institution which everyone can identify. Sheridan explained to me that when writing a script it is easier to understand the character if you can empathise with him or her. "When you're writing a script you try to put yourself in the position of the main character", Sheridan explained, "really when you're making a film you're either outside the character or inside the character"(Sheridan, 1999).

Perhaps it is for this reason that when writing a script, where the main relationships are family relationships, Sheridan may find himself using his own family life as a reference point. From here characters will change and develop until a believable and perhaps more importantly an entertaining script will develop.

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In the films discussed by Jim Sheridan it is obvious that colonization and past as well as Irish history have been a major influence. Also it is inevitable that an author's own family background will have some effect on the portrayal of family life, after all the family is perhaps the single institution which everyone can identify. Sheridan explained to me that when writing a script it is easier to understand the character if you can empathize with him or her. "When you're writing a script you try to put yourself in the position of the main character," Sheridan explained, "really when you're making a film you're either outside the character or inside the character" (Sheridan, 1999). Perhaps it is for this reason that when writing a script, where the main relationships are family relationships, Sheridan may find himself using his own family life as a reference point. I feel here characters will change and develop with a believability and perhaps more importantly an entertaining script will develop.

Interview with Jim Sheridan, 26/01/1999, Dublin.

In an interview with the B.B.C. you expressed how in My Left Foot, "It's an amalgamation of Christy's father and my father, his mother and my mother", could you explain what you meant by this?

Yeah I didn't see that documentary actually, did I say that?.....Well I guess there would be aspects of my parents in the characters but, they weren't totally like that, you know. It's an oedipal story really where Oedipus blames his Father for his defects and I guess Christy did the same, although perhaps even he didn't realise it. Maybe that's why there's this conflict going on and then Christy marries a woman like his mother. As well Oedipus only had one part that didn't work, his foot so I suppose Christy is like an extreme version of that where the only part that does work is his left foot. Anyway, the thing about an amalgamation of my father and Christy'sI did draw on my father but not exactly, what I mean is he wasn't exactly like that, maybe certain aspects but not the whole character.

You also said that you found that you could empathise with Christy, in what ways?

What I meant was that when you're writing a script you try to put yourself in the position of the main character and especially when you're dealing with a character with cerebral palsy, like Christy, you don't want to be patronising. So when I was developing the character of Christy I tried to imagine what it would be like to be him. Obviously I don't know what it's like to have cerebral palsy so you start to think about your own difficulties like, am I too short?, I'm too fat?, do I look stupid or whatever. Really when you're making a film you're either outside or inside the character and I had to try to get inside the character of Christy.

In the book My Left Foot the character of Mr. Brown is far more autocratic. Why did you feel the need to soften his character for the film?

Well I thought that such a dark character would be unbelievable. Film has laws you see

Interview with Jim Sheridan, 26/01/1992, Dublin.

In an interview with the B.B.C. you expressed that in 1971, when you were
young, you were a father and a mother and a brother. Could you explain
what you mean by this?

Yeah, I didn't see that documentary actually, did I say that? Well, I guess there would
be aspects of my parents in the character, but they weren't totally like that, you know.
It's an oddball story really where Odette blames his father for his defects and I guess
Christy did the same, although perhaps even he didn't realize it. Maybe that's why
there's this conflict going on and then Christy marries a woman like his mother. As
well, Odette only had one part that didn't work, his foot, so I suppose Christy is like an
extreme version of him where the only part that does work is his left foot. Anyway, the
thing about the amalgamation of my father and Christy is, I did draw on my father
but not exactly what I mean. I mean I was exactly like that, maybe certain aspects but
not the whole character.

You also said that you found that you could empathize with Odette in what way?
Well, I meant was that when you're writing a script you try to put yourself in the pos-
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cerebral palsy like Christy, you don't want to be patronizing. So when I was develop-
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Obviously I don't know what it's like to have cerebral palsy, so you start to think about
your own difficulties like, am I too short? I'm too fat, do I look stupid or whatever.
Really when you're making a film you're either outside or inside the character and I
had to try to get inside the character of Christy.

In the book *My Left Foot*, the character of the brother is far more autistic. Was it
your job to find the need to soften his character for the film?

Well, I thought that such a dark character would be unbelievable. What has happened you see

so I needed to put in parts even though they may not have actually happened. That bit where he lifts Christy up over his shoulder is most people's favourite bit so I needed to add bits like that to make the character more identifiable for the film audience.

So do you often find yourself mixing literal and dramatic truth when writing a script?

I mean, if you're making a film about real people, like the Guildford Four, and you kind of said something wrong about them well then they'd sue you so you have to stick to the certain truth. In a fiction film it's just fiction, you can make it up and usually it's kinda based on whether you're doing any damage to the original characters. With In the Name of the Father I didn't give a damn what damage it did to the policemen's characters. None of them ever sued me so it must be the truth.

With Into the West where did the initial idea come from, is it purely fictional?

Michael Pierce came to me with the initial idea but I kind of invented it to be about my mother, you know. It's my Ma's story really.

Which parts?

Well what happened was her mother died while giving birth to her and supposedly me grandfather was out in the fields working and he wouldn't come in to her, so I've been told, and she died giving birth. And for a few years my mother had to go and live with cousins and then she came back home. And I think that she always blamed herself for her mother's death. And then there's the little things like the bad breathing , just like Ma.

The Mother in the film is like a mythical character. Why did you treat her like that?

I guess the mother in the film is like my Ma's Ma, in a way, because she blamed herself for her death and in the film the two boys go in search for her even though she's unattainable in a way. And then she turns into a mythical horse. I don't know where

and I needed to put in parts even though they may not have actually happened. That bit where he lifts Cheryl up over his shoulder is most people's favorite bit so I needed to add bits like that to make the character more identifiable for the film audience.

So do you often find yourself mixing these and dramatic scenes with comedy scenes?

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With *in the Name of the Father* where did the initial idea come from in a purely technical way?

Michael Joyce came to me with the initial idea but I kind of ignored it to be about my mother. You know, it's my Ma's story really.

Which way?

Well what happened was her mother died while giving birth to her and supposedly, her grandfather was out in the fields working and he wouldn't come in to her so I've been told, and she died giving birth. And for a few years my mother had to go and live with cousins and then she came back home. And I think that she always blamed herself for her mother's death. And then there's the little thing like the bad breathing, just like

Ma.

The mother in the film is like a mythical character. Why did you want her like that?

I guess the mother in the film is like my Ma's Ma, in a way because she blamed her self for her death and in the film the two boys go in search for her even though she's unattainable in a way. And then she turns into a mythical horse. I don't know where

that bit came from!!!!

Do you ever consciously draw on real people when writing a script in order to develop realistic characters?

Well.....no not really. It's more like when growing up with the lodgers and all that coming and going in the house you're exposed to a lot of different characters and personalities so I don't find it difficult to develop characters in a script. You couldn't say that a character on screen is exactly like a person you know.

You have said that the character of Guiseppe Conlon reminded you most of your own father. In what way?

Well I consciously wanted to make a film about a good father, so I was also conscious of remembering the good aspects of my own father. I started thinking of my Da and Gerry's Da and you know the way he followed Gerry around out of concern and he was always looking out for him. It reminded me of my own father, that's what I meant.

With The Field Richard Harris felt that you were fighting with your father and that he got in the way. Where did he get this idea from?

Well, making the film there was this kind of father/son thing between me and Richard and we'd argue about the Bull's character. I think he saw it as like a King Lear or something and I didn't so he thought that I was actually trying to get at my father and he got in the way. But I don't think that was the case.

You set the film in the 1940s whereas the play is set in the 1960s, why did you change the setting?

I did that because I had to get back to a more primitive time. I think people, especially Americans, wouldn't believe that that could happen in the 1960s. For Ireland things

that bit came from it.

I'm not consciously aware of real people when writing a script in order to develop realistic characters.

Well, I'm not really. It's more like when growing up with the father and all that coming and going in the house you're exposed to a lot of different characters and personalities so I don't find it difficult to develop characters in a script. You couldn't say that a character on screen is exactly like a person you know.

You have said that the character of George Costanza reminded you most of your own father in what way?

Well I consciously wanted to make a film about a good father, so I was also conscious of remembering the good aspects of my own father. I started thinking of my Dad and Jerry's Dad and you know the way he followed Gerry around out of concern and he was always looking out for him. It reminded me of my own father, that's what I meant.

With The Field Richard Harris felt that you were fighting with your father and that he got in the way. Where did he get this idea from?

Well, making the film there was this kind of father/son thing between me and Richard and we'd argue about the Bull's character. I think he saw it as like a King Lear or something and I didn't so he thought that I was actually trying to get at my father and he got in the way. But I don't think that was the case.

You set the film in the 1950s whereas the film is set in the 1960s, why did you change the setting?

I did that because I had to get back to a more primitive time. I think people, especially Americans, wouldn't believe that that could happen in the 1960s. For Ireland things

were a lot worse socially and economically back then. Irish people were after coming out of a period where they'd been crushed and were still unsure of themselves. And in America it was just after the war and and they were coming out of a depression and that so I thought that it would be more plausible if it was set in the 1940s.

Is there an implied father/son relationship between the Bull and the American. and if so why did you add this?

Yeah, that was something that I added that wasn't in the play with the English character. I thought that the American was like the memory of the Bull's son returned or maybe the person that the other son wasn't or what the Bull wanted him to be.

In The Boxer the female characters have an important role in the plot, however they still have little control over their situation. Why did you choose to depict them in this way?

Ireland is still very male dominated even today and especially in a war situation like in Northern Ireland women very much slip into the background. In The Boxer they are trapped by the role of prisoner's wife but not just by this, by the society in which they live.

were a lot worse socially and economically back then. In the 1940s, they were after coming out of a period where they'd been crushed and were still up there of themselves. And in America it was just after the war and they were coming out of a depression and that so I thought that it would be more plausible if it was set in the 1940s.

Is there an implied future relationship between the Bull and the woman, and if so, why, did you write that?

I can't think of anything that I added that wasn't in the play with the English character. I thought that the woman was like the memory of the Bull's son returned or maybe the person that the other son wasn't or what the Bull wanted him to be.

In the book, the female character has more of a narrative role in the plot, however, they still have that control over their situation. It's not that you choose to be part of it in this

way.

Ireland is still very male dominated even today and especially in a war situation like in Northern Ireland where very much slip into the background. In the book, they are trapped by the role of prisoner, a wife but not just by that, by the society in which they

live.

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