THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE COLONIAL MENTALITY IN IRISH CULTURE

Irish cinema a case in point

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Introduction

A problem which must present itself to every student of Irish culture is the lack of quality academic material available in any given area. This is further compacted for the cinematic medium by the absence of an accessible forum in the shape of a National Film Archive, the establishment of which has been in demand now for many years. Unfortunately much of the material to which access can be found tends towards ahistorical and in many cases racist self condemnations, reproducing static images of cultural backwardness, etc., without making an evaluation of the effects of national oppression and colonialisation on the production of art. As has been shown in other areas of cultural investigation, (particularly in the area of feminist art criticism), the cultural product of any oppressed people cannot be viewed without recognition of history and the exertions made by society on art. Irish culture suffered not only the physical loss of its indigenous language, and therefore much of its literature, but also through the imposition of a colonial cultural identity in the form of the stereotype (an essential tool in the armoury of colonialism).

These stereotypes are well known and have become a perceptual prison in which we evaluate ourselves and are evaluated by the rest of the world. Irishmen as drunken, unruly, violent and primitive, divided into two tribal factions north and south. Irishwomen, catholic, virginal, passive, pieta-like cradling the dead bodies of her unruly sons. 'The Coleen Bawn' etc. The 'Irish condition' one arisen out of senselessness, tribalism and

fanaticism, of which sense or solution can never and will never be found.

Before an understanding of Irish culture can emerge a dialectical approach must be taken to consider not only history and the effects of colonialism and present day neo-colonialism on Irish society and national self image, but also the class structure and interests of Irish society itself. Since the Treaty of 1922 the Irish bourgeoisie have found themselves under ever increasing threat from the national independence movement, a threat met legally through the escalation of repressive legislation, internments, censorship etc., but also culturally through the reinstatement of colonial ideology, stereotyping etc. alongside the suppression of images and representations found to be of a politically sensitive character. (A present day example of this is section 31 of the Broadcasting Act.) The restrictive nature of Irish society since 1922 had a detrimental effect on Irish culture, as will be discussed in the following chapters but most particularly on the production of native film.

Film, a cultural product dependent on financial aid and an industrial base and less abstract in its content than many other art forms. suffered rather severely. How Irish cinema has projected Irishness and Irish historical subjects has been in the main through the vision of those in power, those who demanded that art be their ideological voice. This was maintained not only by law in the form of censorship,[1] banning, etc., (approximately 3,00 films banned and 8,000 cut since the foundation of the state) but also by deception through the continual revision of Irish history.

Chapter I - <u>The colonial origin of anti Irish racism and the stereotype, its influence on Irish history</u>.
<u>The violent Irish a theme in culture</u>.

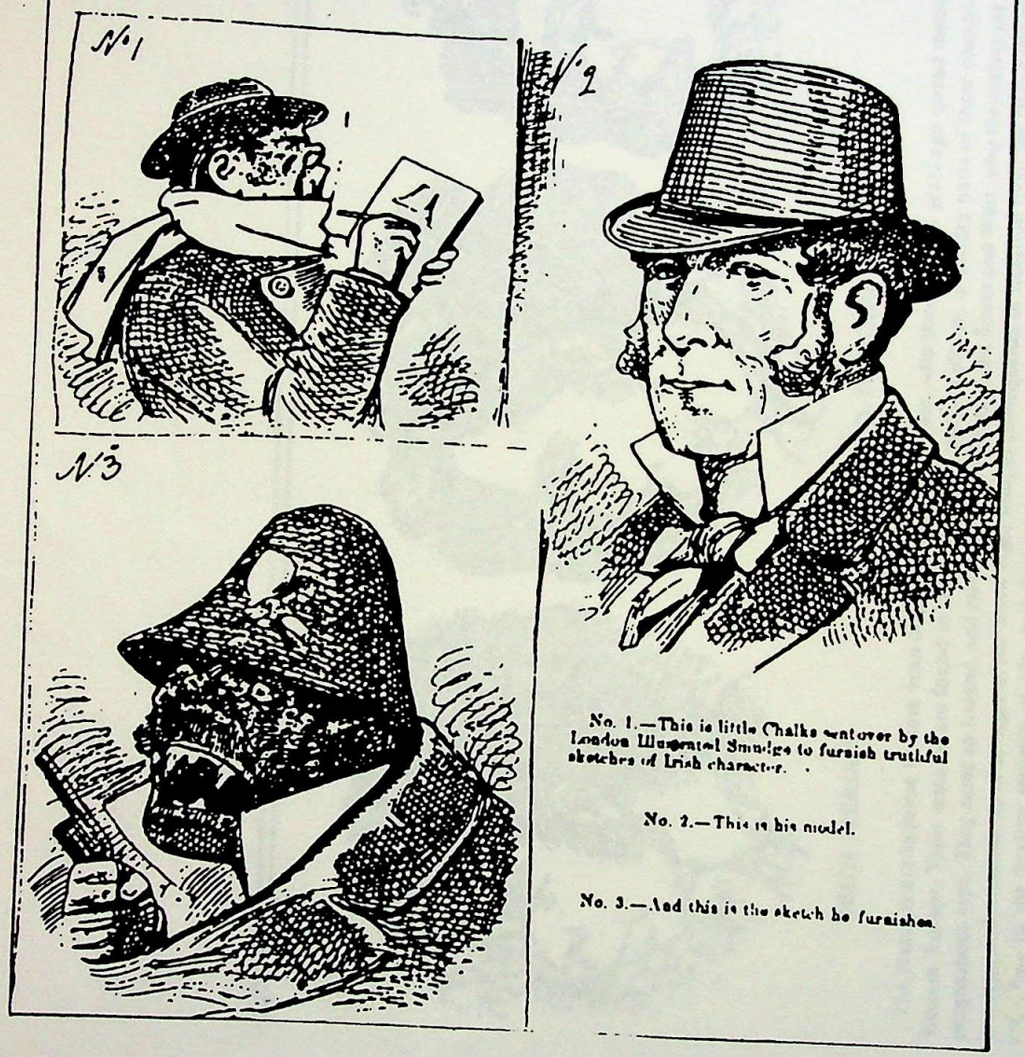
The use of stereotype as an intrinsic element of colonial policy has been well documented. This established itself from the earliest days of colonial development but reached its highest stage in the 19th century. From the spectrum of Irish stereotypes within cultural and historic representation perhaps the stage Irishman is the most examined (and because of his general amiability most accepted), but there are other more covert and pernicious stereotypes, more relevant to Irish history and contemporary Ireland. These regard the depiction of the Irishman and violence.

By developing theories of racial inferiority, stupidity, inability to self govern and general inhumanity in the colonised, (faceless Chinese, savage Irish, etc.) the colonial power obscured the obvious contradictions between the policies of the allegedly 'civilised' colonisers and their suppression of subject peoples particularly in the eyes of their own public. British perception of Irish affairs has been dominated by an image of fabricated Irishness which has resisted change despite contradictory evidence.[2]

> Irish violence as seen in 19th century England and indeed contemporarily was never within reasoning a result of national grievance but merely a reflection of the turbulent character of the Irish people.

The very name Ireland forces to our reflection

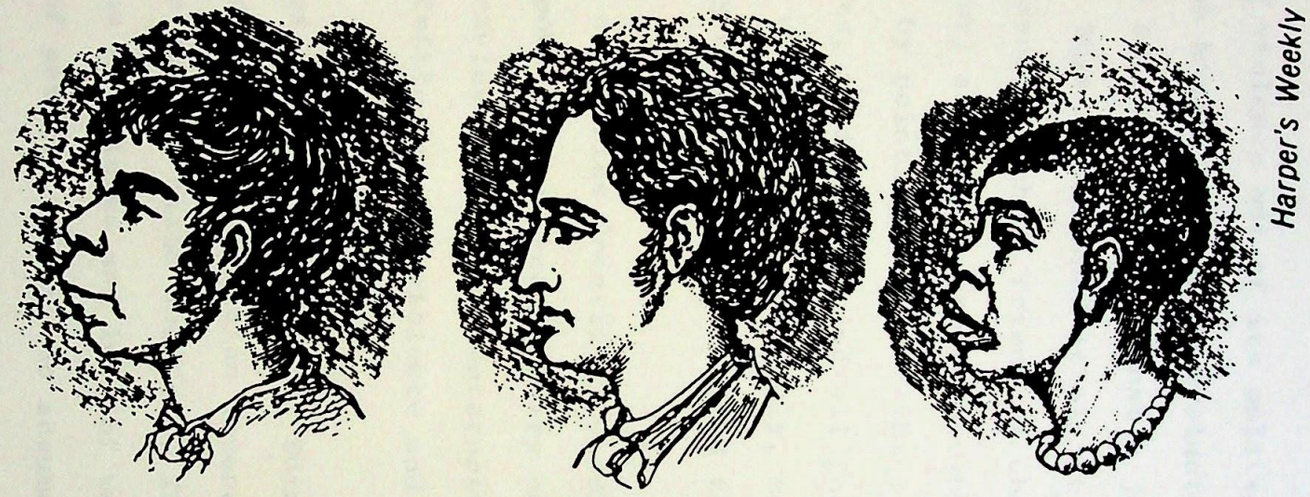
PAT



No. 1.—This is little Chalks sent over by the London Illustrated Smudge to furnish truthful sketches of Irish character.

No. 2.—This is his model.

No. 3.—And this is the sketch he furnishes.



IRISH IBERIAN. ANGLO-TEUTONIC. NEGRO.

Harper's Weekly

The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain over Western Europe. Their remains are found in the barrows, or burying places, in sundry parts of these countries. The skulls are of low, prognathous type. They came to Ireland, and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out-competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.

images of shillegaghs and broken heads and turbulence of every kind.

John Inglis.

By establishing violence out of its political or historical context, British historiography re-evaluated it as a criminal and treacherous activity aimed against a just and civilising colonial order. This established itself at the very onset of colonisation. Barnaby Rich[3] a friend of Churchyard (an early British coloniser) argued against those who thought British conduct too severe by pointing out that the Irish, prefer to... "live like beasts, voide of law and all good order", and that they were "more uncivil, more uncleanly, more barbarous in their customs than any other part of the world that is known".

Economists such as Charles Grenville, Charles Wood and Thomas Maucauley all spoke of the need to carry out a moral reformation in Ireland. Maucauley proposed an interpretation of Irish history based upon the Celtic love of violence and anarchy.

18th century Knox professor of anatomy Edinburgh;

The survival of civilisation depends upon the racial struggle between Saxon and Celt. The Celt possessing a furious fanaticism and love of war and disorder, a hatred of patent history, no accumulative habits, restless, treacherous and uncertain.

Disraeli, 1836 The Times, Letter XVI;

The Irish hate our free and fertile isle, they hate

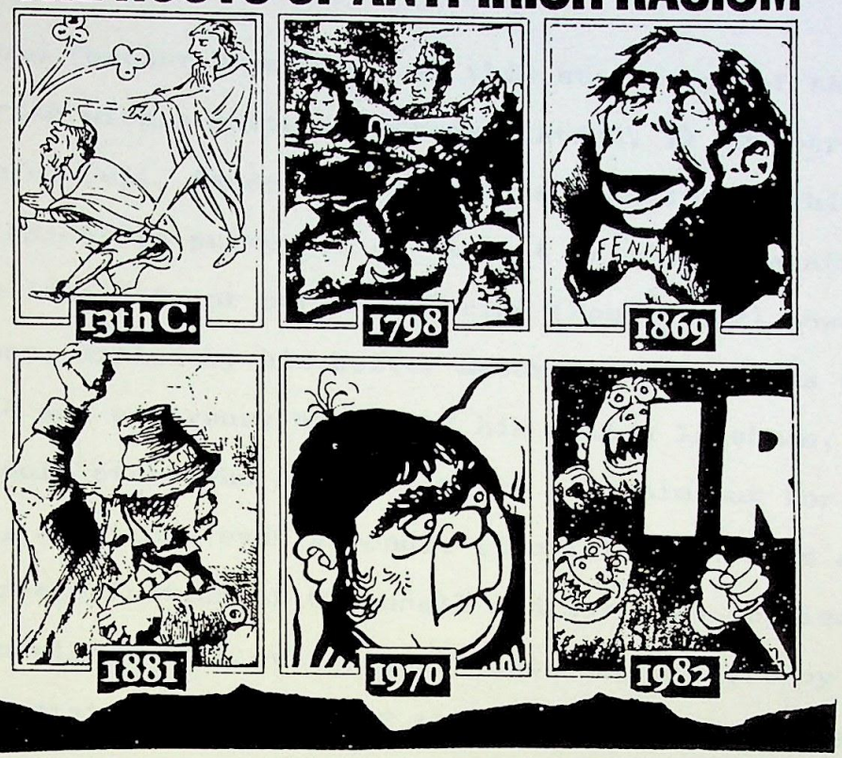
> our order, our civilisation, our decorous liberty, our enterprising industry, our sustained courage, our pure religion. This wild reckless indolent and superstitious race has no sympathy with the English character.

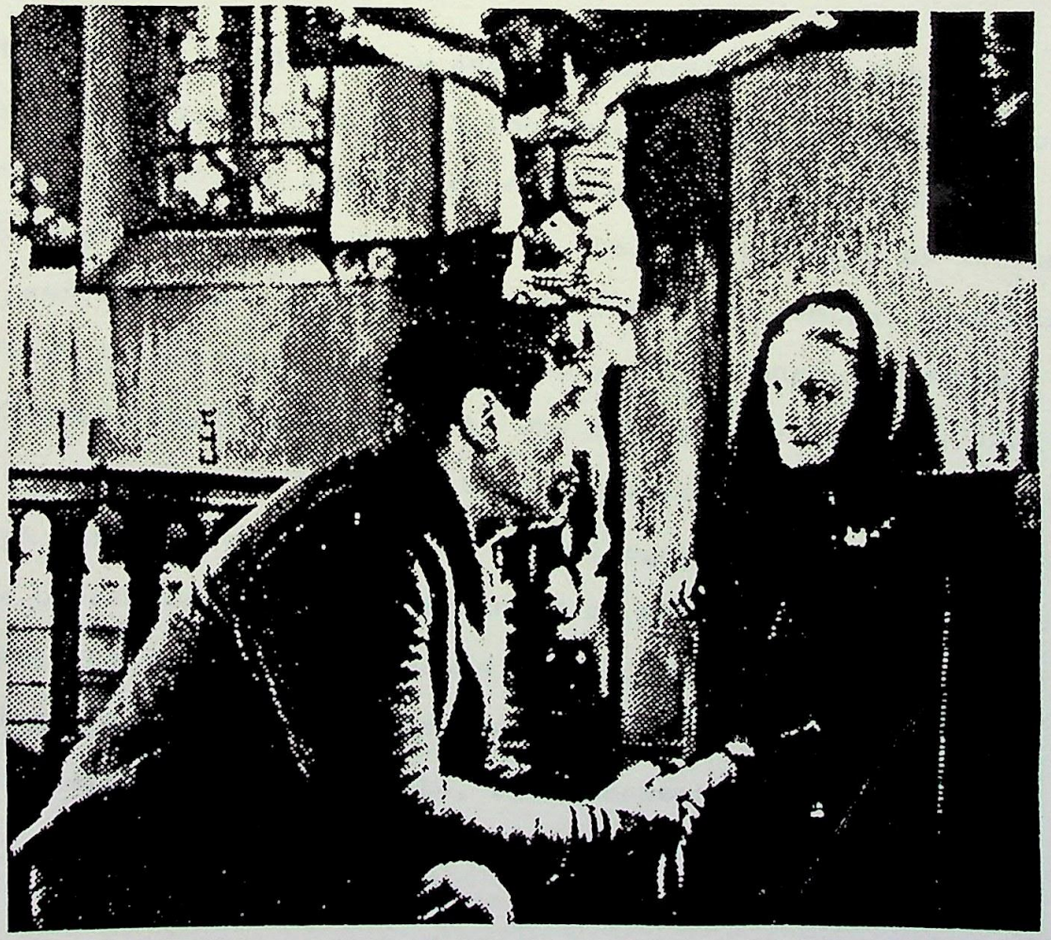
This depiction of the Irish as inherently violent and superstitious has most cleverly served colonialism by diverting attention away from the origins of political and religious division in Ireland. Since the establishment of 'The United Irishmen' led by Wolfe Tone, an organisation which upheld the unity of catholic, protestant and dissenter as part of a bourgeois revolution against colonialism, a policy of incited sectarianism has been followed as part of colonial divide and rule policy. One example of this was in the founding of the Orange Order in 1795 as a counteraction to the United Irishmen as described by General Knox, one of the British commanders, in a letter to his superior just before the 1798 Rising.

> I have arranged to increase the animosity between Orangemen and United Irishmen for upon that animosity depends the safety of the centre countries of the North.[4]

The persistance of this fighting superstitious Irish image is still readily identifiable in modern history, media, and culture, with the continuation and promotion of the two tribes analyses in all areas of communication. This has, by absolving British colonialism of responsibility turned the implications on violence back onto the Irish themselves, where it can be interpreted in

NOTHING BUT
THE SAME OLD STORY
THE ROOTS OF ANTI-IRISH RACISM





the same old racist terms as a natural outcome of Irish barbarity and religious tribalism.

There are two further breakdowns of this stereotype of the fighting Irish within cultural representation. 1) The barbaric and ungrateful Celt, fanatical violent and sectarian. This is applicable mainly to purveyors of violent or guerrilla attacks, and, 2) The idealist, or parliamentarian (Home Ruler) powerful but ludicrous, misled by his better nature and oblivious to the pathetic and unsavoury nature of his fellow Irishmen, the informers fools etc., who are willing yo sell him out for petty indulgences, sometimes even alcohol. (The latter evolved as a British characterisation of O'Connell and has been applied to the Irish intelligentsia ever since.) Both aspects are by nature negative and static, two sides of the same coin so to speak.

The definition of insurgency and the depictions of violence, indeed the entire way in which the concept is represented through images, explanations and evidence is central to the exercise of ideological power in society. In the dramatisation of Ireland both past and present, there have evolved some central elements, the first is the essential criminality of violence, secondly its characterisation as alien to the British way of life, and finally the contrast between the legitimate pursuit of interests through parliamentary means and the illegitimacy of direct action. In the onset violence is represented as eminating and being initiated by the Irish, by means of a disruptive attack on an existing order. By this means the reaction of the state always appears defensive, regrettable, but necessary.[5]

'Odd Man Out', 'The Informer', 'The Violent Enemy', 'Shake Hands with the Devil', 'The Long Good Friday'.

In 'Mirror for England' the British critic Raymond Durgrat criticises the failure of British commercial cinema to fix its treatment of Ireland in real social or historical context, conclusing that Ireland's attainment of independence is presented exclusively in terms of the Irish struggling with their own tendency to violence.

'Odd Man Out' GB 1947

This film holds forth a myriad of stereotypes. James Mason is Johnny, the disillusioned and ill fated IRA man just sprung from jail, who desires to give up violence for the parliamentary road to independence. It is against this better judgement that he involves himself in a pay roll robbery, where through an unfortunate series of events he kills a man, (getting wounded himself in the process). Outside the get-away driver (Cyril Cusack) is beginning to panic. Johnny finding it difficult to remain agile due to his injury falls from the car as it speeds away. Fearing for their own skins his 'comrades' decide to drive on without him (completing the betrayal of the idealist, hero, and exposing the cowardly nature of the common Irish character).

Contrasted with this then is the introduction of the two chirpy Englishwomen who find Johnny, and thinking he has been a victim of a hit and run car accident take him home to look after his injuries, but then on discovering his identity let him go without informing on him to the police. (This is one of the few acts

of decency within the film.) And there is the stage Irishman, the alcoholic artist who searches for Johnny through Belfast hoping to find him as a subject for a painting, but who is out-smarted by the pathetic Irish in the shape of the informer. The final scene takes place at midnight and shows Johnny defeated and dying being helped through the snow to the boat (which is his last means of escape), by his loyal girlfriend Kathleen as the RUC close in. In realisation of the hopelessness of the situation Kathleen shoots both herself and Johnny before they can be taken by the police.

'Long Good Friday' GB 1981

In 'The Long Good Friday' the stereotype provided is somewhat updated from that of 'Odd Man Out'. On the face of it the cruder racist stereotypes of the Irish as foolishly idealistic, stupid or incompetent are reversed and instead the Irish (portrayed here by the IRA) are shown to be ruthless and effective.

Given the changed nature of IRA activity this is not surprising. From the sporadic and isolated actions (depicted in 'Odd Man Out' and other pre 70s films), IRA military activity has for the last seventeen years taken on the form of a sustained guerrilla war which has been beyond the capabilities of British military forces to subdue.

'The Long Good Friday' of the title is the day in which the world of Londong gangster Harold Shand falls apart,

as the story accelerates to a crazy vortex of violence Harols realises he has unwittingly crossed

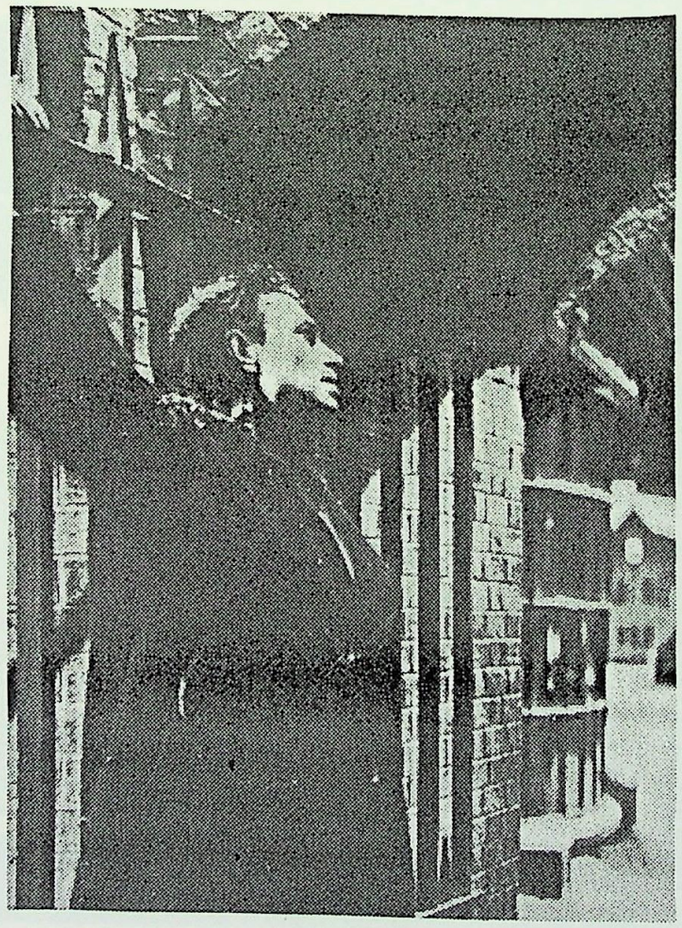
> enemies (the IRA) whose connections, expertise and dedication to violence outclass his own.[6]

As already mentioned the theme of resistance to British rule as simply criminal rather than political has been consistent through history. In recent years this has been embellished by associations with actual criminal activities. (The stereotype of the IRA as 'Godfathers of Crime'.) In this film the IRA is compared to actual Godfathers of crime in the shape of Harold Shand's east London crime corporation and mafia associations. Whereas the latter are portrayed as straightforward rational, 'honest' criminals, the former are depicted as fanatics for whom even money has no rational value. Says Harold in astonishment on discovering the cause of this sudden unleashing of violence, bomb attacks, murders, etc... "You mean all this anarchy is over five poxy grand", a pittance in any real criminal terms, but enough it seems to make the fanatical Irish blow up half of London.

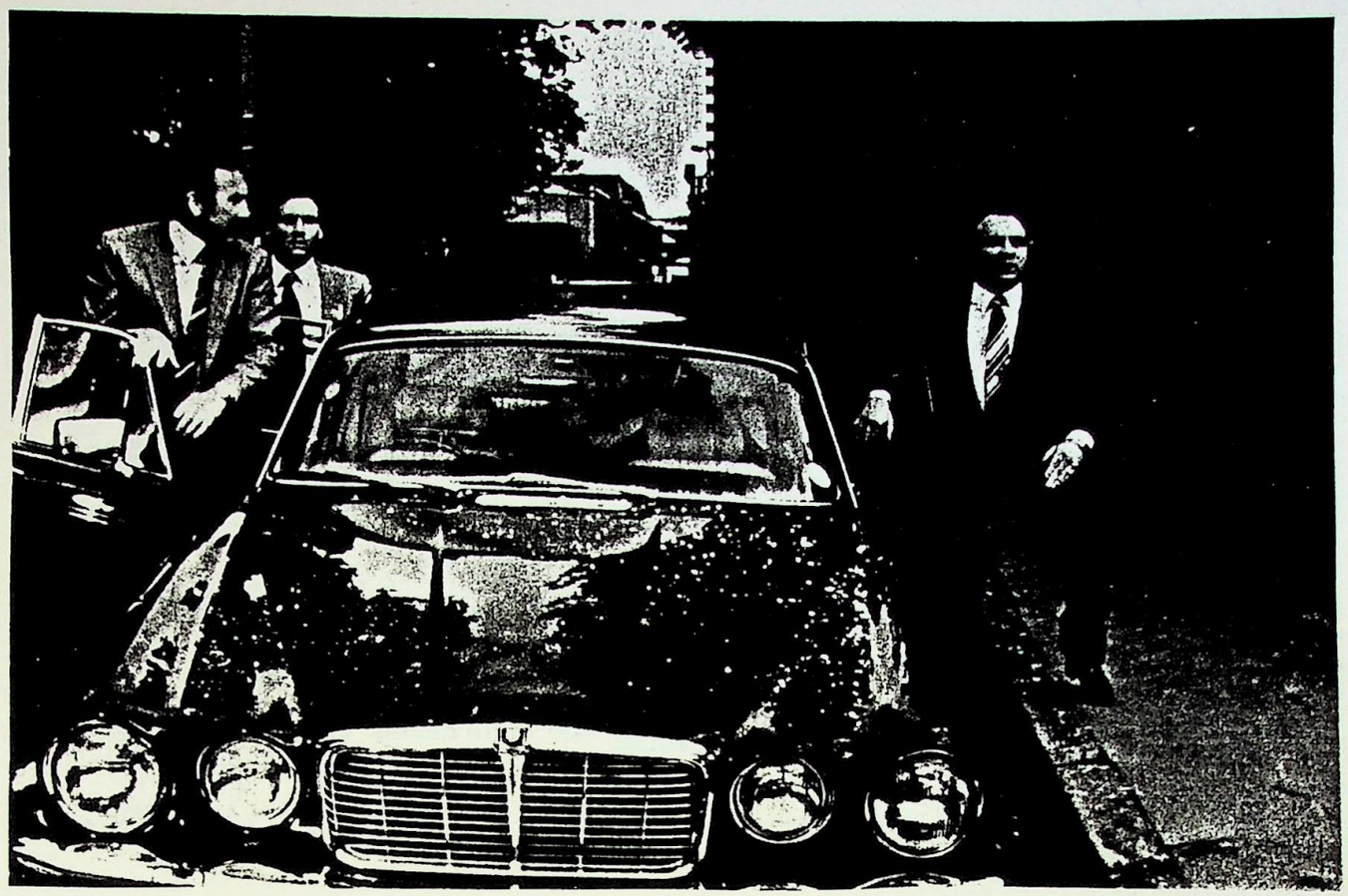
Later on Harold is advised by Harris his local authority lackey to call off any idea of reprisals. Harris -

> Harold call it off. You can't do it. You can't deal with these people. For Christ's sake - they're not interested in money. They're political, they're idealists, they're fanatical.[7]

Here the stereotype has been developed to a new level, going from criminality, to criminality without rationality - senseless violence etc.



'This is the work of some maniac. I'll have his carcass dripping blood by midnight,' says Harold, outraged to arrive at his favourite pub as it explodes.



'Two or three Micks have been very busy covering a lot of ground since yesterday. It is impossible that no one knows nothing. Someone, somewhere knows.' Flanked by Jeff and Razors in his Mayfair casino, Harold instructs his gang to arm up.

Footnotes - Chapter I

1. Censorship the Irish experience, Michael Adams, 1968.
   Censorship Bill, The grounds of prohibition, p. 47.

2. White Britain and Black Ireland, Richard Ned Lebow, The influence of the stereotype on colonial policy.

3. The Ideology of British Colonisation from Ireland to America, Nicholas P. Canny.

4.

5. Televising Terrorism, Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock,
   Political Violence in Popular Culture Philip Elliot
   See Dramatising 'Terrorism' chapter 3, pp 73 - 109.

6. Times, review published in Long Good Friday Original Screenplay
   Methuen Press, p. 1.

7. The Long Good Friday, Oroginal Screenplay, Barrie Keefe, p. 42.

Chapter II - The Survival of the Stereotype past Independence
The Suppression of the Independence Movement
Bourgeois Nationalism and National Chauvinism
The Suffocation of Irish Culture

However within the culture which emerged since the 1920s these self same colonial characterisations of inherent violence, superstition, and backwardness still exist and permeate through all cultural representations. From Synge's'Playboy' who attempts the murder of his father by hitting him over the head with a loy to become hero of the western world, to O'Casey's 'Plough and the Stars' (which later became a film) where the proclamation of Independence orated by pearce is overheard from the interior of a pub, where the citizens of Dublin drink themselves to a stupour, their conversation punctuated with mockery of the Rising, to the Yeatsian mystical depiction of natural harmonious peasantry threatened by the influences of violent Republicanism. (It is interesting to note that 'The Playboy of the Western World' provoked a riot on ints premiere performance.)

Only recently is work being done to question the ideological base of these representations and their implications for Irish society. To do this an historical evaluation of Irish society itself must take place.

The reason for the survival of the stereotype beyond independence and even until the present day is to be found in the changing interests of the Irish bourgeoisie with regard the struggle for independence. Since the crushing of the 1798 rebellion the Irish bourgeoisie had ceased to be revolutionary and henceforth its

aspirations found representation in both constitutional nationalism and unionism. (Unionism at that stage was an all Ireland phenomenon not restricted to the North East.) The revolutionary trend, ie. that which still asserted the use of armed uprising persisted in the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie (shopkeepers, teachers, etc.), peasantry and growing working class. The latter in particular were increasingly significant in the ranks of movements such as the Fenians (or Irish Republican Brotherhood - IRB).

By the beginning of the 20th century the Irish working class were beginning to build their own autonomous organisations both industrial eg. ITGWU and military, ICA - Irish Citizens Army. It was the alliance of the latter (led by Connolly) with the petit bourgeois nationalists of the IRB (led by Pearse) which organised the Rising of 1916 which in turn was to provide inspiration for the war of Independence. This revolutionary alliance (which included the women's movement in the military units of Cumann na mban) lasted up until the signing of the Treaty 1921. By this stage the working class had lost its autonomy within the independence movement, a problem particularly apparent after the execution of Connolly.

Since the independence movement was successful in mobilising almost the entire Irish nation for its goal, it was inevitable that the peasantry and working class would also get mobilised for social change. This was evidenced by the seizure of land by landless labourers and small farmers, strikes, the setting up of Soviets, etc., during the period of the war of Independence. For a significant section of the national movement their contradictions

Women unloading guns on the Asgard, *the ship which smuggled arms into Howth for the Irish Volunteers in July 1914.*

with British colonialism diminished in proportion to their increasing opposition to radical social change.

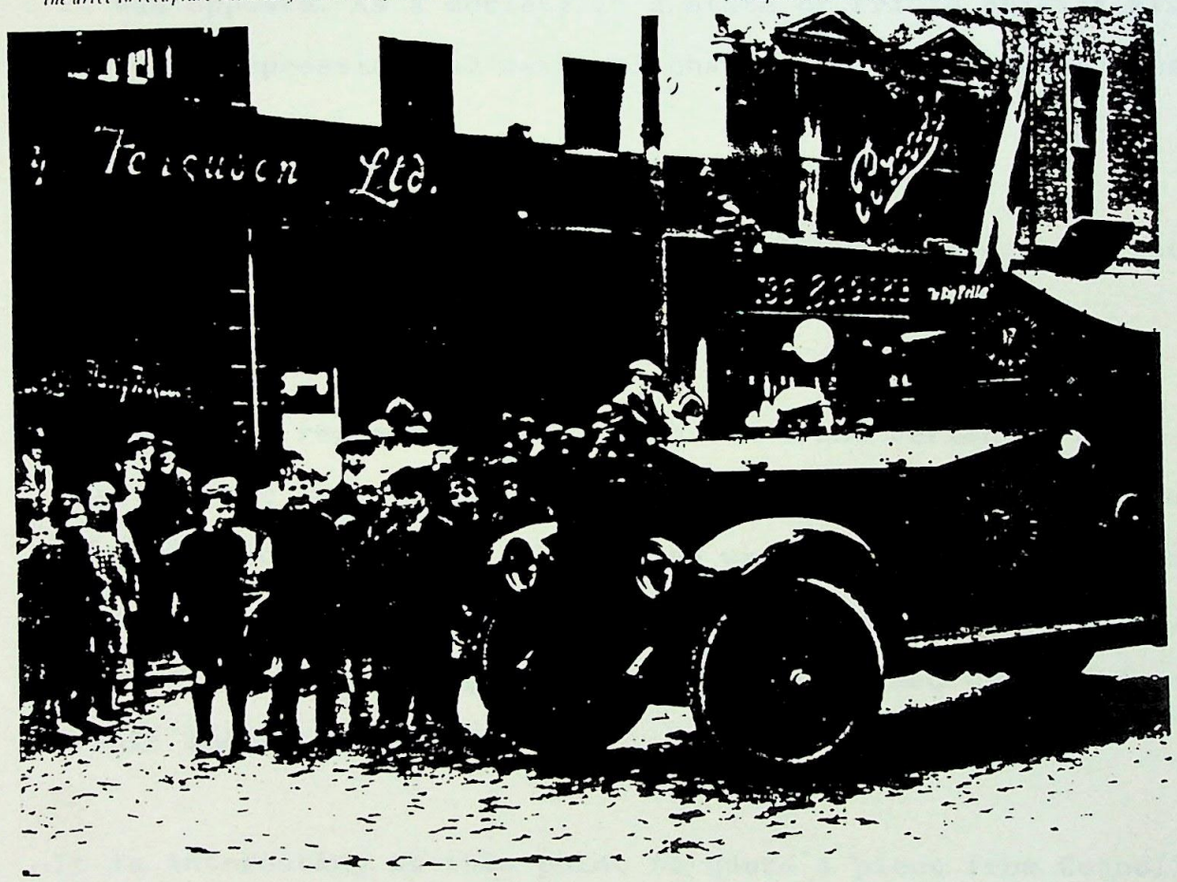
Realising the imminent threat to their interests the pro Treaty petty bourgeois nationalists linked up with all the old forces of conservatism in Ireland, eg. Southern Unionists, former Home Rulers, Church, big business, big landowners, as a safeguard against socialist revolution. Later on even elements of the anti Treaty side such as De Valera's Fianna Fail were to become part of this alliance representing the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie within the Free State.[1]

So the bourgeois nationalist state was founded, willing to show its acceptance of partition and its ability to aid Britain in the suppression of national or social upsurge (for now national upsurge threatened their own maintenance of power). Economically the twenty-six county state was a neo-colony, in practice protectionist developing its Buy Irish campaigns alongside its chauvinist vision of the new catholic Irish nation (see De Valera's constitution), protectionism being exercised to give an impression of national independence, whilst in reality Ireland was tied hand and foot to Britain.

Culturally it was an extremely frightened and insular society. In 1923 just two years after the Treaty the Film Censorship Act was passed which

> would refuse any film as unfit for general exhibition by reason of its being indecent, blasphemous or because exhibition thereof in public would inculcate principles

A Free State unit combs the streets of the Clare town of Killaloe, during the drive to recapture Munster from the Republicans.



'The Big Fella' – a Free State armoured vehicle sobriquet as Michael Collins, who was killed in action

> contrary to public morality, or would otherwise be subversive of public morality.[2]

1929 saw the Censorship of Publications Act which heralded the banning of all modernist literature in Ireland.

> How frightened a society is of anything is reliably indicated by negative social sanctions or by outlawry.[3]

The Irish Free State was static and protective and demonstrated an implacable vindictive chauvinism which spared little to which it was opposed. As a society in a state of crisis philistinism, economic depression and national chauvinism characterised the Free State.

The xenophobic mysticism of De Valera plunged the country into a cultural backward spiral.

The cultural representations which did arise reflected this chauvinistic 'more Irish than Irishness'. Stereotype as it had been applied throughout colonialism was reapplied by the national bourgeoisie, through their Anglo-Irish literary revival etc., being acted out on stages throughout Ireland and the world as a 'real' image of Ireland.

It is interesting at this point to quote a piece from Connolly.

> In the reconstruction of Ireland to the Gaelic principle of common ownership by the people of their sources of food and maintenance the worst obstacle to overcome will be the opposition of the men and women who have imbibed

their ideas of the Irish character and history from Anglo-Irish culture.

By hijacking the movement for national liberation instating in its place catholic chauvinism in the twenty-six counties, and protestant unionism in the North the Irish bourgeoisie not only managed to safeguard the South for themselves but managed to maintain the divisions which in turn safeguarded British interest in Ireland.

For film makers in Ireland things were even more severe. Although films had been made in Ireland which were quite successful in the early days of cinema, indigenous film making declined since this pre civil war period. For Irish people to make film in Ireland was to do battle with almost impossible odds. For non-Irish film makers anxious to exploit Irish history and landscape the odds were somewhat shorter. Film making was plagued with frustrations.

The 1930s and '40s those years which in Ireland saw the coming to power of the Fianna Fail party under the leadership of Eamonn De Valera, the suppression of the IRA, economic war with Britain, the depression with the huge rise in emigration, alongside the rise of fascism with the Blueshirts led by General O Duffy (who later analgamated into Fine Gael) saw Irish bourgecis society in a state of crisis. Political and clerical suspicion as to the influence of film for moral and political subversion (it should be noted that cinema constituted the most popular of all art forms and entertainments between the 1920s and '60s claiming

an annual audience of eighteen million) meant that the medium was singled out for special restrictive measures and hostility, (Censorship Bill 1923).

While Irish film was fighting its deathbed struggle finding itself even more restricted by the national attitude being confined to low level documentary and newsreelwork, (the 1930s and '40s remaining the least productive period in Irish film making), xenomania in the form of imported Hollywood and Alstree dominated the screen. This was a world wide phenomenon but had particular effect in Ireland probably because no language barrier existed, but also because a large amount of Hollywood film (possibly due to the proportions of Irish in America) had Irish themes.

Construction of picture palaces was taking place all over the country with men, women and children crowding once, twice, three times a week, and cinema going in Ireland being proclaimed a national sickness. That this was part of a mass escapism on behalf of the battered public was likely when considering the harsh realities of 30s Ireland. As a culture which was physically impositional so also was its image of Irishness. Again many of the old stereotypes were reiterated, not of course that this enraged in any way the national leadership, since what had formally served in controlling the public for the British now served equally well in controlling the public for the Irish bourgeoisie.

This does not mean to say that interest in native cinema did not exist. During the 1930s and '40s many public calls were made for native images on the screen and there was talk in the upper

echelons of the creation of an Irish Film Industry which in reality were never heeded.

However the desire amongst the establishment was not for a fully developed Irish cinema rather it was hoped that Irish cinema would produce a puritan narrow Irishness which would satisfy the Church (who as part of the national bourgeoisie held huge sway in government) and counter the effects of Hollywood on the morality of Irish youth.

> We cannot be Sons of the Gael and citizens of Hollywood at the same time. The influence of the cinema is at the moment and on the whole one tending towards more artistic and intellectual degradation. The cinema is everywhere throughout the countryside, no less than in the town.
>
> 'Celluloid Menace'
>
> Capuchian Annual 1937

The next fifteen years established the pattern that drama film about Ireland would be produced outside of Ireland.

It is interesting to note the implications of the following.

> Since a proportion of every UK cinema programme had to be a film of British origin, there was an avalanche of short features many of which had Irish subjects and most of which are tat. Certainly English cinema of the time was filled with stereotyped imitations of all characters outside Southern English upper

Man of Aran

class attitudes, were hierarchical and had accents of a costive inarticulacy.[4]

There was no shortage of this type of film: 'The Mountains of Mourne', 1938; 'Oh, Mr. Porter', 1937; 'Father O'Flynn', 1935; 'My Irish Molly', 1938; 'Riders to the Sea'; and Robert o'Flaherty's 'Man of Aran', 1934. The latter, a rather spurious and racist anthropological study of 'primitive man' (Aran islanders), is a good example of the manipulation of truth for the sake of theory. Whereby an even questionable image of nineteenth century life is presented as contemporary. 'Man of Aran' was one of the film premieres patronised and promoted by Eamonn De Valera.

Then, in the forties came, 'Crime on the Border', 'My Life for Ireland', 1941; 'Irish Tragedy', 1940; literary adaptations and stories from Irish history came from both Britain and America. John Ford's adaptation of O'Casey's, 'Plough and the Stars', 1937; Shaw's 'Pygmalion', 1938; Swift's 'Gullivers Travels', was animated by Walt Disney 1938, and Wilde's 'The Canterville Ghost' 1944. There were also lots of Irish in America films, the successful emigre in the land of free enterprise etc.

There was however one notable indigenous exception, 'The Dawn' a feature length film made by amateurs in Co. Kerry which showed that when a native film did appear it could do very well at the box office. Indeed, 'The Dawn', proved as popular with audiences as John Ford's 'The Informer', and Brian Desmond's 'Ourselves Alone', all three dealing with the same period the war of Independence. Because of the infrequency of films with Irish themes

or locations the more numerous foreign productions fulfilled Irish people's desire to see their own image on the screen. This desire superceeded reservations as to the nature of the representations....

Footnotes - Chapter II

1. See History of the Irish Working Class, Peter Beresford Ellis, and chapter Unmanageable Revolutionaries, Margaret Ward.
2. The Cinema and Ireland, a Short History, Kieran Hickey, p. 7, Green on the Screen.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 9.

Chapter III - The Opening of the Floodgates. Lemass/Whitaker Plan (Economic and Cultural Imperialism)

As national oppression and servility are two sides of the same coin so also are xenomania and xenophobia. The Irish bourgeoisie in a period when they wished to open Ireland up to foreign capital in the late '50s and early '60s with the Lemass/Whitaker Plan as a short route to profitability with its spin off of national servicing industries, Smurfits, etc., became xenomanic. The Ardmore Film Studios can be seen as a microcosm of what was happening in Ireland with many other industrial enterprises built from native resources as an enticement to foreign capital, and built more in the interests of foreign film making than that of Irish.

> Mr. Lemass and his friends condescendingly gave Ireland a building and in a voice of authority told us that what happened inside it could best be left to English and American film makers from whom in good time and by some process of osmosis we could acquire the abilities we lacked.[1]

A loan from the Credit Corporation first financed the venture. More state money was spent during the next twenty five years in an effort to keep the industry financially buoyant than was ever given to the creative production of works by Irish film makers. The studio began with stilted adaptations of Abbey plays directed by minor English and American directors. The followed a string of largely forgotten English films for which the Irish Film

The Quiet Man

Corporation gave £ 385,000 over a period of two years, in present day value, at least ten times the budget of the Irish Film Board. Feature films on Irish subjects began to be made at Ardmore as well as elsewhere. 'Shake Hands with the Devil', 1959; 'A Terrible Beauty', 1960; 'She didn't Say No', 1958; 'Johnny Nobody', 1961; 'Darby O'Gill and the Little People'; 'Ryan's Daughter', 1971 and 'The Quiet Man'.

This is not to say that Irish acting especially those from the Abbey Theatre in foreign and native productions went without praise. Indeed one of the recurring features of Irish commentators' views of films about Ireland is the praise bestowed on Abbey personnel which it is universally declared was central to the success of 'Odd Man Out'. This lauding of the Abbey is clearly evident even when either the material with which they had to work, such as adaptations of the Abbey's own plays in the early days of Ardmore Studios was not the best.[2]

Within Ardmore and other foreign productions Irish actors had a disadvantage also with their regulation to subsidary roles. This was due to the tendency of American and British productions to import 'a star' for the main roles while the natives milled around, as it were, in the background. (Irish equity cards are still worth less in Ireland than the British equity cards.)

The sixties saw the first change in film censorship. A campaign in 1963/64 led to the introduction of graded certificates.

With the world boom and the temporary rise in Irish living standards more work was to be had, as film commissioned by the state

and the newly established RTE increased. Certainly Irish film output was greater than ever before, and however cautious these productions might have been, (as sponsored films they had little choice), they did proliferate and their makers were soon confident enough to come together to lobby the government until the Irish Film Industry committee was set up in 1968. As a result the government brought in a Bill to establish a State Film Board. The Bill got no further than its first reading. The goevrnment was then coaxed into rescuing the Ardmore Studios from its current crisis and turned it into the Film Studios of Ireland. This unsuccessful venture also cost a great deal of money.

In the 1970s fewer feature producers used Ireland as a location convenience. The next Film Bill came in 1979. This came about because Irish film makers were opposed to the so called 'Irish Film Industry' which consisted more than ever in the 1970s of American and English films shot in Ardmore with the patronising concession that they would employ Irish technicians and small part local actors and actresses, but whose producers, directors, writers, chief technical grade post production crew, would all come from outside Ireland.

If anything convinced the government of the need to set up a Film Board it was the proof given by the independent film makers in the late '70s that feature films could be made in Ireland with full local artistic and production control.

Thaddeus O'Sullivan, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black, Pat Murphy.

It is not surprising that in a search for national identity many of these film makers should return to those lingering themes of violence and Irish society.

Footnotes - Chapter III

1. The Cinema and Ireland, a Short History, Kieran Hickey, p. 15. Green on the Screen.

2. Re-viewing the Green, Kevin Rockett, p. 34. Green on the Screen.

Chapter IV - A Covert Return of the Stereotype

Pat Murphy - The Violent Irishman

Pat Murphy is an example of one young director who has made Irish nationalism a main consideration in her work.

'Maeve' Ireland 1981 Pat Murphy

GB John Davies

In the reconstruction of Irish history undertaken by historians such as Standish O'Grady and his associates many aspects of Irish culture and folklore were revised to accomodate traditional attitudes. This was particularly the case with representations of women.

As Philip Marcus describes it,

> The treatment of Medb (the warrior queen) was most as variance with the source material. O'Grady tried to make her seem more feminine to endow her with some of the personality traits traditionally associated with the weaker sex, and at times the proud amazon of the sources seems more like the delicate fainting heroine of the nineteenth century novel.[1]

That women should be represented as active particularly in warfare presented many problems for the bourgeoisie particularly in Ireland where the dictates of the Church and constitution demanded passivity.

It is in criticism of this revision of folklore that Pat Murphy's

'Maeve' is established.

'Maeve' deals with the return of Maeve Sweeney a young feminist to Belfast from her self imposed exile in London. According to the director Pat Murphy Maeve leaves "in order to recreate her life outside the demands of her heritage". Maeve more than most film drama is an exploration into not just the media representation of Northern Ireland but issues of conflict between ideologies within Ireland ie. feminism and republicanism.

Political conflict is defined in 'Maeve' as eminating from the patriarchy from a matrix of male dominated history (both colonial and republican). From this history women are seen as marginalised, "remembered out of existence" is a key phrase within the dialogue. This process of exclusion is depicted formally through the dominance of male voice within the film itself. This voice is the paternal voice of Martin, Maeve's father who throughout imposes the masculine perspective of history and folklore through the interruptions of his storytelling. The peripherisation of women by this process is suggested in a later sequence in which Martin looses himself in an evem more drawn out narrative than usual while the young Maeve hovers in the background, edging her way slowly along the circular walls of the ringfort.[2]

Maeve placing as it does Irish history into the realm of male myth and fabrication without defining either the history or the fabrication, ie. which aspects of history have been fabricated and excluded, by whom for what purpose, etc., (for whilst it is true that the exclusion of women has taken place, it is not the only

exclusion which presents itself in the making of history and ideology), defines the Irish problem from a purely feminist perspective. This separates it from its context and re-establishes it on purely sexual terms. Violence is then seen as an almost natural element in male socialisation. This social-Darwinist idea of natural or instinctive behaviour (be that male violence or feminine passivity), raises certain dubious ideas, and indeed poses little or no solution other than political and sexual separatism - which is what Maeve the protagonist finally chooses.

Violence, then, is re-introduced not as was previously the case with colonial stereotype, ie. instinctively violent Celt, but with the feminist stereotype of naturally violent male. The threat of sexual violence and invasion is made explicit in Roisin's story about the British soldier who forces his way into her bed during a party threatening to rape either her or her female companion, and later in the street when Roisin and Maeve are ordered by an army patrol to jump up and down while the soldiers leer at their breasts. That sexual oppression of women exists and is an instrument of power particularly under colonialism is not at question, one need look no further than Armagh jail and the strip searches to recognise that, but for this to be generalised into a political and artistic condemnation of all men is in essence divisive and reactionary.

It is interesting that within a film which questions history as the construction of hierarchical male values and mythologies it re-creates certain aspects of these myths itself. For example,


Milk

Maeve leaves Northern Ireland for what is in essence a life of artistic exile. This has particular resonance in Irish society, exportation and emigration whether imposed or chosen forming a major and recurring element of Irish artistic practice. This alongside the mythologisation of the marginalised woman placed outside history and political involvement is in its way a fabricated view of Northern Irish womanhood when considering the number of female political prisoners held in Armagh and other prisons at present.

In many ways it is the romantic stereotype (Ireland as the sorrowful woman) which is considered most in '<u>Maeve</u>'. This comes across most clearly in the class room scene where Maeve and her fellow pupils read aloud the following verse by Padraig and William Pearse's mother ....

I do not grudge them Lord
I do not grudge my two strong sons
That I have seen go out to break their strength and die
They and a few in bloody protest for a glorious thing
They shall be spoken of an generations shall remember
them and call them blessed.

Oh Lord thou art hard on mothers
We suffer in their coming and in their going.

Later this conflict is brought to a head in a discussion between Maeve and boyfriend Liam.

Maeve - Nationalism is a reaction to attack. Men's relation

to women is like that of England to Ireland.

Liam - Women you're like anarchists, you walk around in your defeat and feel superior. You don't want to win, but by defining yourself as different you weaken us.

Maeve - I belong to a class that's oppressed no matter what happens, being a woman is a nationality I carry around with me.

Liam - I'm closer to the women here than you are.

Maeve - Yes, you are closer to the women, they're fighting for freedom too, but when the revolution's over they'll recognise you as the next stage in their struggle. The time for women as spectators is gone. They demand that this revolution includes them.

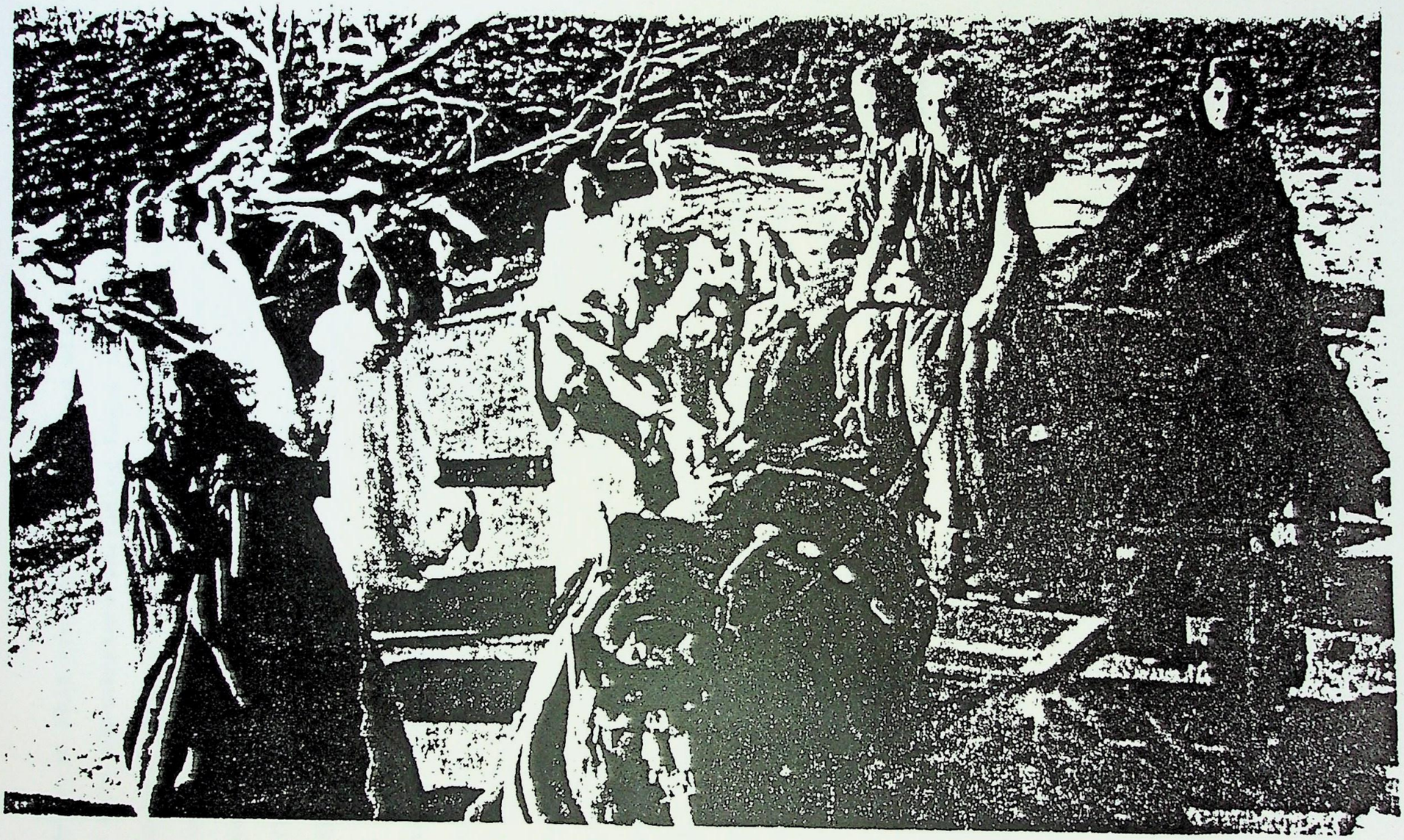
In a way it is ironic that Maeve should make this final point, since it is not what she herself stands for. By identifying womanhood as a nationality and class apart, separated and dominated by the male "no matter what happens" the process of struggle against colonialism is for her a process of giving in to male values. This she makes clear throughout to both Liam and sister Roisin.

Historically this is very different from the views of those women who in the past - Markievicz, Maud Gonne, Skeffington, etc, fought

for independence and today the women in Armagh who saw and continue to see feminine participation in history as essential to female emancipation.

'Anne Devlin', Pat Murphy's second feature film, makes reference to these women by focusing on one such figure from history, Anne Devlin, Robert Emmet's co-conspirator in the uprising of 1803. Emmet's rebellion was a sequel to the United Irishmen Uprising of 1798. With hindsight it is easy to dismiss it as an insignificant debacle (in military terms the rebellion amounted to little more than a skirmish in Thomas Street). However the Rising's greatest strength was also its greatest weakness. In the interest of maintaining the strictest secrecy Emmet neglected the type of mass organisation characteristic of the United Irishmen. The desired secrecy was maintained to the extent that the Castle never found out to their satisfaction the full extent of the conspiracy which would explain their anxiety to relieve the heroine of the film of her "useless burden of information".

Anne's historic significance is in relation to her part played in the rebellion and her subsequent refusal to impart information to the authorities (Major Sirr). Her misrepresentation in history as simply Emmet's housekeeper is put to rights here in the film. However in general the film is unhistorical dealing as it does with contemporary feminist themes out of context. Anne's involvement throughout the film is shown as something set apart from the rebellion itself. Her refusal to talk for example is not explained with any logic (its true significance is mentioned above), but rather as her own personal or even feminist crusade. Anne's



Taking her place in history: Anne Devlin (Bríd Brennan).

resolve in this crusade is contrasted with the veniality of the male conspirators including Emmet himself (the inferred 'sunshine patriot'). Thus we have a reworking of the familiar stereotypes. The hero, in this case heroine, sold out by fools, informers, etc. As with 'Maeve', the message of 'Anne Devlin' is that women when they involve themselves with men in any political activity are necessarily undermined and defeated.

It is unfortunate that these films which are emerging contemporarily have not managed to redress with any full significance these self scathing caracitures. Much of this can be explained by the general confusion felt by people on approaching the topic. That section 31 of the Broadcasting Act censors full coverage of events in Ireland and has had its effect, obvious one cannot expect otherwise. In a situation where guerrilla war is on the national agenda, repressive legislation and censorship of information form the main stay of the political diet. In this atmosphere art and culture will naturally find difficulty in proclaiming anything other than the superficial accounts of the media. This has become detrimental to Irish culture, since the national image has remained much in the mould cast since 1922, becoming protectionist and reproductive rather than assertive and constructive.

Footnotes - Chapter IV

1. Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance, Philip Marcus, (Ithaca, New York, 1970), p. 235.

2. See Luke Gibbons' 'Lies that Tell the Truth', Cranebag. Maeve, History and Irish Cinema, pp 150 - 151.

Conclusion

So in summation, Ireland and its culture have had imposed on it a colonial identity. This found representation in the stereotype and its many variations. That these stereotypes continued into the period after 1922 can be explained firstly by the continuation of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Ireland, and also by the attitude of the national bourgeoisie who since the signing of the Treaty had allied themselves with Britain in the maintenance of the Border.

The nature of Irish society in this post Treaty period was protectionist, catholic and chauvinist and served to deplete any social advances made by women, workers, etc. during the war of Independence. The development of culture by the Free State was highly bureaucratic to such an extent that those living aspects of culture actually decreased in the years since 1924. Censorship of literature and film, and the general protectionism of Irish culture starved the public of a healthy culture and caused the nation to become a cultural desert with the exodus of many artists from the country. Although Ireland had its film enthusiasts since its invention, native film declined dramatically after 1922. Film culture which was immensely popular continued to be provided but by foreign film companies. The themes which had always provided material for these productions also continued but were embued with racist depictions of the "naturally violent Irish". The situation for Irish film and culture did not change until the massive importation of foreign industries and culture in the late 1950s. This further undermined any prospect of

native development. Ardmore was yet another aspect of cultural imperialism, being established to provide cheap location and acting skills for foreign film companies, did by the sheer frustration it created provide motivation for young film makers arising in the short lived boom of the 1970s to pressurise the government to set up the Irish Film Board. This although pathetically funded was a major step for native cinema.

However since the escalation of guerrilla war in the North from the period of 1969 a campaign of media censorship, (section 31) has existed in the South alongside frightening but ever increasing repressive legislation. 1970 saw the dismissal of the RTE authorities responsible for an interview with Sean Mc Stiofan then IRA Chief of Staff.

Although the Northern 'troubles' have provided a context for many modern Irish films to develop, this has happened in an atmosphere of extreme political confusion and ignorance. One can still find dominant in those productions many representations of a colonial nature, of mindless violence outside political consideration, tribalism, etc. Unfortunately until many stock assumptions are brought out into the open for examination in society little advance is likely either nationally or culturally, culture being a product of the economic base of society.

The propaganda value of these images has up until now served only one purpose and that has been to keep everything in the sorry state that it is in. If there is to be progress it will only happen when those racist and colonial images of the Irish

have been erased from culture and history. It is unlikely given the nature of the society (which is itself a reproducer of these images) that this will be allowed to happen easily.

List of Illustrations

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