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ILLUSTRATIONS.

Introduction.

Maeve has been considered by many to be the first instance of feminist intervention in Irish Cinema. Bearing in mind that there are many different feminist positions and subsequent strategies of articulation I want to draw out and discuss that feminist position, or more accurately perhaps, those feminist concerns which might be seen to be articulated in Maeve, in order to more fully consider the implications thereof.

In 1988, Fionna Barber, an Irish feminist critic, wrote an article in which she identified the need for the development of a theoretical and critical discourse which could adequately support an emerging feminist art practice in Ireland. It is with this in mind that I intend to consider Pat Murphy's film Maeve, in an attempt to further draw out and discuss some of those issues related to feminism which although articulated in the work, I would argue have not been adequately discussed to date.

CHAPTER 1.

Pat Murphy has said that Maeve arose out of her awareness of debates within the women's movement around the relationship between feminism and Irish republicanism and out of a concern to redress what, she argues, constitutes the misrepresentation of Northern Ireland and women which pervades both mainstream and independent film-making and television representation in Britain.[1] Speaking of B.B.C. documentaries in particular, Murphy has insisted that the form must be understood to be inseparable from the content, suggesting that this misrepresentation is not merely, "a case of B.B.C. manipulation of material because of politics, it was also something to do with the nature of documentary".[2] The concern here then is that content and form are not mutually exclusive but are inseparable from one another, the content being constituted to a large extent through its mode of articulation.[3]

Given this, the form of Maeve takes on a particular significance, especially since it is consciously pitted against dominant British forms of representation. In order to understand how this is the case and what the effects of this might be, it is first necessary to consider the form which dominant British cinema tends to take and how this contributes to the production of a particular ideological reading of the political situation of Northern Ireland.

P. Murphy has noted that, in England particularly, the majority of people are used to experiencing Northern Ireland over the last twelve years in what she calls "documentary language" which is characterized by "violence plus a kind of B.B.C. 'balanced' voice-over".[4] Many feminists who have analysed the address of documentary realist films have shown that it typically appeals to some kind of empirical conceptualisation of the visible as 'evidence', encouraging the belief in the viewer that "if it's on the screen, it must be there".[5] The image then, within this form of representation acts as evidence of the truth of the commentary, affirming the authority of the unseen commentator's interpretation of 'reality'. The camera here assumes the role of a supposedly objective 'window onto the world'.

One of Murphy's major concerns was to challenge the apparent transparency of this form and other cinematic devices which work to produce the illusion of naturalism and thereby raise questions about the function of such a representational mode and its political implications. In order to achieve this, she used a number of devices which worked to foreground the materiality of the film itself, the intention being that film then could not be seen as a transparent reflection of an 'already given' reality, but as a system of representation wherein reality is seen to be actively constructed for the camera rather than merely 'given'. These devices draw heavily on Brecht's techniques of distanciation.

For example many of the scenes are obviously posed (i.e.constructed) rather than 'spontaneous', while the characters often address the camera directly. Whereas in dominant documentary form, the direct addressing of the camera is coupled with very mobile camera-work, thereby suggesting a 'spontaneous reality' revealed by the camera, the camera in Maeve and the characters speaking are both obviously controlled by the author, as suggested by the posed quality of the scenes. 'Reality' then is here shown to be a construction for the camera, rather than spontaneously and objectively revealed by it. This reference to documentary form within a fiction film further suggests the constructed/fictive nature of reality as represented in documentary realism.

Within dominant cinema both American and British, there is also a concern to produce an appearance of 'naturalness' and 'normality'. This illusion demands that the spectator understands the image as a truthful representation if not of reality, then at least of the story in question.[6] Central to this project is the illusion of a 'continuous flow' which works to construct - by ensuring that the cuts are as unobtrusive to the spectator as possible - the appearance of a coherent and seamless narrative space and time. The process of meaning production (by both producer and viewer) is thereby rendered apparently effortless and consequently invisible.[7]

In Maeve however, the cuts are abrupt, intentionally working to frustrate and challenge the viewer's expectation of a naturalistic illusion. For example, whereas in dominant cinema, shifts from one frame of reference to another in either space or time are traditionally smoothed over and indicated by the use of dissolves, shimmer effects, etc. which both works to conceal the break and resolve any potential confusion for the viewer, Murphy uses no such devices. The viewer is thereby confronted with the materiality of the film which has clearly been juxtaposed. Furthermore, given that the usual techniques which signify a change in time or space are withheld, he/she is temporarily thrown into confusion and must actively construct the connections and relationships between the various scenes. The viewer is thus required to actively produce meanings suggested, but not entirely fixed in or by the film, rather than to passively and effortlessly consume meanings assumed to be already there/given in the text. Presumably the intention here is also that the spectator will ultimately recognise the process that he/she is engaged in and will subsequently reflect on and question his/her usual expectations of and consequent assumptions about the way one is addressed as a viewer and thereby positioned in dominant cinema.

It has often been noted that in dominant cinema the narrative form is predominantly linear. Many feminist theoreticians [8.] have argued, convincingly I believe, that such a form is most conducive to the posing of oppositional meanings in terms of a problem or obstacle. It is the impulse to resolve this which, they argue, precipitates narrative movement.[9.] Here, as T.Elsaesser has noted,

> "contradictions are resolved and obstacles overcome by having them played out in dramatic-dynamic terms or by personal initiative: whatever the problem, one can do something about it". [10.]

Within this form narrative closure is dependent on the resolution of the problem, i.e. the recuperation of oppositional meanings back into the dominant ideological system. Despite the fact that this recuperation is often singularly unconvincing many feminists have argued that this 'linear and instrumental syntax' which is the dominant form of all symbolic discourses in the West, invariably priveleges 'masculine' meanings and works to shut down and limit all dissident meanings, particularly those of the female subject.[11] Consequently many different feminists have insisted on the necessity of developing a 'feminine language' which they argue, could be more open, setting up a multiplicity of meanings.[12] The feminine in this case is posited as a subject position, a marginal or dissident place which the user or the subject of language can occupy in relation to language.[13]

The structure of Maeve is particularly significant in this respect, given its rejection of a linear syntax in favour of what Pat Murphy has described as an 'episodic form', with each section illuminating/giving meaning to those around it rather than propelling one another forward towards a totalizing resolution of contradictions. Moreover, rather than having one coherent narrative form which finally recuperates all difference, Maeve is composed of a number of different narrative forms through which different concerns and perspectives are articulated. These consist of the dominant narrative mode situated in the present tense, through which is charted the return of Maeve, a young Irish feminist living in London, to her family who live in the Falls Road in Belfast, where she is to spend one or two weeks holiday. This narrative is fractured by flashbacks to her past which serve the function of charting Maeve's shifting relationship with her family and environment. While they ultimately culminate in Maeve's departure these memory-flashbacks also work to re-establish the bonds between the visiting Maeve and her family and environment. Both of these modes are punctuated by what Murphy has described as "political dialogues" in which Maeve's developing feminism is considered in relation to Republicanism, as articulated by her former boyfriend, Liam. These dialogues gradually develop into a situation where both feminism and Republicanism are pitted against each other. Finally there is a story-telling mode which pervades the film, all the characters resorting to telling

stories at one point or another over the course of the film. P. Murphy has suggested that the significance of this is not only that it echoes the oral tradition of Ireland but it also reflects her concern with what she terms a "hidden history"... "stories passed on through mothers to daughters .... fragments of things found out .... a serpentine labyrinthine way of finding out".[14]

In Maeve moreover, the story becomes a site of struggle, a point of resistance and domination, the control of which and the implications thereof become a major question in the film constantly posed across the various modes and levels of articulation. On a formal level, the use of many different narrative modes suggests that the form is intrinsically bound up with the meaning produced, the implication being that any coherent totalizing narrative which purports to transparently represent the 'truth' does so at the expense of a welter of contradictions and oppositional meanings which have been repressed. In this way, the episodic form of Maeve works to challenge such illusions of 'reality', exposing them as signifying systems which work to support the dominant ideology. Within Maeve then, the viewer is not carried along by the movement of the narrative towards a 'satisfying' resolution, rather contradictions and questions remain, posed for the viewer to actively consider.

A. Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' is I believe useful in this context as it provides a model by which to understand more fully the political implications of the struggle over ideology in Maeve. According to Gramsci, capitalist society is not held together primarily or automatically by economic force or political coercion. Rather the "spontaneous consent" of the masses must be won if the dominant group is to retain its power.[15] Consequently, relations of domination must represent themselves as a priveleged system of meanings. Whilst the dominant group enjoys ideological benefits from their control of production, Gramsci also stressed the importance of culture in consolidating the ideological privelege of this group. R. Williams, elaborating on this concept, has insisted on the unstable nature of what Gramsci termed a "war of position". Cultural hegemony, Williams has argued, is not simply given, but must be won or maintained

through continual struggle. Consequently, he contends,

> "A lived hegemony is always a process.... it does not just passively exist as a form of domination. It has to be continually renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered and challenged by pressures not at all its own".[16]

Maeve then, I would argue, might be understood to be articulating a resistant position on one level through its challenging of the transparency of the dominant cinematic forms and their ideological implications.

In the next chapter I want to discuss what I would identify as the main narrative themes in Maeve in order to consider how those concerns implied on a formal level are further articulated on a narrative level.

Footnotes.

[1]Taped interview with Pat Murphy, Jan.1989. All other quotations are from this tape unless otherwise stated.

[2]Mackintosh,H., City Limits, Dec.4-10, 1981, p.48.

[3]However, I would insist on the recognition of a distinction between this understanding of the relevance of form to content and the modernist project which results in a conflation of the two. This concern is with cinema as a system of signification. It is influenced by the work of feminist theoreticians amongst others who, grounding themselves in an anti-essentialism, turned to psychoanalysis, structuralism and semiology in an attempt to understand the interrelationship of the subject, cinema and the social relations in which both are grounded. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in Screen, vol.16, no.3 (Autumn 1975), and Claire Johnston's "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema", Screen Pamphlet, no.2, (Sept.1972), were particularly influential in this respect. I would argue that many of the strategies adopted by Murphy in Maeve can be seen to be very much influenced by Mulvey's insistence that a counter-cinema should "free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space" and her concern that women's cinema should avoid a politics of emotions and should seek to problematize the female spectator's identification with the on-screen image of women in order to provoke in the audience a critical attitude of "passionate detachment".

[4]Mackintosh, H., City Limits, Dec.4-10, 1981, p.48.

[5]See for example Kuhn, A., Women's Pictures, Feminism and Cinema, London:R.K.P., 1982, for a discussion of documentary realism in more detail.

[6]Joan Copjec points to some of the implications of this when she says, ..."as narrative claims to repeat events which have taken place already, it is possible to define it as it defines itself, as 'history', as a constitutive utterance which has its referents outside and prior to itself; it may also be considered a force which ensures the taking place of events....", Copjec,J., "India Song/Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta Desert: The Compulsion to Repeat", Feminism and Film Theory, Penley, C., (Ed.), London: Routledge, Chapman & Hull; 1988, p.232.

[7]See Doane, M.A., "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing", The Cinematic Apparatus, de Lauretis, T., Heath,S., (Eds.), Milwaukee MacMillan Press Ltd., 1980, for a more detailed discussion of how these cuts are concealed in dominant cinema.

[8]Theresa de Lauretis has moreover argued that this narrative form is predicated on an Oedipal libidinal economy in the sense that it typically poses an enigma which through its movement will be revealed. Furthermore, she contends that this enigma can be seen to constitute the 'feminine space' in the narrative in so far as the meaning of the difference it represents must be penetrated by the protagonist and recuperated into the dominant symbolic order. In this system then, Woman is often seen to constitute the problem or obstacle. Here the meaning of her difference is often

recuperated into heterosexual romance. Failing this the deviant woman might be symbolically punished or killed. This is particularly obvious in the films noirs (1940's), as is the difficulty in achieving a totally satisfactory resolution.

[9]By 'oppositional meanings' I mean a world-view which is not in accordance with, or consciously challenges, that of the dominant hegemonic group.

[10]Gibbons, L., Hill, J., Rockett, K., Cinema and Ireland, Kent: Croom Helm, 1987, p.151.

[11]See Kuhn, A., Women's Pictures, Feminism and Cinema, London: R.K.P.,1982, p.11., also de Lauretis, T., Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema, London: MacMillan Press, 1984, for a further discussion of this.

[12]Laura Mulvey, T. de Lauretis and Mary Ann Doane have, despite their slightly different perspectives all argued for this development of a 'feminine syntax'.

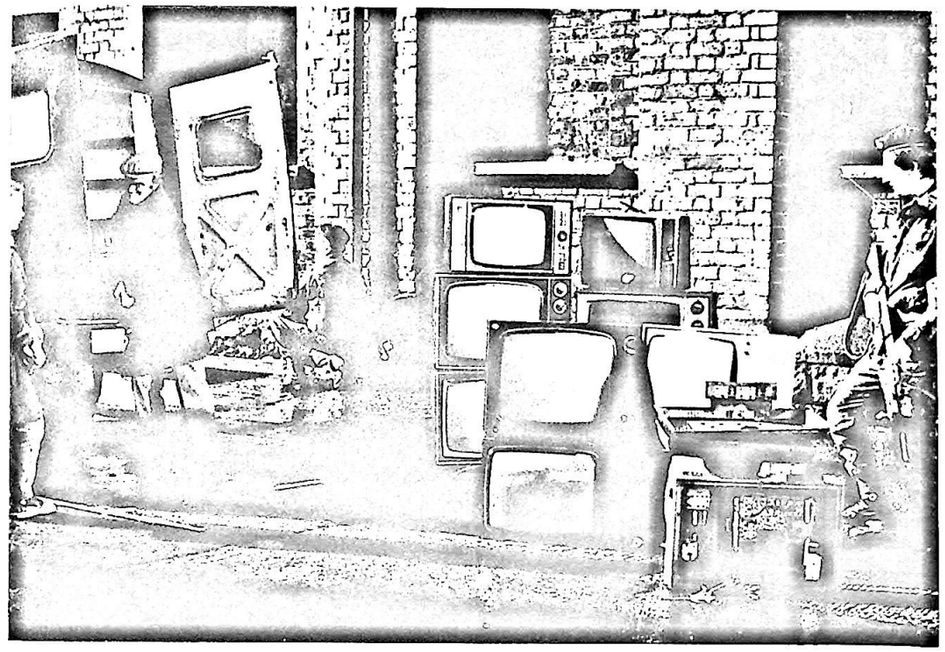
[13]This theoretical position draws greatly on psychoanalysis, particularly the Lacanian influenced writings of J.Kristeva and that of L.Irigiray and Helene Cixous. This is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 3.

[14]Taped interview with P.Murphy.

[15]See Gramsci, A., Selections from Prison Notebooks, Oxford: University Printing House, 1986, pp.196-200.

[16]Williams, R., Marxism and Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p.112.

Plate 1.



CHAPTER 2.

In Maeve I would argue two main themes can be identified, the first being a concern to represent the personal as embedded in and inseparable from the political and the second, a concern with the place and function of ideology and myths both in society in general and more specifically in relation to women and the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Catherine McKinnon has noted that, "To feminism, the personal is epistemologically the political and its epistemology is its politics".[1] That is, feminism through understanding personal experience as inseparable from the social, works towards an understanding of the position of women as having a political rather than merely personal meaning. The importance of this is that women can thereby understand individual isolated acts of violence, oppression, etc. as part of a political-social history which has meaning and can therefore be challenged and changed, rather than as incomprehensible, meaningless acts emanating from an unchanging natural order. Pat Murphy's insistence on the personal as political can therefore be understood to be part of a feminist project working towards the provocation of a critical mode of understanding in the subject in relation to the position of women in society in order to ultimately effect a change in that position. An example of how this is the case might be helpful here.

Luke Gibbons has noted that the conventions of classical narrative cinema with their emphasis on individual characters as agents of narrative causality,

> "almost inevitably encourage the explanation of events and actions in terms of individual psychology rather than more general social, political and economic relations".[2]

The personal and political are here represented as separate and antagonistic. In British cinema this priveleging of the personal has led to a representation of violence which, separated from any political context is seen to be negative, destructive and irrational, explainable only in terms of individual deviance.

Such a representation of violence is moreover, as Gibbons has noted, entirely in keeping with the British establishment's refusal to consider or represent the conflict in the North as anything other than a problem of 'law and order', a righteous fight by the British government against senseless violence perpetrated and sustained by the Irish.

Murphy's insistence on the personal as political works to challenge and undermine such representations, demanding that political questions must be confronted and considered by the viewer as integral to one's personal experience and vice versa. This is suggested and worked through in a number of different ways on the narrative level.

Firstly, whereas a number of films have used Belfast as the expressive foil of documentaries or as a dramatic backdrop to an unfolding psycho-drama[3], in Maeve the political climate of Belfast and its materiality is seen to be inseparable from and intrusive in the lives of the people who live there. This is articulated most forcibly by the constant intrusion of the public into the private. In the opening scene for example, Martin, Maeve's father is suddenly interrupted by a British soldier banging on his door. Refusing to leave his home, despite the 'bomb scare', he puts on his coat and retreats into the kitchen - a space traditionally associated with the feminine. Throughout the film moreover, Martin constantly tries to occupy what might be considered 'female space', interrupting his wife Eileen's storytelling in order that he might tell the story himself, interrupting Maeve's daydreams about the landscape they pass through in order to impose his own meanings on it, (and by extension on her).

However Martin never manages to fully usurp this female space. The kitchen is cold and unwelcoming when he goes into it, the women elsewhere. As he tells his stories and attempts to impose his meanings on his environment his authority is undermined by Eileen's angry silence and by the authorial refusal to allow him the authority of a voice-over. Instead, he must shout over the noise of the van to be heard and is fixed by the camera as Maeve slips away from him, obviously creating her own meanings. See also Plate 1.

4

The home is however a fragile space in Maeve which can be violated at any moment. M.A.Doane has written that in the Woman's Film the window has a particular significance in terms of the social and symbolic positioning of women, representing as it does, the interface between inside and outside - the feminine space of the family and reproduction and the masculine space of production.[5] However these spaces are not merely sexually differentiated but, in Maeve, politically differentiated. This is very explicit in a scene where Maeve and Roisin (Maeve's sister) look out at the Orange Order march through the window and later as they watch the same march on television (thereby bringing it into the home), are intruded upon by a brick smashing through the window. What is suggested here is that there is no space outside, or untouched by social and political relations, or more specifically, there is no'feminine space' outside the dominant symbolic order.

The extent to which the personal is inseparable from the political is stated explicitly by Maeve when she says to Liam, "You occupy us like an army",(referring to dominant socio-sexual relations). Here Maeve attempts to suggest the political significance of relations between the sexes by posing the relationship in terms of a 'colonization'. However it is also suggested that women are doubly colonized in the North by a dominant order which is either alternately or simultaneously male and British. This is suggested through Roisin's story about a British soldier who, intent on raping either her or her friend, got into their bed, bringing his rifle with him. It is by virtue of his possession of a rifle, with all its phallic overtones, that the soldier claims the right to rape the women. Here where both rifle and penis are used as weapons against women the soldier posits his penis as justification of his political domination, (saying he hadn't made love with his wife in so long, etc. - a familiar argument of the uncontrollable natural sexual drive of the male often used as defence in rape cases). Sexual and political violence and domination, it is here suggested, are inseparable, both being justified and maintained by a symbolic order in which the phallus is priveleged. See Plate 2.

Whereas this colonization occurs on a physical level Pat Murphy also suggests that one is also colonized on a psychic level. The place and function of myth is shown to be one area of key importance to this process. Roland Barthes' understanding of myth is useful here in order to understand how this might be the case. Briefly, Barthes argued that myth must be understood as a mode of signification which has an historical foundation, i.e. it is 'motivated' and serves an ideological purpose. All modes of representation - speech, photography, cinema, sport, etc. can be employed as a support to mythical speech, the major purpose of which is to give to an historical situation a natural and eternal justification through "transforming history into nature" as Barthes puts it. This justification takes the form "not of an explanation, but of a statement of fact".[6] Myth thus organizes a coherent image of the world which is comprised of unchangeable essences, rather than complexities and contradictions rooted in or caused by specific socio-historical situations and power struggles.

The implications and importance of mythic speech is explored through a series of different although interrelated incidents in Maeve. For example, the soldier uses the myth of the natural sexual drive of the male in order to justify his raping of the women - both to the women and to himself. In this way the essentialist myth of the biological nature of the male or female is used to privelege the male.[7]

Richard Kearney, drawing on the writings of Levi-Strauss, has shown that in the I.R.A. myth serves as an ideological strategy which invents symbolic 'solutions' to problems which remain irresolvable at the socio-political level.[8] This mythic attitude hinges on the dual concept of 'tradition' and 'martyrdom'. The function of the myth of tradition is, he suggests, to represent history as a continuous flow. The individual can thus conceive of him or herself as, "an agent of ancestral continuity carrying the past into the present".[9] In the case of the I.R.A. the individual can thus posit his/herself as acting on behalf of those dead generations of Irish nationalists, thereby merging past and present in a meaningful flow towards Ireland's sacred destiny as a free country. Ireland is moreover characterized

as female in this ideology, dependent on her sons to fight for her. What Kearney calls the "cult of martyrdom" is also he claims, a powerful ideological tool in this context,

> "evoking a tradition of death and renewal which works to provide justification for present acts of suffering by realigning them with recurring paradigms of the past and thus affording these acts a certain timeless and meaningful quality".[10]

Such an attitude is epitomized by P.Pearse's claim that, "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing", or, Kearney suggests, by a Maze prisoner's statement in 1980:

> "I am one of many who die for my country ... if death is the only way I am prepared to die".[11]

Moreover such martyrdom has powerful political consequences. For example after the hunger strikes Sinn Fein support grew both in the North and South of Ireland.

The place and power of such myths in the lives of Catholic people in the North can be seen to be explored in Maeve. In a scene on Cavehill - the place where Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen pledged to rid Ireland of the English - Maeve and Liam argue about the place of myth and history. Liam argues that these myths are a source of strength which have fuelled his father all his life. Maeve however, sceptical of the mythic attitude, argues that he has been controlled rather than strengthened by them. This is further suggested in the text itself as the mythic legacy is shown to weigh heavily on Liam; he is derided by his father in an earlier scene for not having taken part in any I.R.A. activity: "The trouble with him (Liam) is, he's one of those revolutionaries who doesn't want to get shot". Here martyrdom is represented as something to be embraced. Moreover it also takes the form of the prison sentence which his father simultaneously boasts about and goads Liam with. The power of this myth is suggested by Liam's later internalizing of these

values. On Cavehill he says how he admires his father for having been in prison for 'the Cause', reproaching himself at the same time for not having followed in his father's footsteps. By the end of the film moreover he has moved back into his father's home and is carrying on the tradition.

Maeve however, rejects these myths of "purity and death" as she sees it, arguing that within these myths and this version of history women are repressed, predominantly defined as subordinate or absent. This is further emphasized in a later scene where Maeve, as a schoolgirl, is required to recite P.Pearse's poem "The Mother" in which a mother offers up her three strong sons to God for the sacred cause of Ireland. She is not a hero however, merely the long-suffering passive patriarchal image of Woman as Mother-Ireland and the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, but not God herself. Maeve significantly has not learnt the poem or the lesson therein, assuming the fight for freedom to be hers also.

At this point she fights against the British army, but later comes to understand these nationalist myths as inseparable from the nationalist cause and consequently rejects the limited freedom offered therein. In her final meeting with Liam she says that if those women who fight for a free Ireland are not free after the battle is won, then they will recognize men as the next enemy to fight. Such an argument reflects debates within the women's movement at the time (Maeve was being made in the late 1970's) which centred around questions regarding the place of women's rights on the political agenda of the republican movement, and the suspicion that women would gain little if, having fought with men against the British army their specific aims were ignored in a United Ireland.[12] Whereas at the time Maeve was made these debates were taking place outside the republican movement, from the hunger strikes of 1980 onwards, many women and feminists came to see de-colonization as an absolute necessity. Consequently many of these debates now come from within the movement and the terms have shifted in so far as the question becomes for feminists in Sinn Fein not either republicanism or feminism, but how best to work for both.[13]

Myth then in Maeve is represented as occupying a central place in people's lives. Whereas Maeve herself argues that the dominant myths of the Catholic nationalist tradition are based on a repression of Woman she also recognizes the power of myth as an ideological tool and consequently does not reject it but attempts to appropriate it for her own ends. For example, on the way home from Cavehill where she has been telling Liam that traditional nationalist myth and its version of history leaves no place for women, she tells a story, very much in mythic form, of a woman whose drowning gave rise to four rivers which fertilized the countryside. Here, a myth is being used in a different way, as a parable which ultimately questions the value and richness of a culture based on the repression and oppression of women. Significantly, Maeve's name harks back to a mythic character in pre-Christian Ireland who was considered to have been the greatest of all pagan Irish queens. What is at stake here seems to be the necessity of developing new terms of reference which do not pivot around the phallus as measure of desire, but allow a space in which the desires of a female subject might be articulated.[14]

Footnotes.

[1]C.McKinnon, quoted by T.de Lauretis in Alice Doesn't, Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema, London: MacMillan Press, 1984, p.184.

[2]Gibbons,L., "Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema", Cinema and Ireland, p.150.

[3]See eg. The Outsider,(1979). Here the political context of the protagonists actions is rendered unimportant, the deaths of Hennessy's wife and children being given a purely psychological significance.

[4]This is particularly noticeable in a scene where Martin and Maeve are in a stone ring fort. As Martin tells another rambling story Maeve walks around the walls of the fort, at the edge of the frame, obviously not listening to Martin.

[5]Doane, M.A., "The Woman's Film, Possession and Address", Gledhill, C., (Ed.), Home is Where the Heart is, Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, London:B.F.I. 1987, p.288.

[6]Barthes,R., "Myth Today", Mythologies. London: Paladin, 1973.

[7]Moreover many feminists, recognizing that the oppression of women stems from and is based on an essentialist understanding of the 'nature of women', have argued that essentialism can only serve to privelege the male in one culture. In this sequence, the 'nature' of the male sexual drive is used as both cause and justification of the abuse of women.

[8]Kearney, R., "Myth and Motherland", S.Deane, S.Heaney, R.Kearney, D.Kiberd , T.Paulin (Eds.) Ireland's Field Day, London: Hutchinson, 1985, p.66.

[9]In Transitions, Narratives in Modern Irish Culture, Kearney cites the 1916 Proclamation "Poblacht na hEireann" as an example, the opening lines of which read: "Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and the dead generations from which she derives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for freedom". See Transitions, p.210.

[10] "Myth and Motherland", p.66.

[11]ibid. p.67.

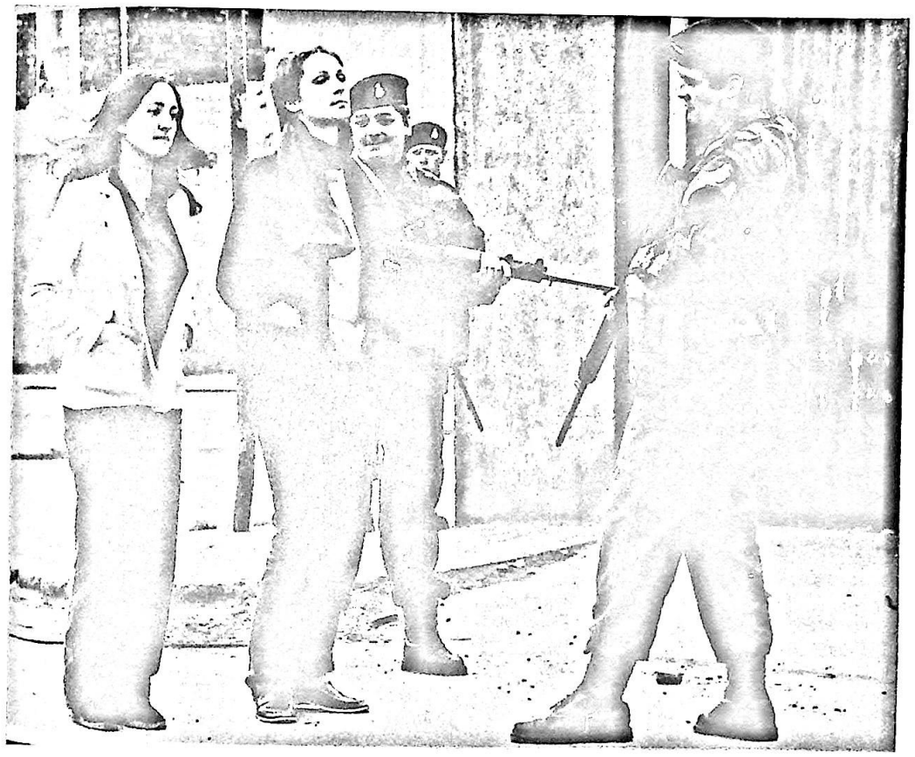
[12]The position of women in the Republic of Ireland adds weight to this argument.

[13]See "Fighting Women: Women in the Republican Paramilitaries", Fairweather, Eileen; McDonagh, Roisin; McFadyean, Melanie; Only the Rivers Run Free, Northern Ireland, the Women's War, London: Pluto Press, 1984, for interview with women directly involved in the I.R.A. Here it will be obvious that whilst their experiences differ widely, the questions and problems regarding the position of women remain. To this extent the arguments which Maeve voices in the film are valid although not to be taken as the only feminist perspective on the issue. For example both Bernadette McAliskey and Nell McCafferty argue that despite the contradictions, feminists must recognize British

occupation of Northern Ireland to be of crucial importance. See interview with Nell McCafferty in Spare Rib, No.192, June 1988, and interview with B.McAliskey in Outwrite, Women's Newspaper, Issue 71, Dec. 1988, p.7., for their understanding of this issue.

[14] This argument is based on the writings of those feminists influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of J.Lacan. T. de Lauretis for example has argued that "in the frame of reference of cinema, narrative and visual theories, the male is the measure of desire, quite as the phallus is its signifier and the standard of visibility is psychoanalysis". Consequently she argues, "The present task of theoretical feminism and of feminist film practice alike is to articulate the relations of the female subject to representation meaning and vision and in so doing, construct the terms of another frame of reference, another measure of desire". de Lauretis,T., Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Cinema, Semiotics, p.68. M.A.Doane and L.Mulvey both arrived at similar conclusions. It is this position which I would suggest might be seen to be reflected in Maeve's struggles around representation and myth. See also Glossary, p.44, for further account of Lacan's concept of the Phallus.

Plate 2.



CHAPTER 3.

The problem of articulating a dissident position and creating one's own meanings within a dominant order in which one has already been positioned as 'Other' is posed and explored in Maeve in terms of language, both verbal and cinematic.

In the first scene in which Roisin (Maeve's sister) appears she is surrounded by three British soldiers on a street. There then ensues a struggle over definitions, or more precisely of the right of the British soldiers to impose their meanings of "Roisin" - as both Irish and female - onto her. For example when she says she's been working late one of them smirks, implying she's a prostitute, to which she angrily retorts "I work in a pub". A second soldier, not listening properly as she tells him her address, insists that her home is not her home while a third makes her spell her name and asks, "What's that the Irish for?", suggesting that an English version preceded the Irish. However Roisin refuses this presumption saying "its just Irish". Moreover when one of them asks if she has any identification with her she tells him, "I don't need identification, I know who I am". Here the struggle is very much about the right to produce one's own definitions of self on one's own terms, rather than in a form necessarily understandable to the dominant group.

The use of the Irish language as a means to distance oneself from the colonizing force has been described by E.Said as a form of nativism which he suggests is often part of an assertion of, "a native past, history or actuality that seems to stand free not only of the colonizer but of worldly time itself".[1] He further argues that while it may well form a crucial first step towards a resistance of colonization it is not sufficient in itself, aspiring as it does to a return to a pre-colonized state which can never be achieved. Instead he argues that it is necessary,

> "to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover,
> a third nature which is not pristine and prehistorical
> ... but one which derives historically from the
> deprivations of the present".[2]

This argument has much in common with feminist debates about women's place in language, and precisely the possibility of articulating dissident meanings in order to disrupt the priveleging of the bourgeois male whilst working within the very symbolic order which it is suggested is founded precisely on this inequality.

On a cinematic level for example, many feminists, drawing on psychoanalysis and semiology, have argued that classic narrative cinema is founded on structures of voyeurism and fetishism, the feminine as both image and spectator, being theorized as 'lack' and 'absence', repressed within this system. Here the female body is seen as a site colonized by masculine meanings, existing as a sexual being for male gratification. In Maeve such theories obviously inform Pat Murphy's representation of the women, particularly noticeable in the scene where Roisin and Maeve wash in their bedroom. Murphy has stated that she had believed the scene would be less problematic given that the camera was directed by a woman than would have been the case had a man attempted to do the scene. She used devices which were intended to de-sexualise the women's bodies in order to articulate different meanings which women may attribute to their bodies. For example, as Maeve washes, she and Roisin speak about health issues related specifically to women's bodies and their sexuality - a woman who had a pelvic infection due to pregnancy, how their mother had helped a girl who had got pregnant to get an abortion, etc. At one point, Maeve, lying on the bed, is obviously posed for the camera, which she looks at directly, the intention clearly being to make the viewer aware of his/her position in relation to the images, actively addressed by, rather than merely passively consuming them.

How far these devices work to offset the traditional meanings accruing to the female body is debatable, given that the spectator may well be already predisposed towards one reading rather than another. Moreover these devices are subtle rather than blatant and one could easily consume the images without necessarily considering these issues at all, without consciously recognizing the position one is ostensibly occupying in relation to the film.

However, this argument is also predicated upon the assumption that the spectator is occupying a masculine position in relation to the film, whether male or female. I would suggest that the female subject's relationship to these images is quite likely to be very different. For example, rather than adopting the position of a 'controlling masculine gaze', many women may well identify with those representations of women which figure the interrelationship of health, sexuality and female subjectivity. The question then is if the female body which has long been a site of masculine meanings can be represented at all differently for or by women without running the risk of recuperation. While this scene is particularly problematic in this respect, as Murphy has herself acknowledged, it does on one level illustrate the problems inherent in assuming that merely by speaking as a woman one can necessarily produce meanings for/of the female subject. The feminine position then, is one which is consciously adopted as a strategic position in relation to language, not necessarily authenticated by the speaking subject being female. In other words, although it may be used by the female subject it is not a natural position but a consciously constructed relational one which is moreover not necessarily dissident in and of itself.

The positions that Maeve and Eileen occupy in relation to language is I would argue precisely that of the 'feminine', despite their different political beliefs. Before discussing how this might be the case and the implications thereof, it is, I think, necessary to first consider some key points of J.Kristeva's theory of the female subject in relation to language, which, I would argue, is of particular relevance in this context.

J.Kristeva has accepted Lacan's positing of the mirror phase as the subject's first step into the symbolic/language. She sees this entry into language as a question of positioning along the lines of gender primarily. Necessarily, the pre-Oedipal phase with its lack of differentiation between the sexes must be repressed if the subject is to take up his/her position in language, a symbolic order which priveleges the masculine/bearer of the penis. The traces of the pre-Oedipal Kristeva terms the 'semiotic'. For Kristeva, the symbolic is not, as Lacan has argued, a rigid monolithic structure. Moreover the

semiotic is not and can never be totally repressed. Instead it constitutes a source of disruption, appearing as contradictions, meaninglessness, silences, absences and non-linearity. Her contention then is that any strengthening of the semiotic (which knows no sexual defferentiation) must necessarily lead to a wakening of the dominant symbolic order and consequently of gender divisions. While J.Rose and Parveen Adams have argued that Kristeva's associating of the semiotic with the feminine is essentialist, Toril Moi has argued that the feminine and the semiotic are associated only in so far as both occupy a marginal position within the dominant culture. The feminine then, is a marginal position which men can also occupy.[4] Whilst both the feminine and the semiotic are marginal Kristeva has insisted that they are both still within the dominant symbolic order. For her, there is no 'other space' from which to speak instead the female/ feminist subject must use language in a new way in an attempt to disrupt the Symbolic Order. "Women's strategy", according to Kristeva,

> "... should be neither to adopt masculine modes of power nor to flee encounters with the symbolic, but to assume a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society".[5]

Maeve's'feminism' is I would argue greatly influenced by this theory. For example, in the scene on Cavehill as the camera pans over the city of Belfast, Maeve's voice is heard saying,

> "A centre, a landmark, laying a foundation,
> giving a ground, grounding ourselves,
> clarity about what happens, about what's
> supposed to happen, a space for things to
> happen, a technique, a way in, a way out,
> a celebration, a guide, a release, a lie,
> a truth, a lie that tells the truth,
> a projection, a memory, a way of thinking,
> a way of not thinking".

These words, on one level can be understood to refer to the function of the film itself, as well as reflecting its formal structure with its broken syntax, open endings, repetitive and accumulative rather than linear structure. Moreover, through them Maeve is given the means to impose her own meanings on the city and landscape she grew up in. These meanings are however openended and obviously subjective rather than pretending towards the closed authoritative definition often signalled by a voice-over in dominant documentary. The subjectivity is reinforced by the camera's pan finally coming to rest on Maeve herself.

Maeve's primary function in the film is to challenge the beliefs of those around her, posing as a negative term - an exile temporarily returned. Whereas Roisin insists on the right to define herself, Maeve insists on the right not to. For example when Liam, arriving in her flat in London tells her, "You don't know what you're doing here", Maeve replies "I have the right not to know. I have that space". This is entirely in keeping with Kristeva's insistence that women should not be defined since such definitions have long served to curtail women's freedom and rights. At another point Liam says to Maeve, "What you're proposing is no story at all". This is emphasised by Maeve's questioning of many of the stories told to her. For example, she challenges the two men's story in the republican club, eventually knocking over their drinks, having rejected their definitions of her mother. The negative position which Maeve occupies is reinforced on a formal level also. For example, Maeve, the protagonist upon whom the narrative movement depends is most often displaced to the edge of the frame. She is however in a priveleged position in relation to knowledge in the film, i.e. the viewer has less knowledge about Maeve than she has and is dependent on her presence in order to have access to this knowledge which is neither totally coherent or resolved but is in a state of flux, giving rise to contradictions and problems which remain posed.

The viewer thus becomes aware that what is presented is a fragmented account of Maeve's story rather than her whole life or an illusion of this, (for example most of her existence in

London is left uncharted). Consequently one gets the feeling that those fragments that were represented have erupted to the surface as it were, and cannot constitute a finite definition of Maeve just as she herself (and Kristeva) refuses such definitions. It is in this sense that I would suggest that Maeve's feminism can be seen to be largely informed by Kristeva's writings.

It does not however exist in a vacuum but is applied to the conflict in Northern Ireland. As I have suggested, her negative position opens up a questioning and challenging of the beliefs of those around her. One result of this is a questioning of what Seamus Deane has called "the mystique of Irishness", the dissolution of which, he and others have argued, is a necessity if any lasting solution to the conflict is to be found.[6] On one level this is specifically the function Maeve serves, provoking questions and suggesting that other solutions are possible, although these she does not pose. Deane has further argued that:

> "To accept the mystique of Irishness is to become involved in the spiritual heroics of a Yeats or a Pearse, to believe in the incarnation of the nation in the individual. To reject it is to make a fetish of exile, alienation and dislocation in the manner of Joyce or Beckett".[7]

Significantly, Liam tells Maeve in one of the final scenes that he saw her in the bookshop hiding behind Joyce and Beckett.[8] Maeve, in rejecting the politics of identity fuelled by an Irish mystique, has adopted a world-view which is based on an internationalist, and some would argue, inherently Eurocentric perspective. Maeve however in returning to Belfast is in a sense trying to work through these contradictions, or more specifically, she serves the function of posing these contradictions which P.Murphy addresses over the course of the film.

The relationship between the women is particularly significant in this respect as it is very much posed on one level as a

confrontation between feminist and non-feminist women, within the family unit.

Over the course of the film it transpires that both Eileen, Maeve's mother, and Roisin resent Maeve's emigration, although for slightly different reasons. In order to understand this better it is first necessary to consider recent feminist theorizing of the position of the mother and motherhood in society. Many feminists have argued that within patriarchal culture motherhood is constantly repressed. Kristeva for example argues that,

> "... the vagina and the jouissance of the mother are disregarded and immediately replaced by that which puts the mother on the socio-symbolic community - childbearing, procreation in the name of the father." [9]

While Eileen is represented as occupying this space in Maeve she is shown to disrupt this in a number of ways, firstly by her tendency to retreat into angry silence, e.g. when Martin interrupts her storytelling; when Maeve attempts to confront her in relation to a woman she sent to stay with Maeve, etc. Secondly she evokes throughout the film what might be considered to be the pre-Oedipal intimacy and power of the phallic mother. This is explicitly suggested in a story Roisin tells about her mother's defiance of a "wee lad" in a mask who stopped the taxi they were in, and ordered them to get out. At first Eileen just sat staring straight ahead in defiant silence and then she jumped out of the taxi, shouting at the masked man, "You should be at home in bed. You're only out of nappies. If I were your mother I'd pull down your pants and slap you 'till you were raw".

At another point Eileen tells a story about Maeve's suitcase which, on her first departure to Britain, burst open on the bus, embarrassing Maeve and the soldier who had intended to search the case as all her underwear fell out of it. The intimacy of Eileen and Maeve at that time is suggested by the fact that it was Eileen who had bought all Maeve's underwear, moreover she tells the story as a shared memory, in a sense to re-establish the bond between them. Maeve however insists that she cannot

remember the incident, which Eileen obviously interprets as Maeve's rejection of the intimacy, also as she bitterly reproaches her for not looking back even once as she left.

In psychoanalytic terms it can be argued that what is being replayed here is the process of individuation which in a patriarchal culture is predicated on the repression of the mother. Mary Kelly has explored this in her work Post Partum Document, suggesting among other things the difficulty the mother has in coming to terms with the loss of the phallus. The emigration of Maeve might be seen to be the final stage of this individuation which, as J.Rose suggests, leads "if not to violence, then at least and of necessity to psychic pain".[10] Eileen moreover has not accepted Maeve's departure. She continues to maintain the parlour as a sacrosanct place which she had dreamt of as a place where her daughters might bring their boyfriends. She intimates that this room is as much for Maeve as for Roisin. In this way her daughters' lives and dreams might act for Eileen as an extension of her life and hopes. Liam suggested this to Maeve on Cavehill saying of his father,"Its not like it is with women. He can't extend himself through his body". Eileen's dreams for her daughters are however caught up in the same mythic system as Liam's father's, with their religious connotations and the emphasis on the traditional role women must play therein. This is suggested by the religious pictures which mingle with the ornaments and her ritualized maintenance of a room dedicated to heterosexual romance. Moreover Roisin tells Maeve how her mother dreams of them both having families and living near her. What seems to be at issue here is that Eileen, having accepted although not without conflict, the role assigned to her in patriarchal culture, has a stake in that ritual which Maeve cannot accept if she is to retain her independence. This is then a large contributary factor to the tension represented between Eileen and Maeve, i.e. a tension between those women who have accepted or embraced motherhood for many different reasons and feminism, for many feminists have criticized the place of motherhood as repressed, etc., but in so doing have often also criticized those women who are mothers. In fact it has been argued that feminism is founded on a rejection and repression of the mother.[11] Not surprisingly then Maeve's feminism is understood by Eileen to be a rejection of her life

and values.

Roisin, who has accepted many of Eileen's values, is also bitter about Maeve's departure. She is consequently suspicious of Maeve who has obviously rejected her values. This is explicit in the bedroom scene when Roisin understands Maeve's smile to be derisive of their mother and begins defending her, breaking the intimacy between them as she moves away to get dressed. Her storytelling acts both to re-establish the bonds between them - it is also through Roisin's stories that Maeve re-discovers her mother - and to insist that Maeve's solutions are inadequate for Roisin in so far as it does not take into account and deal pragmatically with her lived reality. For example when Maeve tells Roisin that if she gets pregnant she will help her so that she doesn't have to get married Roisin looks at Maeve in disbelief and says, "sure who would I be getting married to? Its hard enough to find a man at all around here". Roisin is here suggesting that Maeve's feminism is out of touch with her lived experience and therefore cannot presume to provide solutions to her life.

Such a criticism is in keeping with a growing dissatisfaction of various groups within feminism itself about the presumption that a movement which was originally named and shaped by the concerns of predominantly white middle-class women can deal with the lived contradictions of other women's lives. Jackie Stacey has argued forcibly that this problem must be confronted by feminists, insisting that Western feminism is founded on, "a startling ignorance of questions of age, race, class and sexuality"[12] This she suggests is a consequence of the parameters of feminist politics, practices and subjectivity being defined by a small number of politically active women on the Left. Kristeva's book About Chinese Women is in fact a case in point, having been rejected by many women of colour as an instance of Eurocentrism.[13] Maeve's adoption of an internationalist feminist perspective is not, I would argue, unrelated to her understanding of London as a "centre of energy", particularly if one bears in mind E.Said's contention that one of the effects of colonization is that all meanings are seen to emanate from the centre or seat of colonial power. It is in part Maeve's feminism that leads her to accept

this while Liam rightly points out that London has become so powerful precisely due to colonialism, "on the backs of places like Belfast". In this context then, the dominant discourse of feminism itself, with its basis in academia, might be understood to be part of a colonizing impulse.

This is not to suggest by any means that feminism itself is oppressive per se, but to recognize that it has evolved as a system which has often imposed meanings on women's lives without full consideration of their historical specificity, and has consequently often merely acted to further compound their oppression. This conflict has often been dismissed by feminists as the 'false consciousness' of those women who do not or cannot accept their philosophy. However I believe Pat Murphy is here articulating the necessity for a re-examination of the dynamics of the relationship between women and feminism, specifically in Northern Ireland, but also in a wider context, for they are conflicts which unconfronted, results in feminism being a preserve of the few. Significantly, Maeve leaves her working class family for a more 'upwardly mobile' lifestyle which she does not however fully belong to, (she is minding the flat for someone else). Her feminism has moreover cut her off from her family and friends in Ireland. The question then is whether feminism can be really valid if it does not attempt to address and reconceptualize the situation of women as lived in all its contradictions and complexity. The representation of the relationship between the women in Maeve works, I believe, to foreground this question, representing contradictions which remain largely unresolved in the text and are consequently posed to the viewer. The final scenes of the three women, (Eileen, Roisin, Maeve) together on the Giant's Causeway [14] works to suggest that it is both possible and necessary to overcome these contradictions without ignoring the differences between them. Significantly they are drinking whiskey (Irish Spirits) as they fantasize about throwing the Loyalist man into the sea.

Plate 3.

Footnotes.

[1]Said, E., "Yeats and Decolonization", Field Day Pamphlet, Derry: Field Day, 1988.

[2]ibid. p.12.

[4]Kristeva cites the work of James Joyce, for example, amongst others, as such.

[5]Marks and de Courtviron, French Feminist Thought, 1980, p.166.

[6]Deane, S., "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea", Ireland's Field Day, 1985, pp. 57-58. E.Said also suggests this.

[7]ibid.

[8]Significantly, Kristeva argues that Woman is, "an eternal dissident in relation to social and political consensus, in exile from power and therefore always singular, fragmentary, demonic". Quoted from Polylogue in "Talking about Polylogue", an interview with Kristeva by F. van Russum-Guyon, Toril Moi (Ed.), French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, p.113.

[9]Kristeva, J., About Chinese Women, London: Marion Boyars, 1986,p.26.

[10]Rose, J., Sexuality in the Field of Vision, London: Verso,1986,p.160.

[11]Annette Kuhn for example, referring specifically to American feminism has argued that feminists "come to the revolution as daughters, not mothers", even if they themselves are mothers. While there has been a greater concern with the position of women as mothers in European feminism, there is still conflict around the issue. For example, while J.Kristeva seems to suggest that women are only truly fulfilled at motherhood, Mary Kelly has argued that motherhood is the final stage in the positioning of women in a place of 'otherness' - see Post Partum Document.

[12]Stacey, J., "Desperately Seeking Difference", Gamman, L., Marshment, M., (Eds.), The Female Gaze, Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, London: Women's Press, 1988, p.180.

[13]By 'Eurocentrism' I mean the imposing of meanings from a European perspective on another culture. For example, in About Chinese Women, Kristeva develops her theory about the position of women in relation to the Symbolic Order, drawing on the psychoanalytic writings of J.Lacan. In the second part of the book she considers the position of Chinese women in the light of this model, for the benefit of a Western audience.

[14]Significantly, this is the first time that the three women are together in the frame.

CHAPTER 4.

Finally I want to tentatively consider some of the possibilities of pleasure available to the spectator of Maeve.

I have already suggested how Maeve, drawing on avant-garde and feminist film theory and practice, works to frustrate and challenge traditional audience expectations. Part of this impulse was to deny the vicarious pleasure which a viewer might obtain for example from random violence; emotional investment in characters (via identification) or in a traditional priveleging of heterosexual romance (this is displaced in Maeve by a political discourse); through the passive apparently effortless consumption of a coherent and resolved narrative which it is argued, leaves the viewer feeling satisfied and passive. Murphy was working to deny these pleasures in Maeve. What then is offered in place of this?

Clearly one of the most obvious pleasures in Maeve is an intellectual one, occurring on what Mulvey has called the level of "passionate detachment".[1] This is available to those viewers, both male and female, who are aware of or interested in debates regarding either avant-garde and/or feminist film theory, and/or the political situation of Northern Ireland and the position of women therein. How far non-initiated audiences might enjoy this pleasure is however debatable. For example many of the political dialogues might well, (and have often been) interpreted as didactic, the form confusing and consequently alienating.[2] Murphy herself has said that while she had intended the film to be available to a general audience it tended to be categorized as an art-house film, which one critic claimed would be "entirely its own fault".[3] Obviously then this kind of film-practice is to an extent circumscribed. However given that such work is I believe, both important and necessary, I would like to further consider it precisely in terms of its limited - although not by any means fixed - audience, and ultimately I would suggest that the meanings of the film are dependent to a great extent on the context in which it is shown and that consequently the criticism of the film as merely 'preaching to the converted' does not invalidate it by any means.

Moreover such a criticism is based on the notion that there is

one feminism and feminist aesthetic to be produced and consumed by feminists. There were however many different reactions to the film, due to the historical specificities of the viewing subjects. For example many feminists criticized Maeve precisely for its refusal of an easy identification with the protagonist due both to the distancing devices used, the negative and difficult character of Maeve herself, and her particular feminist perspective. These feminists then were saying that Maeve offered them a merely intellectual pleasure which they found to be inadequate.

However for some feminist viewers Maeve offered the pleasure, if not of identification, then certainly of 'recognition'. For example, Pat Murphy has noted that many Irish women and feminists living in London reacted favourably to the film. Consequently identification is not necessarily with a female character per se, but is bound up with the recognition of a set of circumstances both intellectual and emotional - the conflict in Northern Ireland, one's position in relation to this, the tension, pain and intimacy within the family between mother and daughter, feminist and non-feminist, etc.

J.Stacey, drawing on Freud's later discussions of the difficult path to heterosexuality for female children, has suggested that the re-enactment of a pre-Oedipal desire for and identification with another woman (the mother), which is an experience of all women, might also constitute one of the pleasures of spectatorship for the female viewer. The dominant narrative in Maeve can moreover be seen to be motivated by Maeve's desire to re-establish the bonds with both her sister and mother. Consequently one might suggest that this pre-Oedipal re-enactment, especially as it works to reconcile feminism with the betrayed mother is also one of the pleasures of Maeve.

Finally I would argue that there is pleasure to be had for many feminist viewers in the ready availability of feminist meanings in the film - the unusual pleasure of reading with, rather than against, the grain of a text. It is moreover at this level that I would suggest this thesis might be seen to function, in so far as I have attempted here to further draw out those meanings in order to consider some of their implications for feminism itself,

in the light of the complexities of the political situation in Northern Ireland.

* * * * *

In conclusion, I would contend that Maeve can be understood on one level as the testing of a feminist perspective very much derived from psychoanalytic theory in the context of the political situation of women in Northern Ireland. This perspective is personified by the character Maeve. It is significant in this respect that she poses as a negative term in the film, questioning the values and assumptions of those around her, but also unable to cope with the situation as lived. It is also suggested that whilst this negativity might lend itself toward escapism it may also be a useful transitional phase, allowing the space for a challenging of the dominant understandings of the situation and a re-conceptualization of this in different terms. What is ultimately being proposed here is I would argue, the necessity for developing a new feminist understanding of the position of women in the context of Northern Ireland. Such an understanding would be neither imposed from without nor based on an acceptance of the myth of a golden past which might be returned to, but, to quote Said, "is derived from the historical deprivations of the present" [4] in all its complexity. Maeve, I would suggest, might be seen to be a tentative step in this direction.

Footnotes.

[1]See Mulvey,L., "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

[2]See for example David Simmons' review of Maeve in In Dublin magazine, 16/10/81, or Barry McIlheney's review, Hot Press, Nov.19, 1982, or Derek Malcolm, Guardian Newspaper, 13/8/81.

[3]See Malcolm, Derek, Guardian, 13/8/81.

[4]Said,E., "Yeats and Decolonization", Field Day Pamphlet, Derry: Field Day, 1988, p.12.

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Glossary

Lacan's concept of the Phallus:

Basically, according to Lacan, the child's entry into language (Symbolic discourse) is dependent on the infant recognizing itself as having a separate identity from its mother's. This unity/wholeness with the mother is broken partly by the mirror phase, with the child's recognition of the mother as a separate image/entity and of himself as an image (ego-ideal), creating the structure of the "divided subject", and partly by the introduction of the Father as a linguistic Third Term, breaking the mother-child dyad. The child meanwhile embraces language in order to fulfill its desire to re-establish its lost unity with the mother, the pain of which is repressed. Hence language is always predicated on desire. This wholeness with the mother is described as the phallus. Given that, at the point of entry into language, the subject loses this sense of unity forever, the phallus then, represents lack. At this stage both sexes define themselves in relation to the phallus. However, according to Lacan, the boy in having a penis has that which lends itself to the phallic symbol. The girl does not have a penis. What she lacks is not a penis as such, but the means to represent lack. This is a crucial point because, as M.A.Doane has noted, "what is being suggested is that the boy's body provides an access to the processes of representation while the girl's does not" (See Doane,M.A., "Woman's Stake, Filming the Female Body", Penley,C.,(Ed.). Feminism and Film Theory, London: Routledge, Chapman & Hull, 1988). Consequently the male body/phallus becomes the priveleged signifier against which all else is defined, necessarily in terms of a binary opposition: penis/no penis, presence/absence etc. Within this context Woman becomes determined by her exclusion from the symbol. Drawing on this Laura Mulvey has argued,"Woman ... stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of Woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning". (See Mulvey,L., "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema").