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CINEMA'S GREEN IS GOLD: THE COMMODIFICATION OF IRISHNESS IN FILM

By

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B.A. in English Literature, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999

Thesis

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Cinema for the Irish American Dream: The Commodification of Irishness in Film

Chairperson: Kathleen Kane

This thesis is concerned with the manners in which Irishness has become highly desirable and commodified, and the manifestations that commodification has taken in Irish film. In recognition that the Irish American diaspora holds a special regard for Irishness, I will explore reasons for the allure of Irishness for Irish Americans and how that allure contributes to commodification. Chiefly among these reasons are Irishness' desirability as a white ethnicity and its alignment with a family values based morality. Irishness also has strong appeal for the Irish diaspora with its ties to a land that offers a welcoming "authentic" homeland and pre-modern escape from the perils of contemporary urban society.

In addition to confirming the desirability for Irishness, this thesis explores how Irishness is depicted in film, particularly in the ways in which Irishness is stereotyped and commodified. By firstly examining the history of Irish film and outlining the disadvantages that native Irish cinema has encountered in its development, I will give the background that will explain, in part, the issues with which contemporary Irish films have to contend. The discussion of Irish film must also include an analysis of authenticity in terms of stereotyped portrayals of Irishness and the place of history in Irish film. These depictions will demonstrate the troubling aspects of commodified Irishness, not only in the ways in which it exists in Irish film, but also in the manner that the commodification is problematic in understandings of definitions of Irishness in general. In a response to these problematic portrayals of Irishness, this thesis will highlight contemporary filmmakers and films that confront issues of stereotyping and commodification by offering alternative depictions of Irishness and helping to develop a current and broad native Irish cinema.

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Introduction

Critic Natasha Casey raises many questions concerning the phenomenon of the popularity of Americans claiming Irish roots in her essay “*Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish American.*” She offers many examples of how this popularity among Irish Americans is used by television, advertising, catalog shopping and pubs in their embraces of Irish themes in order to appeal to potential consumers through the commodification of Irishness. What Casey wants to address in her article is the question she states in her opening paragraph, “What, then, is the allure of all this Irishness?” (9). This question has been asked before by critics, but never has been fully answered, even by Casey. At the close of her essay, Casey poses a similar question that she leaves open. She queries, “In respect to the consumption of Irishness in the United States, however, it remains to be seen just what problems are being solved, whose desires are being fulfilled, and to what end?” (25).

What this thesis strives to achieve is an exploration of those questions through an analysis of Irish film. By analyzing Irishness and the way in which it functions in film, I mean not only to answer questions related to the desirability of Irishness, but also to address the issues that arise from the commodification of Irishness. This thesis will examine stereotypes of Irishness in film as well as the consumption of Irishness, specifically within the Irish American community. By first developing the claim that Irishness is, in fact, commodified and especially by Irish Americans, I will establish the importance of understanding the role of Irishness in Irish film. This examination will entail highlighting distinctions between the nature of film as a production and commodity in general and films that use Irishness as an audience-specific commodity. Because of

the position of film as a commodity, as well as the nature of film as a re-production (removed from reality as a simulation), static definitions of terms such as “authenticity” becomes difficult as meanings change in the context of the discussions of the thesis. Commodity, on the other hand, can be broken down. According to Marxist definitions, all commodities are produced in order to satisfy a want or need, either directly or indirectly. A commodity can also be defined as “something that is exchanged for other commodities” possessing “*exchange-value*, the property of being exchangeable for other things” (Brewer 22). In this sense, all films made intending to satisfy a want or need are commodities. In addition, almost all filmmakers produce films that will be exchanged for monetary value. But what I am mainly concerned about in this thesis is the way in which Irish films have turned to an audience-specific and audience driven means of producing Irishness, not just film, as a commodity. Irish films are producing Irishness itself to be exchanged as a commodity, not simply producing and exchanging film for reciprocal value. When Irishness becomes a commodity in these films, it is produced with its possible exchange value in mind; therefore it is produced in order to have a high exchange value and/or be exchanged (consumed) by many (i.e. appeal to audiences). This manner of production leads to stereotypes of Irishness. In this manner, stereotypes of Irishness are pre-packaged and audience-specific commodities.

Intention becomes an important aspect of production when I am referring to authenticity (as a non-commodity) as opposed to stereotypes (as commodities) in film. When I speak of a film that offers more authentic portrayals and therefore escapes the commodification of Irishness, I mean that the film was not produced and is not marketed with the intention of using Irishness as a commodity. There are, certainly, cases when

authenticity itself is a commodity. One need only look at the situation with the Northern Irish Tourist Board and its direct and obvious intention to use Northern Ireland's "authenticity" as a commodity to increase tourism.¹ Of course, in many situations a film may not have specifically intended for its portrayals of Irishness to become commodities, but due to audience demands, they have become commodified. These films can also be troubling in that they may present stereotypes of Irishness that feed into a system that ignores or even blocks more realistic, broad and non-commodity based portrayals of Irishness.

In order to understand the problematic place of commodified Irishness in film and the need for alternatives, one must be aware of how the commodification ties in with the development of Irish film. This thesis will begin with a brief look at Irish film history and will review some of the impediments that have blocked the progression of native Irish film, such as national censorship and lack of funding, which paradoxically also contributed to Ireland's unique native film development. These disadvantages to native Irish filmmaking will also be discussed in terms how they contributed to the lack of native Irish representations of Irishness in Western film and Hollywood's initial domination of Irish film. I will also show how Hollywood's control of Irish portrayals led to many of the stereotypes of Irishness in film. By highlighting specific films (*Riverdance*, *The Secret of Roan Inish*, *Waking Ned Devine*, *Michael Collins*, *The Boxer*, *In the Name of the Father*) to illustrate common depictions of Irishness, I hope to show the reoccurring themes that comprise Irishness-as-commodity in the films' productions and consumptions. These films will demonstrate understandings of Irishness that are particularly alluring, such as the lifestyle and landscape of the rural west of Ireland, and

¹ See discussion on pages 52-55 for more information on films from the Northern Irish Tourist Board.

therefore particularly common as commodities of Irishness targeted towards Irish Americans. The films' examples will also show how stereotypical characters, such as the "reformed" gunman, and stereotypical narrative forms, such as the historical epic, came to represent characterizations and subject matters for internationally distributed Irish films in general. These stereotypes, in turn, greatly limit definitions of Irishness available to Irish Americans as well as slow the progression of accurate and contemporary illustrations of Irishness.

I will finish my discussion by identifying examples of Irish film that are unique in their styles and portrayals of Irishness outside of the usual stereotyping of Irish history, characters and politics that has defined Irishness in cinema of the twentieth century. I will use Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, *Butcher Boy* and *Breakfast on Pluto* as well as Paddy Breathnach's *I Went Down* and Jim Sheridan's *In America* in particular as examples of films successful in exploring definitions of Irishness and methods of portrayal that are usually underrepresented. By calling attention to marginal and alternative representations of Irishness, I will show films that demonstrate new, radical avenues of Irish filmmaking that avoid the easy commodification that characterized other films appealing to the international and Hollywood markets by trafficking in stereotypes that, troublingly, reinforce old colonialist, conservative, prejudicial and uni-focal models of Irishness. These new avenues of Irish filmmaking are also supportive of the argument that in Ireland, a country that has supplied a good deal thematically and visually to the cinematic canons and conventions of Western film, a national native cinema relatively free from and in conversation with other global filmic genres has begun to emerge.

This thesis will touch upon a range of subjects that are growing and timely in the academic community, such as postmodernism, Irish studies and film studies. But, more importantly, it will look at subjects that are central to understanding the way information and culture is constantly transferred between nations in a progressively globalized and digitalized age. Irish film can serve as both a product that *is* a commodity and a production that *carries* the commodity of Irishness. In this manner, Irish film is a telling example of how the transnational exchange of culture can be problematic when culture is commodified and definitions of Irishness are kept within the boundaries of stereotypes. This thesis will concentrate on the cultural exchange of Irishness specifically between Ireland and the Irish American diaspora, where issues such as authenticity and stereotypes are especially important. With increasing globalization and growing populations of Irish diaspora, what is at stake with Irishness as a commodity clearly relates to its allure and the way in which it is portrayed in cultural productions, like film.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of Irish Film and the Allure of Irishness

An examination of contemporary Irish film must include some discussion of Irish film history due to the unique evolution of Irish film as well as the many factors influencing its development. The progression of Native Irish film has been plagued by many disadvantages. In part because of the lack of financial support given to filmmaking, economics is an important factor. Also, Ireland did not have a strong history of visual culture that filmmakers could look to for examples. As Luke Gibbons argues in his essay, “Projecting the Nation: Cinema and Culture”:

To be sure, many other forces have militated against a strong, indigenous cinema since the founding of the state, amongst which may be numbered the lack of an economy of scale and adequate industrial base; the hostility to mass culture, fuelled by cultural protectionism in the early decades of the state; the existence of an Anglophone audience which made a fledgling Irish cinema unduly susceptible to Anglo-American influence; and – not least – the absence of a strong visual tradition. (207)

Although history has a very strong presence in many of Ireland’s cultural productions, this prevalence of history at times was a disadvantage because it led to the creation of films that are too culturally specific, and, therefore, alienating. While Irish film was struggling with its development due to these disadvantages and more, Hollywood’s film production was burgeoning. In what became yet another disadvantage to native Irish film, Hollywood made many films with Irish themes and characters, which then came to

dominate almost all portrayals of Ireland and the Irish in film.² These portrayals of Irishness were heavily stereotyped and reinforced by later Hollywood films, as well as their Irish counterparts that sought international popularity.

Irish Americans have long had a significant role in Hollywood. Perhaps because of this presence as well as the sheer population of the Irish Diaspora in America, Ireland and the Irish often have been the subjects of American films. Ireland itself did produce films during the early to mid-twentieth century that received some notice, such as *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (1920), but Ireland never had the budget or methods of distribution that America had during this same period. Kevin Rockett discusses the influence that poor funding and censorship had on Irish film in his article “Irish Cinema,” appearing in the film magazine, *Cineaste*. He reasons that although by the late twentieth century there were several Irish independent filmmakers who generated critical and inventive films, like the independent and controversial filmmakers working in the 1970s and 1980s, they were left with little of the commercial or governmental funding that other

² Popular genres (such as the gangster film) featuring the Irish and Irish Americans emerged in Hollywood, fueling the stereotyping of Irish characters. Films such as *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) popularized portrayals of the Irish American gangster, while films such as *Beloved Enemy* (1936) and *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) emphasized a violent Irishman, often a rogue member of the Irish Republic Army. Films that featured Irish priests, such as *The Bells of St. Mary's* further pigeon-holed Irish characters as tending towards a saint or a sinner. In *Angels with Dirty Faces*, tough Hell's Kitchen Irish American kids overtly portray the saint and sinner counterbalance. One character turns from his rough ways to become a priest and another character (portrayed by James Cagney – a popular choice for depicting Irish American characters) uses his rough background coupled with experience in reform school and the city streetsto become a dangerous gangster. There appears to be little gray area available to the Irish and Irish American characters outside of the extremes of saint and sinner.

Films like *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959) and even, to some extent, *The Quiet Man* (1952), portrayed the Irish as comically mischievous, drunk and backwards – possibly the most damaging depictions of Irishness. These portrayals closely resembled the perception of the Irish as inebriated and slightly conniving yet often victims of their own inanity that was reflected in the Stage Irish character that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Stage Irishman had his colloquial manners and less-than-neat appearance exaggerated for comic effect in both political cartoons and the theatre even before the characterization was used in film alongside the stereotyped depictions of the Irish as more violent.

Many of the stereotyped aspects of Irish characters described above are found, at times unaltered, in films of the late twentieth century, as outlined at length later in this discussion.

countries' filmmakers had available to them. The end result was that their films were low-budget and largely unseen outside of Ireland. Even into the 1990s with the reestablishment of the Irish Film Board, funding was still a major issue with Irish filmmakers. As Rockett reports:

Many of the films made in Ireland do not get, or even seek, funding from The Irish Film Board. Supporting eight to ten films each year with production loans, these are generally made available to independent filmmakers, most of whose films do not get an American release. (25)

For these reasons, it was mostly the American versions of Irishness that were made public through film in the twentieth century. Irish native cinema, especially before the late twentieth century, did not have much international prominence. Even when Irish films did achieve critical acclaim, like *My Left Foot*, *In the Name of the Father* and *The Crying Game*, many creators of Irish film, Rockett states, "inevitably responded in the first instance to the demands of the international marketplace. In this regard, such films often reinforce rather than challenge the inherited stereotypes of the Irish in the cinema" (24).

In early Irish cinema the influence of Hollywood was embraced by native Irish filmmakers through the overwhelming romantic vision of Ireland portrayed in Irish films, a feature which enabled many films to pass censorship acts. During De Valera's reign, conservative values were not only prized, but often enforced in Ireland. That censorship was customary in many aspects of culture and filmmaking is evident in the establishment of the Censorship of Films Act in 1923. From 1922 to 1962, over 3000 films were banned from Irish theaters and over 8000 others were cut before screening before an

audience (Rockett 23). Rockett mentions early films made by the Film Company of Ireland, such as *Knocknagow* (1918) and *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (1920), which were some of the first major attempts at indigenous filmmaking. He goes on to state, “Despite the sophistication of some of these films, the post-independence state established in 1922 did not show any enthusiasm for film production. Instead, it concentrated its efforts on a narrow form of cultural protectionism which included close scrutiny of any films which were deemed to infringe conservative Christian morality, or challenge the notion of the family as the unit of the state” (23). Not only was Irish film struggling because of low funding, but filmgoers were, through various restrictions, kept from viewing more experimental films. Censorship narrowed the field for Irish filmmakers, making it difficult to create new or innovative films that would still pass the censors and, therefore, the end result was the maintenance of Hollywood’s early stereotyped portrayals of Irishness.

In the 1970s and 80s, Irish film began to explore urban spaces and more contentious issues such as feminism and challenges to Catholicism, nationalism and tradition. Rockett mentions filmmakers such as Joe Comerford, who critiqued the “Irish urban experience,” and Bob Quinn, who “explored a version of the Irish countryside which challenged not just the romantic foreign representations of Ireland” but also brought in new ideas of the Irish landscape (24). Other filmmakers, such as Vivienne Dick and Pat Murphy, challenged the roles of Irish women in film, which would often touch on critiques of Catholicism and Irish nationalism as well. Vivienne Dick used actresses who were part of the Punk era with their rebellious and modern style to confront the depictions of women in the media, offering an alternative type of female character as

well as a method to question accepted ideas of sexuality, particularly in the Catholic Church (Hoberman 105). Pat Murphy, a more recognized filmmaker, primarily dealt with the relationship between women and Irish nationalism and Republicanism and women's roles in The Troubles. These are important issues, yet they were rarely discussed during the time that Murphy was making films.

When the Irish Film Board was finally reconstituted decades later in April 1993, the continued influence of Hollywood versions of Irishness needed to be addressed. While the members of the Irish cinema community did not wish Irish film to lose its appeal to international audiences, they did want to introduce more appropriate, accurate and diverse representations of Irishness. As Luke Gibbons highlights in "Projecting the Nation,"

What was at stake, perhaps, at this developmental level was the capacity of Irish films to tell their own stories in a manner that addressed Irish audiences, but which also aimed at international distribution, whether on the art-house and festival circuit, or the more commercial mainstream controlled by Hollywood.
(213)

Even while Irish filmmakers did begin to "tell their own stories," they faced the danger of too much cultural specificity when addressing Irish audiences at the possible expense of connecting with international audiences. While Hollywood tends towards an assimilationist aesthetic (requiring films to imitate the typical Hollywood style) and clear narrative which requires little prior knowledge on the part of the viewer, many of Ireland's films were culturally specific and not easily assimilated with the expectations of international audiences. These Irish films required local knowledge for the viewer to

appreciate, and often even to understand, the complex Irish themes. Irish films also often featured specifically Irish historical events and figures unfamiliar to large sections of an English speaking international audience. Luke Gibbons uses the example of the early film, *The Colleen Bawn*, which would need an audience prepped in Irish politics to follow the narrative plot and understand the characters which are seemingly thrown together. He describes a “radical disjunction between story and setting, narrative and history” that occurs with an overemphasis on unexplained historical facts appearing in films for reasons of historical “authenticity.”

The problem with these claims to authenticity is that there were no originals in the first place, as both the characters and the incidents depicted were fictitious and passed into Killarney lore through the invented traditions of tourism. This tension between story and spectacle is stretched to breaking point when one intertitle finally announces, having described Danny Mann’s remorse after his attempted drowning of the Colleen Bawn: ‘The bed used in this scene belonged to Daniel O’Connell and was occupied by him.’ Not surprisingly, the logic of these intertitles is to split the screen – and by extension, audiences – in two: the top half narrates the story in a manner presumably intelligible to mass audiences, but the lower part increasingly relapses into topographical and historical asides that could only be of interest to Irish viewers, drawing on popular history or cultural memory. (Cambridge 209)

Irishfilm.net points out something similar in its description for the film *Man of Aran*: “No narration is used, thus some knowledge of the subject is needed. For example a man is shown repairing his coracle (oilcloth-hulled boat). The casual observer might not notice

the unusual and ancient construction, let alone understand its uniqueness in 20th century Europe” (BAST *The Irish in Film*). *Man of Aran* and the silent film *The Colleen Bawn* are also representative examples of films that fit the ideas of Irish nationalism at the time of De Valera’s reign. *The Colleen Bawn* recalls a romantic Ireland of literature. *Man of Aran* recalls a pre-colonial Ireland where the population still spoke the Irish language and maintained Irish traditions untouched by the English occupation. The films fit the idea that some nationalists had of reclaiming a pre-modern Ireland, a return of a truly Irish Ireland, rather than the modernized and colonized Ireland of urban areas. By making their films culturally specific, Irish filmmakers could also be seen as attempting to counter the stereotypes of Irishness pervading Hollywood films, especially the musical, gangster and “stage” Irish. Irish productions could focus on what was distinctive in Ireland, like its rural west and rich folklore. As Luke Gibbons explains, “the demand for specific Irish modes of address presents itself as a protest against stage-Irishry, against the kind of hollowed-out representations that show little knowledge of, and less sympathy with, the multilayered complexities of Irish culture and history” (207). In her 2000 article, “The International Cast of Irish Cinema,” Marcia Landy explains the development of certain stereotypes of Irishness (including what Gibbons names “stage-Irishry”) in light of the important place history has in Irish cinema. She explains that Irish immigrants have not only kept alive old notions of Irish identities, but also ideas of Ireland that have become more myth than fact in the distance and time that has passed between the development of identities of Irishness from experience and the development of identities of Irishness through second-hand knowledge, such as those depicted in film

portrayals. In turn, the myths of Irishness commodified in film, such as those created and sustained by the Irish Diaspora, can dominate definitions of Irishness.

Until recently, cinematic portraits of Ireland have been governed by a mythology in part abetted by indigenous ideologies in the interest of national identity, in larger part by a mythology sustained and perpetuated by a large immigrant population scattered worldwide. In this sense, though, there has always been an Irish cinema, even if it did not belong to the people of Ireland. In particular, Hollywood and British cinema exploited Irishness, offering a screen mythology of the fighting Irish, the bloodthirsty Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the garrulous, ineffectual, often alcoholic but charming Irishman. (Landy 23)

As Irish filmmakers worked to create native Irish films and a strong national film community, the issue of the reception of their films by an international audience began to climb to a more pressing place. In his essay “Culture, Industry and Irish Cinema,” Kevin Rockett states that when indigenous Irish filmmaking became more productive throughout the 1970s and 1980s a positive change started to take place in film’s increased engagement with Irish culture. But, by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, Rockett states, filmmakers were more concerned with the style and aesthetics of their films. This often led filmmakers to alter their films to simulate the look of Hollywood films in order to allow for a more familiar presentation and wider audience reception and resulted in less engagement with Irish culture. This need for alteration can be attributed to a number of factors, including economic issues and the expectations of the global market. While these films were able to procure monies by appealing to international funding, they also necessitated their filmmakers’ response to the global market’s desires.

One example that Rockett gives is Jim Sheridan's 1990 film adaptation of John B. Keane's play, *The Field*. In Keane's original play an Irish immigrant who had moved to England many years before returns to Ireland after gaining success in England. The character wants to buy land in his native country. In the film version, the immigrant is Irish American. This change affects the film in several manners. For one, the Irish American character would give the film an appeal to a wider audience, especially American audiences who would be able to identify with the film through the vehicle of the Irish-American character. But the change also loses emotional power in taking away the controversy of someone who has made a success in England returning to Ireland to buy Irish land, an echo of history especially resonant to the Irish in their experience as a former colony of England. The film also changes the time period in which the events take place, moving the film to the 1930s from the original 1960s of the play. This change of time periods not only secures a less dramatic "cultural impact," like the change of the main character to an Irish American, but it also allows the film to maintain "an image of a pre-modern, pastoral society, something which the backers of *The Field* may have wished to trade on" (139). Rockett goes on to point out that "To deal with 1960s Ireland would have required a confrontation with the modernization of Irish society as well as an engagement with the conventional image of Ireland in the international cinema" (139). In this case, *The Field* is a telling example of Irish films that sacrificed cultural engagement for the sake of procuring a slice of the global market. Critics were afraid that this industry trend would cause a loss of the more controversial and engaging subjects which Irish films of the 1970s and 1980s attempted to address. After Irish film seemed to break free from so many years of Irish Nationalist repression and domination by Hollywood,

film critics were wary about the increasing lack of cultural engagement in Irish films made in the late 1980s and 1990s (such as *The Field*).

Shortly after *The Field* was released in the early 1990s circumstances drastically changed for the Irish film community. Ireland made several more steps towards developing a film industry that would compete in an international market, rather than a small culture of native Irish filmmakers that created culturally specific features mainly intended for a specifically Irish audience. In 1992 the Irish Film Centre opened in Dublin. The Irish film community also rejoiced at the decision to appoint Michael D. Higgins, a man Kevin Rockett refers to as “a radical and informed voice on culture” in his essay “Culture, Industry and Irish Cinema,” as Ireland’s first Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (130). In addition, Irish film achieved critical and international attention with Jim Sheridan’s acclaimed *My Left Foot* bringing both a Best Actor and Best Supporting Actress Oscar, Neil Jordan’s 1992 Oscar win for Best Screenplay for *The Crying Game* and Michelle Burke’s 1993 Oscar win for Best Make-up for *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (making her a two time winner after her original Best Make-up award from 1982’s *Quest for Fire*). These Oscar wins led the Irish Cabinet to reactivate the Irish Film Board, Bord Scannán na hEireann. The rapid changes of the new governing powers of film opened many opportunities for Irish filmmakers and also provided them with much needed funding. For example, in 1993, in order to encourage indigenous film and television production, Higgins took the cap off of a previous budget limit for Ireland’s television network, RTE, for commissioning independent filmmakers. With these loosened restrictions RTE could host more Irish independent productions. Around the same time, Ireland was able to finally launch *Teilifís na Gaeilge* (now named TG4),

the Irish language network which produced the popular soap opera *Ros na Rún* (Rockett 131).

Despite the advantages these changes presented to Irish filmmakers, there were also worries in Ireland's film community that some new changes would lead to old problems. There was a danger that the incentives given to international filmmakers to film in Ireland, while economically positive, were damaging to Irish film culture. These films often maintained the stereotypes of Irishness that were already in existence in the work of other outsider filmmakers and in essence these films worked to keep those stereotypes dominant over indigenous portrayals of Irishness. Martin McLoone, in his article "Reimagining the Nation," mentions the Irish presence in films made in America and the United Kingdom, which led to establishing particular stereotypes of Irishness.

He writes:

American cinema has largely been responsible for a romantic view of Ireland, representing the nostalgic imaginings and nationalist inclinations of the Irish-Americans, while a darker, more somber view of a violent Ireland has largely emanated from the British cinema, a reflection no doubt of Britain's close political involvement in the affairs of Ireland. (28)

This domination came to resemble that of the Hollywood portrayals of Irishness from the 1910s to 1960s that overshadowed native Irish filmmakers' portrayals. In his book *Irish Film* McLoone states, "The danger is that, to attract financial support, such films propose a view of Ireland that is already familiar to international funders and which funders in turn believe audiences are likely to recognize and identify with" (114-15). And, despite the fact that some of these films had outsider funding and/or directors and producers, they

are still categorized as “Irish,” thus giving a sort of legitimacy to these films’ portrayals of Irishness as somewhat “native.” In this sense, an Irish creative contribution and setting were enough to render a film Irish. The plentitude of these films also overshadowed the much smaller indigenous Irish film industry, leaving others to define Irishness.

The fact that a large portion of the global market for Irish films was located in the Irish Diaspora in America helped foster the Hollywood/Irish native cinema relationship. Irish filmmakers did, however, also have to consider their place in European cinema, a much more liberal film culture with a wide range of narrative styles and subjects that especially appealed to the Avant Garde filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, the Irish film community still had to contend with the fact that Irish Americans had already established an Irish film culture in Hollywood. Even while Irish films struggled to fix a position within Irish visual arts, they also would have to contend with comparisons to Hollywood’s Irish films. Martin McLoone states that it was inevitable:

If filmmaking in Ireland exists in relation to other aspects of Irish culture, it, nonetheless, has a special relationship to the cinema globally and to Hollywood cinema in particular. As Irish filmmaking began to develop it was bound to respond, consciously or not, to the pre-existing representations of the Irish that had emerged originally as a result of the Irish diaspora, especially in the case of Hollywood. (87)

McLoone’s statement expresses the importance of the influence of Hollywood’s portrayals of Irishness as a commodity for consumption by the Irish American diaspora that had created these ideas of Irishness through nostalgia and idealization. The

disadvantages, such as lack of funding, a strong visual culture and censorship, facing Irish filmmakers definitely influenced Irish film culture. But it is the influence of the Irish American Diaspora that heavily sways both Irish film in its place as an industry and Irishness as a commodity. It is for these reasons that it is important when discussing portrayals of Irishness in film, and therefore, when discussing Irish film in general, that one should analyze the Irish American perception of and identification with Irishness displayed in film.

The Development of Irishness as Commodity

Before examining the place of Irishness in particular films, one must first analyze the place of Irishness in modern Western culture in general. By the end of the twentieth century, Irishness had become one of the more prominent identities featured in Western, and particularly American, cultural productions. The popularity of Irishness is especially evident in the frequency with which Americans sought to find some sort of Irish heritage in their ancestry. The question presents itself, why was, and is, it so important, so desirable, for Irish Americans, and other Irish diaspora, to confirm, publicize and even celebrate their Irish connections?

At this point, it is critical to define the term “Irishness” as it is used in this discussion. “Irishness” is, basically, an identification of a quality of being Irish. For a person, it could mean an Irish nationality, an Irish heritage, or a trait that is signaled as Irish. For a place, it could mean Ireland itself, or a place containing something of what is indicated as Irish (i.e., scenery, a type of community, an “aura” of something Irish). For

an object or idea, it could mean anything from a physical “thing” from Ireland to something meant to evoke a vague notion of being Irish that is created entirely by and for an American population. The term “Irishness” is vague and its meanings are wide, which is evident in the differences of films that are acknowledged as Irish. It could be summarized to mean simply that essence which makes a person, place, or thing Irish; but it most often means, in this context, a particular *identity* which associates a person, place or thing with Ireland.³

For some, like critic Diane Negra, Irishness-as-identity assumes its form as a kind of chosen race. Both Negra and fellow contributor Natasha Casey point out the “everything and nothing” quality of Irishness in their essays contained in the collection *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture*,” edited by Negra. Negra describes Irishness as the “ideal all-purpose identity credential” (2). This phrase serves well as part of an introduction to a work examining the place and meaning of Irishness in culture. The anthology covers many aspects of Irishness, particularly its presence in popular culture, through advertising, film, television and music. But Negra, in her introduction, makes the important step to call the reader to examine not only *how* Irishness is manifested in these cultural productions, but *why* these productions were created in such profusion. Negra examines the phenomenon of Irishness as a particularly desirable cultural identity. By using Negra and Casey’s discussions on the development of Irishness as commodity, particularly in media, I will show how pervasive the creation and consumption of Irishness is in America. This exposure of the consumption of

³ While both terms “essence” and “identity” imply a sense of *being*, I choose to differentiate the terms in order to make use of the differing connotations of the terms. I use the term “identity” in order to indicate a more fixed and defined meaning of being as a named Irishness. I use the term “essence” to denote Irishness as more of a possession or quality of being Irish which is less delineated.

Irishness in America will also establish the importance that Irishness as an identity carries with Americans. I will extend these ideas into the place of Irishness as commodity in film, referencing the theories of Negra and Casey, as well as other film critics.

Appearing at the opening of Natasha Casey's essay, "'The Best Kept Secret in Retail': Selling Irishness in Contemporary America," is a quotation from Peter K. Lunt and Sonia M. Livingstone's *Mass Consumption and Personal Identity: Everyday Economic Experience*. It proceeds as follows:

The material conditions of consumer society constitute the context within which people work out their identities. People's involvement with material culture is such that mass consumption infiltrates everyday life not only at the levels of economic processes, social activities and household structures, but also at the level of meaningful psychological experience – affecting the construction of identities, the formation of relationships, the framing of events. (84)

This quotation is central in exposing the important role that media and its consumption play in identity formation. As Lunt and Livingstone suggest, an individual may both be motivated to consumption by identity and by the possibility of achieving the identity that the consumed object may seem to promise. Casey uses these ideas as a backdrop to her discussion of Irishness as an attractive identity to advertisers and consumers alike.

Casey divides consumers of Irishness into three groups: the "sanctioned," the "deviant" and the "ancillary." The "sanctioned" are described as "the people we mean when we typically refer to 'Irish America,'" which includes "touristic-minded students to second- and third-generation middle-class Irish Americans investing in Waterford crystal to typically 'traditional' older Irish Americans (members of the Ancient Order of

Hibernians, etc.) and millions of shoppers in-between” (86). The “sanctioned” consumers are those most obviously targeted by Irish-themed catalogs, pubs, films, and other culturally specific entities. This group names itself Irish and chooses to assume identities of Irishness. Casey also states that they can be noted for “their conspicuous consumption and exhibition of mainstream Irish-themed merchandise in both public and private arenas” (86-87). The issue for members of the “sanctioned” group is one of authenticity, as they have been identified both by others and themselves as Irish in that they seek to confirm their identity as Irish and are targets for productions that appeal to their desires for confirmation of their Irishness. Filmmakers and advertisers can easily present something as authentically Irish even if their claims are tenuous or even false, creating a question of whether these “sanctioned” consumers know that what is being presented is an exaggerated or idealized version of Irishness (i.e. the charming Irish pub flown to America from Ireland piece by piece) or if the consumer can even have a fair idea of what could be an authentic portrayal of Irishness (89). In films like *Waking Ned Devine* and *The Secret of Roan Inish*, the very fact that the Irishness of the characters and landscapes are emphasized in the films in order to appeal to an audience seeking a decidedly Irish film, adds to the films’ inauthenticities because they are catering to audience expectations.

It seems obvious that the “sanctioned” group should comprise the majority of the consumers of Irishness, but Casey goes on to state that both the “deviant” and “ancillary” groups have their influence as well. For the “deviant” group, the place of Irishness as a symbol for whiteness is its central attraction, and can be used to much different purposes, such as white supremacy (93-94). The “ancillary” group “is comprised mainly of white,

suburban, middle- and upper-middle-class Americans who make little or no claim to Irish ancestry but rather appear motivated to invest in it by the recent mainstream popularity of all things Irish” (99). The “ancillary” group seems mostly to be motivated by a desire to align themselves with an attractive and admired identity that often falls into mainstream American culture. But Irishness also has the appeal of being still being set apart as a particular identity. As Casey states, “Perceptions of specialness and uniqueness are frequently articulated when Americans describe their feelings about Ireland” (101). There is an “everything” and “nothing” quality of Irishness in that it is both distinctive as an ethnicity, but also very much a part of mainstream American culture that even those claiming no Irish ethnicity, such as the “ancillary” group, can feel a part of it (101). Irishness in its “everything” quality in advertising can be seen in campaigns that incorporate Irishness even when it is unrelated to the products they are advertising.

Diane Negra discusses the use of Irishness in popular advertisements in her article, “Consuming Ireland: Lucky Charms Cereal, Irish Spring Soap and 1-800-Shamrock.” She makes the point that for some advertising campaigns, like that for Irish Spring, Irishness is very appropriate to the product and is enhanced to call attention to the friendly and quaint features of Irishness. These values, like simplicity, community and innocence, are displayed by the people shown in the television spots selling Irish Spring. The Irish Spring advertisements also feature sweeping shots of the Irish countryside, another symbol of Irishness that is easily recognizable (78). As Negra states, these advertisements “either directly or obliquely package Irishness for US consumers by deploying imagery associated with an American idea of what Irishness is” (77). These advertising campaigns become problematic in that they appropriate Irishness in a manner

that reinforces stereotypical views of Irishness. Negra goes into greater detail of a specific advertisement where residents of the small Irish town of Conneely allow Irish Spring to use the scent of their waterfall for the scent of Irish Spring's "Waterfall Clean" bar of soap. The town agrees with the naïve request on the condition that in return for the use of their waterfall's scent, they be allowed their picture on the boxes of soap. Negra dissects the specific process of commodification of Irishness happening in the television advertisement:

This ad is remarkable on two levels: first, the way in which it encapsulates so many of the signifiers of 'romantic Ireland' (the primitive people, the hyperbolic landscape, the rendering of a community of happy workers) and second, for the way in which it makes plain its own ideological operations. The ad's punch line ('They want their picture on the box') is intended to draw a laugh at the simplicity of people who fail to recognize the complex industrial operations that mandate a gulf between labour and its results. The residents of Conneely, on the one hand, claim some ownership of their own labour, but in asking to be featured on a box of soap, they also render themselves as commodities. Gleefully and ignorantly participating in their own commodification, they furnish a justification for colonial usurpation by modern conglomerates. (88)

What Negra discusses here is central to issues dealing with Irishness in film, namely the necessity that the Irish be allowed to participate in their own commodification. Many of the characters in Irish film perform much in the same manner as the Conneely residents, housed in their stereotypical roles as part of a larger production (the film itself) that will be sold using the charms of the colonial ideas ("romantic" Ireland, simple, happy people)

that make the film “Irish,” and therefore, desirable. As the criticism points out, to be savvy in the modern marketplace and have international appeal, the advertisement must present the stereotypes of Irishness that are expected by an international audience, which include the “romantic” Irish landscape and, ironically, the community of simple, “happy workers” which displays its ignorance of production. This disproportion is similar to the mixture of contemporary and pre-modern Ireland illustrated in the film *Waking Ned Devine*. The residents of the small village of Tullymore play up their country ignorance and innocence in order to con a Dublin city man out of discovering the truth about their scheme to collect the lottery winnings of a deceased resident’s ticket. This plot scheme seems to indicate that the villagers are aware of the stereotypes associated with the rural Irish and are using them to their advantages in confronting a slick city man, showing that they are neither ignorant nor innocent. Despite this contrasting aspect, the remainder of the film’s characterizations continually reinforces stereotypes of the Irish as drunkards, mischievous and backwards. The film also continues to promote its quirky and loveable characters and charming landscape as the more authentically Irish in contrast to the flat, boring character of the Dublin man with his inability to handle the country (the *real* Ireland). The villagers will let the city man literally buy into their acts, turning themselves into the country town full of stereotypes of rural Irishness that an urban dweller would expect. In performing in the manner, the characters of the film then make themselves into commodities that will sell the film to international audiences that want to buy into the quaint Irish village as well.

In contrast, for other advertising campaigns, Irishness is not so much represented by stereotypically Irish characters or directly linked to the product as it is used by the

advertiser for what it represents. Attractive qualities that have long been connoted with Irishness, like geniality and family values, are indirectly linked to the product advertised through its association with Irishness. These advertisement strategies display the “everything,” the desirable aspects of Irishness that are highlighted to compel sales. The “nothing” of Irishness in advertising comes from the manner in which Irish ethnicity has become so intertwined with what can be characterized as “all-American.” Not only are Irish Americans a large percentage of the population of the United States; due to the appeal of Irish roots in contemporary society, they would be likely to claim their ancestry. According to the U.S. Census Statistical Abstracts, almost 35 million Americans reported having Irish ancestry. But, as Casey’s description of the “ancillary” group suggests, having a claim to Irishness in America does not always signify a direct Irish ancestor, but possibly only a connection to the aspects of being Irish American that fall into mainstream culture. In this sense, advertising that features Irishness is attempting to appeal to the greatest number of Americans. Irishness has also become “nothing” in the ways that it has become associated with generic family and average white American lower middle and working class values (even if, for many of these products and films, the target audience of Irish Americans are more correctly placed in the middle or upper middle class economically).

Diane Negra, in her essay “The New Primitives: Irishness in Recent US Television,” describes the desire to inhabit Irishness as a way of “sentimentalizing white ethnic identity.” She also cites the use of Irish American characters in television as “a myth of ethnic enchantment” which “uses Irishness as an access route into a purified vision of family and community life that specifically compensates for the exigencies of

contemporary US culture” (229). Negra gives examples from coffee and credit card advertising campaigns that both utilize Irishness as a shortcut to the positive traits associated with Ireland in American popular culture (i.e. family values) as well as strive to make those connections with their product. She uses these examples as evidence that “Ireland is increasingly called upon to solve American identity problems, and Irishness is used to speak for American interests in new ways” (233). She goes on to cite a special issue of *Newsweek* that rated the “fitness” of European nations to make progress in the twenty first century as even more evidence of the values which Irishness has come to represent for Americans. “In an overall ranking of the ‘musts for a better society,’ an evaluation that considered such nebulous values as sustainability, fairness, harmony and readiness, Ireland was placed first” (231). It seems the key to the aptness of Ireland’s first rank were the “nebulous” values that allow Ireland to be both economically successful but still rural and simple, which “is crucial to support the kinds of fictions that now so regularly appear in US popular culture” (231-32). Negra’s comments demonstrate the ability of Irishness as an ideology to straddle definitions of identity: economically viable but not privileged, ethnic and still white and ancestral and very American. For some characters, like the men from the 1994 film *The Brothers McMullen*, Irishness is highlighted, but specifically for its relation to identities of working class Americans in traditionally Irish American areas of Chicago or Boston. In other situations, the use of an Irish American character in representing the average, working American (i.e., *Crossing Jordan*’s Max Cavanaugh – a former policeman) melds Irishness so much into a symbol of whiteness that Irishness in these situations has lost its

distinctiveness as an ethnicity and has become instead a signifier of ideologically dominant conceptions of American culture.

Negra, in general, focuses less on Irish ethnicity's ability to establish itself as a part of mainstream American culture, and much more on mainstream American culture's desire to claim a part of Irish ethnicity for its own definition. According to Negra in her introduction to the anthology, *The Irish in Us*, an important contributing factor to the clamor for Irish identity lies in what she terms the "terror of white decline" (2). In the face of multiculturalism and transnationalism, whiteness has lost much of its dominating power. In fact, because of past abuses of power, whiteness, and in particular the white male, had fallen under some scrutiny by the end of the twentieth century. While the benefits that came with being white are still attractive, it is no longer respectable to proudly proclaim whiteness. Most white Americans (and particularly white males) want to deny past or present participation in the white power structure. Irishness became a way that a person could retain the ease and given power that has long been associated with whiteness, while still claiming multiculturalism in embracing Irishness as an ethnicity. Irishness allows a person to be both white and ethnic, a position which would detract from the negative associations of dominance that a person would attract in emphasizing his or her whiteness without any ethnic attachment. As Negra states, "claiming Irishness often authorizes a location and celebration of whiteness in ways that would otherwise be problematic" (15). Although the ethnicity is particularly white, Irishness is, nonetheless, an ethnicity. In turn, Irishness became a "white ethnicity."

Irishness also had an advantage in attractiveness over whiteness due to Ireland's history as a colonized nation. Irishness might be termed non-white because of England's

past rule over the Irish, making them subservient to the white, English aristocracy that had power in Ireland. Ireland under this model takes part in the shared suffering of previously colonized nations, especially in taking into account the oppression of native Irish culture and language. This suffering can be seen as giving Irish ethnicity a form of legitimacy. From this position, it is easy to compare the Irish Diaspora to the African Diaspora scattered through the Black Atlantic after enduring a long and often deadly trip through the Middle Passage. Also, in America, both races were seen as, to some degree, sub-human and were treated as such with employers often barring either from jobs.⁴ In her essay in *The Irish in Us*, “‘Still ‘Black’ and ‘Proud’: Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia,” Catherine Eagan goes so far as to question whether Irish Americans are to be considered “white negroes” (23). Statements such as the often remarked upon “I’m black and I’m proud” from the film *The Commitments* were curiously welcomed by Irish and Irish Americans: “This dialogue and its enthusiastic reception are so important because they demonstrate the Irish and Irish American tendency to link ‘Irishness to a heritage of oppression that is in many ways distant from their present day lives’” (Eagan 21). Eagan describes how Irishness lets its subscribers reclaim a “lost innocence” and past suffering inherited from their ancestors as well as a manner of maintaining “pride and victimization, assertion without their need for defensiveness” (23-28). Nevertheless, the differences between the (arguably) elective migration of the Irish (even the indentured servants) and the forced migration of the African slaves must be noted. One must also take into consideration the earlier acceptance of the Irish as equals to the populations that fit the narrow definition that

⁴ The place of the Irish as sub-human is evident in the cartoons of the Stage Irishman displayed later in this thesis.

“whiteness” carried in the days of mass immigration of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the difference that made in the experiences of oppression of Irish and African Americans in America. Despite these differences, the late 20th century saw a resurgence in the focus on the suffering of the Irish as a nation, especially from the Irish American Diaspora. Events such as the 1997 150th Anniversary of the worst year of the Irish Famine (1847) called past injustices and afflictions in Irish history to the forefront with the dedication of memorials, such as those in New York and Boston. Irish Americans could celebrate their success in America in contrast to the humble beginnings that compelled their ancestors to leave their beloved Ireland to try their hands in America, Australia and other new lands.

In spite of these similarities, there is further reason to separate the experiences of the African Diaspora from that of the Irish Diaspora. Eagan is careful to point out that while Irish Americans can benefit from claiming an ethnicity while still maintaining whiteness, they are able to adhere to an ethnicity that will not greatly alter their mainstream middle-class American life. She states:

...Ethnicity is not something that influences Irish Americans' lives unless they want it to. They can embrace their ethnicity through purchases, leisure activities, and even political involvement but still enjoy the advantages of being white in America's racially hierarchical society. (28)

At this level of Irish identification through consumption, the individual will still remain, for most purposes, white.

On the extreme end of the discussion, Irishness could be taken to represent whiteness. In the rise of the Irish identity to an esteemed race, some began to use

Irishness as an exclusively white identity. Natasha Casey uses the example of white supremacist Stormfront's website, which includes the nationalist flag of Ireland ("Erin go Bragh"), the Northern Irish loyalist Red Hand of Ulster flag, St. George's Cross and St. Andrew's Cross flags (English and Scottish) and the Red Dragon flag from Wales next to the flag for Stormfront itself. Casey argues that the message of ethnic identity is mixed:

The message on display here, however, is both blunt and jumbled. On the one hand, signifiers of English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish ethnicity operate as Aryan ideological camouflage. In light of the widespread appeal of Irish/Celtic culture, Stormfront's visual assemblage demonstrates astute marketing awareness of the 'everything and nothing' nature of these identities. That is, the Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh flags are semiotically broad enough to encourage mainstream audiences to align themselves with the group, while at the same time the inclusion of the Stormfront flag specifically defines its audience as white supremacist. On the other hand the photograph contains some ideologically confusing signs, most obviously in the symbolic alliance of Irish nationalism with Ulster loyalism! This suggests that understandings of Irishness in the United States are simultaneously multidimensional and contradictory. In an unceasingly racialized society, Irishness has come to connote a distinctive, though rarely publicly announced, ideology of whiteness. (94)

In this instance, Irishness has been adopted for an identity that has little, in reality and despite the suggestions of very specific Irish flags, to do with the Irishness that is embraced by what Natasha Casey termed the "sanctioned" group discussed earlier. This example also shows the manner in which an identity of Irishness can be deployed

regardless of how little information the user actually has of Ireland, hence the ironic positioning of both a symbol of Irish nationalism and one of Ulster Loyalism side-by-side, proposing that these fiercely opposing political groups have similar ideals. Nonetheless, Negra makes a strong case for recognizing the degree to which white America desires to claim Irish ethnicity for its own.

Chapter 2: The Commodification of Irishness in Irish Film

The Success of Irishness in America: *Riverdance*

In her essay “*Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish American*,” Natasha Casey uses the successes of *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* as evidence of the appeal of Irishness to Americans, particularly in the mid-1990s. These shows attempt to offer new definitions of Irishness by making old themes, like traditional Irish music and dance, contemporary and easily marketable to Irish Americans. Casey’s examinations of the films touch upon many of the ideas that will be discussed later in analyses of other Irish films, and are, therefore, a particularly relevant transition from the theories discussed in Chapter One to films that cinematically exemplify those theories.⁵ As Casey reports, *Riverdance* was first performed as an interval performance piece for the 1994 Eurovision song contest in Dublin and received such a response from the audience that it was expanded into a full length performance. The success of the show was evident with sold out performances in Ireland and in other countries (when the show toured), prompting the film version of *Riverdance*, which would achieve boundless popularity worldwide by 1996. The first half of *Riverdance* (1995) focuses on the connection between Ireland’s first inhabitants and nature. Songs and dances pay tribute to Irish folk heroes and explore a spirituality that comes from nature and celebrate its power and mystery. The second half of *Riverdance* features an Irish character who must immigrate to America. The show carries him from his departure to his arrival in the United States where he must overcome

⁵ Although *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* are considered documentaries and differ from many of the narrative films that will dominate most of the discussion of the last two sections of this thesis, They still employ Irish “characters” and themes which are similar to those in narrative films and are especially relevant in examining stereotypes of Irishness in Irish film in general.

hardships and make friends with his fellow immigrants (who hail from many countries). *Riverdance* concludes with an Irish American's trip to Ireland, a land he has never seen. But, because of the character's strong ties to his ancestry, he feels that he has arrived home. *Riverdance*, then, utilizes two subject matters, Celtic art and spirituality and Irish immigration, which are of great interest to Irish Americans.

Casey states that *Riverdance* "embodied a new respectable Irishness" that would fill in the void created by the increasing disuse of the stage Irishman, whose characterization was no longer acceptable (12).⁶ The Stage Irishman was portrayed as a happy-go-lucky buffoon who is constantly tipsy and quite shiftless and uneducated, a characterization that makes the "savage" Irishman non-threatening in both his lack of ability and ignorance. The Stage Irishman was given a simian-like appearance (a physical representation of his place as a lower order of human than the colonizer) and was rarely seen without a tattered tail coat, clay pipe and shillelagh, which was often used for mischief. The Stage Irishman's appearance and portrayal showed him as ignorant, unstable, dirty, childish, indolent, superstitious and primitive, much like the characterization of Black Americans at the time, as the following Thomas Nast cartoon suggests.

⁶ This characterization had its roots in colonialist ideas, as *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* explains in its definitions of the Stage Irishman: "Stage-Irishman, a term for stereotypical Irish characters on the English-language stage from the 17th century, also applied to characters in fiction in whom Irish national characteristics are emphasized or distorted. As a product of colonialism, the first stage-Irishman reflected a desire to stigmatize the native Irish as savages or anathematize them as traitors, while later versions sought more commonly to provide amusement to English audiences by exaggerating the traits which differentiated the Irish from the English. His chief identifying marks were disorderly manners and insalubrious habits, together with the Hiberno-English dialect or brogue and a concomitant propensity for illogical utterance" ("Stage-Irishman").

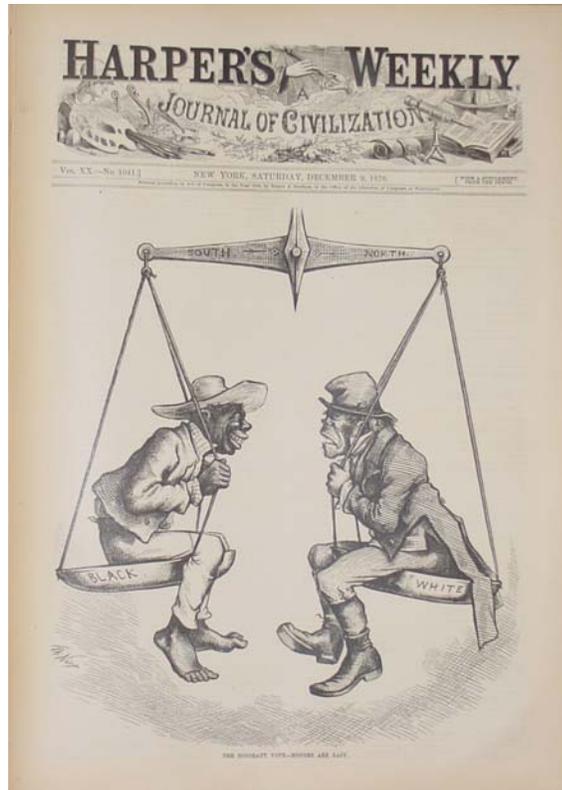


Figure 1

In contrast, *Riverdance* shows an array of alternative Irish identities including a powerful and spiritual Irishman who dresses in somewhat flashy and modern clothing, as well as an Irish immigrant who is tolerant and successful.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Riverdance is also a clear example of a cultural production that is consciously mindful of the connections between African and Irish Americans, particularly in terms of emigration to the United States. The central scene of shared stage presence in *Riverdance* is a back-and-forth of ethnically-allied dance (for African Americans it is tap dance, for the Irish Americans it is traditional step dancing) that takes place shortly after both have arrived in the United States. There is some irony here in *Riverdance*'s depiction of the early experiences of Irish immigrants to America, as they were considered neither successful nor tolerant at the time. As Casey reports, in the 19th century "physiognomy, phrenology, and other 'sciences' established the Irish in popular culture realms as a group less than 'white'" (15). The Irish would have wanted to distance themselves from other less desirable ethnicities (i.e. African-Americans) in their climb up the ladder to move from being considered a "black" race to a "white" race. Despite the fact that historically the Irish immigrants of the 19th century were not particularly warm to Black Americans, *Riverdance* uses music and dance from the Black immigrant community to highlight a bonding over shared experience with Irish immigrants.⁷

Casey also discusses *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* as merely a pair of examples in a mass of Irish music, symbols, film and identities that were increasingly desirable to Irish Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. During last century Irishness transitioned from being considered in what she describes as the "category 'black' (race) to 'white' (ethnicity)" (15). She points out that not only did thirty-nine million Americans designate themselves as having Irish ancestry in the 2000 census, but Irish

⁷ Catherine Eagan reports in her essay "Still 'Black' and 'Proud': Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia," "Whatever connections Irish Americans may have made between the Irish cause and those of other colonized or oppressed peoples, they were generally hostile to the suggestion that Irish Americans and African Americans had anything in common" (21-22).

Americans have also “emphatically articulated” their Irishness, notably in the last two decades. As Casey declares, “The label Irish has migrated from connoting an ethnicity to a race to a blurring of the two categories – Irish American – in which it now signifies both a race (exclusively white) and an ethnicity (fashionably Irish)” (16).

This new version of Irishness, which is present in *Riverdance*, was particularly popular with white middle-class Irish Americans and can account for a large portion of the success of the productions. The star of the shows, Michael Flatley, was a great attraction for American audiences as he was the perfect example of the American Dream. He was also particularly appealing for Irish Americans, because he grew up poor in Chicago with his working-class Irish immigrant parents before his success. Casey states:

Flatley also consistently frames his story in American maverick versus European traditionalist’s terms. In a 1997 interview for the Los Angeles Times, Flatley explains the European critics’ bias against him: ‘I did it my way, which may be more flamboyant than the British press cared for, but it’s typically American....’ (13)

By the late 1990s, the shows had such status that they were parodied in commercials (for Apple Jacks and Dr. Pepper), television and films (like 2000’s *Scary Movie*) that featured characters participating in Irish step dancing and wearing costumes similar to those of Flatley’s productions (14). After Ireland’s economic success of the late 20th century and the success of Irish immigrants in America through the last century, Irish identity was no longer associated with being poor, idiotic and dirty, like the Stage Irishman.

But, as Casey also discusses, stereotypes of Irishness were not abolished, merely reworked into something marketable:

...[although the Irish] have been subject to enormous stereotyping in the United States and Britain, the imperial ideology that viewed them as a quirky and amusing nation — though of course incapable of running their own affairs — can be comfortably reworked and utilized to sell the new economically successful, but still ‘Irish’ Ireland. (14)

This reworking of imperial ideologies relates to the commodification of Ireland as a rural beautiful land peopled with simple “folk,” waiting to welcome their Irish American cousins “home.” This vision of pastoral Ireland calling Irish Americans home is very attractive to suburban and urban dwelling Irish Americans. Casey quotes Jonathan Culler stating “one of the characteristics of modernity is the belief that authenticity has been lost and exists only in the past” (19). This belief allows Irish Americans to rely on their Irish roots for authenticity. Irishness symbolizes tradition and a culture that embraces the worth of pre-modern traditions like folk music, poetry and oral storytelling. The view of the Irish as quirky has changed for the offspring of Irish emigrants from a negative view (laziness or backwardness) by its colonizers to a positive view of the Irish as “lovable,” unique and “simple,” with their respected traditional ways which are uncomplicated by the pressures of modern urban life (20). The charm of Irish traditions for Irish Americans can also be seen in the popularity of Irish language and dance classes around the time that *Riverdance* was popular. Irish Americans might believe that they can gain authenticity by acquiring the skills that would bring their ancestors’ folk traditions into their own lives.

Through *Riverdance*, Irish Americans may look to gain authenticity by means of a connection to the Celticism that is spread throughout the production. This seems to

contradict what the producer of *Riverdance*, Moya Doherty, asserts. Casey quotes Doherty, “I was tired of cliché images of Ireland...I wanted to show the Ireland that I know and love, that it is modern and in step” (12). *Riverdance* could be considered modern in that it is complemented with flashy costumes, complicated lighting sets and rock and electronic music. But, the show is still based on music and forms of dancing that are hundreds of years old. Both *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* fall into clichés in their use of popular culture’s understanding of “Celtic” as main influences in set and costume design, music and in their narratives. They use a vague idea of spirituality that is often viewed as Celtic or as stemming from the ancient druids. They play to the idea of this type of spirituality being closer to nature and as a way to connect to a lost past. The productions use influences of Celtic myths, like the story of Cuchulainn, in their storylines as well as feature dances and songs that celebrate nature and the elements. Poet Theo Dorgan was commissioned to write for *Riverdance*, including a narrative introduction to the song “Reel Around the Sun,” in which the sun is worshipped as “Our Lord and Father.” The narrative describes the Irish as children of the sun and elements and in awe of their healing and driving forces. All of these factors add to the shows appeal to an audience that popularized New Age “Celtic” music and Celtic knotwork.

Although the terms “Irish” and “Celtic” are often interchanged, their definitions, and more importantly, their connotations, are distinct. On paper, “Irish” is used in the demographic context and means that which is associated with the country of Ireland, sometimes specifically The Republic of Ireland, but more often both The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. “Celtic,” on the other hand, refers to a broader grouping of peoples, including populations in Ireland, Britain and parts of France and Spain. “Celtic”

is often linked with ancient Ireland and its inhabitants while the term Irish is more often used with modern Ireland and its population. But, perhaps the most common and significant difference in the uses of the terms is the use of “Celtic” in defining the spirituality associated with ancient Ireland. “Celtic” appears frequently in descriptions of the spirituality of the rural west of Ireland and implies a primitive mysticism that dominates the definitions of religion in ancient Ireland. The term “Celtic” has also acquired a strong correlation to the New Age movement that the term “Irish” has evaded. In the 1990s New Age musicians enjoyed a rank of popularity higher than any they had achieved before, or since. Leading the group was the Irish-born Enya, whose music could be deemed the definition of “Celtic” music. The popular group “The Chieftains,” on the other hand, is classified as “Irish,” and markedly not “Celtic,” because of their adherence to strictly traditional Irish folk music without any influence of New Age music. Not only is a good portion of New Age music described as “Celtic,” much of New Age spirituality is as well. Celticism offers a tranquility and timelessness that is meant to be universally appealing. There are countless prayer and meditation books self-described as Celtic. In these works Celticism offers an intimacy with nature and a pre-modern purity unavailable in contemporary, industrial society. This purity is highly marketable and remains a heavily commodified version of Irishness. Ironically, it is Celticism’s seeming distance from consumerism that is part of its appeal. As the quotation Diane Negra uses from Thomas L. Friedman’s 2001 *New York Times* article suggests, “People all over the world are looking to Ireland for its reservoir of spirituality, hoping to siphon off what they can to feed their souls, which have become hungry for something other than consumerism and computers” (*Irish in Us* 9).

The Irish Film of the Rural West: *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Waking Ned Devine*

The films *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Waking Ned Devine* exemplify what Natasha Casey alludes to in her discussion of Irish folk and the “Celtic” in film. Like *Riverdance*, director Kirk Jones’ *Waking Ned Devine* (1998) recalls a sort of Celtic spirit while director John Sayles’ *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) uses Celtic spirituality to bring ancient myth into the mid-twentieth century for the main narrative. Both are also examples of a common trope of Irish film, that of the quaint, pre-modern, rural west of Ireland. *The Secret of Roan Inish*, like *Waking Ned Devine*, aligns Irishness with the rural west of Ireland, but goes deeper in Irish historical identity by setting its narrative in a mythical, pre-colonized Ireland. The film opens with its main character, the young Fiona, searching for her father while walking through a factory with menacing looking machines as well as a dirty, smoky city pub. The bartender in the pub comments that this is “no place to be raising a child” with the “poison airs” of the city. The only respectable thing to do would be to take the child back to the country, where it will be healthier for the child. And so, Fiona travels west to live with her grandparents on their rural farm. The audience eventually learns, through the grandfather’s traditional storytelling, that the family used to live on a small island, Roan Inish, but had to be evacuated from the islands during severe storms some years before. The move reflects the actual evacuation of the Blasket Islands in the 1950s in Ireland.

Fiona continually revisits the island in an attempt to reconnect with her brother, Jamie, who was lost during the evacuation. Jamie is one of the “dark ones” of the Coneely family. Fiona’s cousin Taig, thought of as suspicious in the mainland town, is

one of the “dark ones” himself and he tells Fiona that the reason for the “dark ones” in the family is because of their ancestor, Finnoula, who was a Selkie (a mythical half-seal/half-human). He states that he has seen Fiona’s brother, Jamie, and tells her that Jamie has not been lost, “only living with another branch of the family” - the seals. These relations with the seals are a symbol of Roan Inish not just as a place of myth, but also as a place where humanity is inextricably tied with nature, an important aspect of Celtic spirituality. In their article, “Between Worlds: Considering Celtic Feminine Identities in *The Secret of Roan Inish*,” Emily Selby and Deborah Dixon discuss the relationships that the female characters, especially Fiona, have with nature. Fiona begins to understand her position in the rural west of Ireland and her connections to its spiritual and natural aspects.

As Fiona comes more into contact with the spirit world that underlies the everyday – as she becomes the mediator between the natural and the supernatural elements of Roan Inish, fashioning their impact upon each other – her qualities of strength and courage are brought forth. (7)

But it isn’t only Fiona that must contend with nature and receive moral fortitude from it. In the film, all of the residents rely on the land for their livelihood, food and shelter, but they must also know the sea and the weather. As Fiona’s grandfather states, Roan Inish is a place “where man and beast lived side-by-side, sharing the sea.” In the modern and urban world, man, beast and the sea, and by insinuation, man and the spiritual world, are separate.

Fiona becomes convinced that Jamie will come back to the family if they move back to Roan Inish. At the same time, Fiona’s grandparents learn that their rented house

is going to be bought by “wealthy people from overseas” (much like the return in *The Field* of Tom Berenger’s character back to Ireland to buy land after getting rich in America) for their summer home. The grandmother then comments that “It’s the times,” and that everyone wants to “march into the future” and that they “just get left behind.” But the answer to the Coneelys’ trouble is not to try to modernize like others; rather, it is to delve deeper into the past and return to their roots. The reappearance of Jamie at the end of the film in the presence of the seals is an affirmation of the myth as reality in the film. Taig’s stories are true and there is harmony now that the family has moved back to Roan Inish and has reconnected with their Celtic, pre-colonized cultural identities. The Ireland of the Coneelys’ future is not the mainland of Ireland that shows the dangers of modern and urban development, but a regression back to Ireland’s “pure origins.” Ruth Barton discusses *The Secret of Roan Inish*’s use of regression in relation to the film’s marketing to international audiences in her essay “The Ballykissangelization of Ireland.” She states that the film was widely distributed in America and Britain, but had only a limited release in Ireland, suggesting that “this regressive image of Irish society is more commercially viable outside of its home territory,” and that the film does not give a genuine ideology of contemporary Ireland (425). Barton proposes that the film actually relies on mythology in order to avoid the question of authenticity. The film chooses an escape to the past instead of clarifying historical events for its audience. She writes:

“Their [the filmmakers] harnessing of Irish mythology endows them with a sense of the past in the present which is heightened by incorporating it into universal narratives of late twentieth-century life (alienation, marital break-up, etc.). The

employment of mythology in particular enables them simultaneously to bypass more uncomfortable historical facts. (425)

The lure of Roan Inish does not seem to be solely a symbol for the Irish to return to their origins and escape to the pre-modern. The film alludes to the Irish international migration to other countries as well as the intranational move away from the island. In an interview printed in *The New York Times* given by Stephen Holden, John Sayles confirms the theme of returning to Ireland with his statement, “Where so many Irish songs and stories are about leaving Ireland, this was about people making the decision to go back to their roots. It [*The Secret of Roan Inish*] became an exploration of roots in general and what they mean to people” (13). The sea journeys and the constant presence of boats in the film echo the image of ships that have become so tied to Irish emigration. In fact, Jamie’s cradle bears a distinct resemblance to a ship, and it is both what first takes him away from the island, and what takes him back to Roan Inish.



Figure 4

But it is mostly in the nostalgic call back “home,” the reassurance that happiness lies in return, that the film resonates with the Irish American diaspora. The film also insinuates, through nature’s manipulation to move the Coneelys’ back to Roan Inish, that the land itself, that Ireland itself, is calling for the immigrant to come back to reconcile with her origins. Innocence, in the form of the child, Jamie, will be given back to the traveler if she will return to the simplicity of pre-modern, rural Ireland and away from urban life, whether it is in Dublin or New York.

Waking Ned Devine is an example of film that presents an image of Ireland as a “home” for the Irish Diaspora as well. This “home” remains a nostalgic, fixed Ireland with an innocent morality, beautiful scenery, quaint people and lifestyles, and a welcoming community. This place of Ireland as “home” was important for Irish immigrants as a way to maintain connections to their identities as Irish. For Irish Americans, Ireland as “home” becomes a way to define a cultural identity of Irishness as well as a way to maintain a relationship with Ireland as ancestral land. In the series *The Irish Empire*, Kerby Miller even goes so far as to state that in the Irish diaspora’s imagination Ireland frequently operates as a “pastoral never-never land to which Irish-Americans should return to spiritually replenish themselves at the source of their history and their identity” (quoted in Negra “New Primitives” 231). As these films illustrate, these ideas of Irishness are mostly created after one has left Ireland and are debatable as truth because they are creations of what the diaspora would like to imagine as “home.” In his book, *The Ex-Isle of Erin*, Fintan O’Toole discusses the nature of Irish immigration and the relationships between the Irish Diaspora and Ireland. He asserts that nostalgia for

Ireland is a common and strong feeling for Irish immigrants and is deeply rooted in their shared cultural origins. “It is particularly true of Irish culture that the imagination itself is inextricable from the idea of home, usually made powerful by the act of leaving it” (O’Toole 136). It could be for this reason that the images of Ireland and the Irish in these films do tend to be dominated by the pastoral Ireland of the past. It is not a contemporary or modernizing Ireland that the Irish American is used to seeing as “home,” nor may they want to see modern Ireland as home. It is far too like the urban America and would not be the escape to innocence and community that Irish Americans might want to believe is waiting for them back “home” in Ireland.

Both *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Waking Ned Devine* bear resemblances to the version of Ireland that Eamon De Valera, former president of Ireland, wanted to create. They are perfect examples of the pastoral utopia that De Valera sought to project as Ireland’s cultural identity. There is a sense that De Valera was actually searching for a move backward to re-establish a pre-colonial Ireland. As O’Toole states, “The grand narrative of a society moving from the pre-modern to the modern to the post-modern, breaks down in Ireland” (131). After the Anglo-Irish and Civil wars, as well as hundreds of years of struggle, the Irish were concerned with maintaining the nationalist cultural identity that they were finally free to express in their self-governance. De Valera seemed to be “protecting” this Irish culture from outside influence, as well as moving as far away from the power of Ireland’s former colonizer, England, as the country could manage. One form of this protection was censorship, as noted earlier. Another was to promote the Nationalist vision of an ideal Ireland. As Martin McLoone states, rural Ireland “played an important ideological role in Ireland itself, linked to the particular nationalist

imaginings of time and representing the essence of what was seen as Ireland's difference to the industrialized world of Britain in particular" ("Re-imagining the Nation" 30). But, ironically, while they were used to differentiate Ireland from England, these stereotyped visions were also reflections of the cultural identities as simple and unprogressive that England gave Ireland. Harvey O'Brien discusses what Frantz Fanon delineates as problematic in a postcolonial shift to a pre-modern nationalism:

In one sense, representations that replicate the clichés of the colonizer are part of the process of regression to tribalism described by Frantz Fanon. Fanon argued that though the emergent postcolonial society seeks to shed itself of its colonial baggage, its attempts to cultivate a national concept of self are frequently a retreat into tribalism and myths of racial purity. (60)

Attempts to retreat to pre-colonial identities in order to establish "a national concept of self" could be dangerous for a family like the Coneelys'. In Fanon's view, the Coneelys' would try to shed the postcolonial identities forced on Ireland (and themselves) by retreating into their past on the islands. Therefore, the Coneelys' would form their own racially pure tribe of family by default in their removal to the deserted islands. This tribe would be mostly devoid of any outside influence, self-governed and isolated from international exchange – all negative effects of shedding colonial baggage in this manner of retreat, according to Fanon.

The film *Waking Ned Devine*, like *The Secret of Roan Inish*, acts as a pastoral, depicting a beautiful and rural Ireland. Unlike *The Secret of Roan Inish*, *Waking Ned Devine* is set in the rather contemporary 1990s Ireland, but, nonetheless it reflects an Ireland of the past. In these films the people and the settings work together to present an

Ireland only slightly affected by modernization and comfortable in its lack of change. *Waking Ned Devine* opens with traditional Irish music playing in the background as one of the main characters, Jackie, is watching television. The mix of the old, traditional music, with the new, the televised, is indicative of several moments in the film, but on the whole, the old takes precedence. This mixture seems designed to sell well to Irish Americans. As Natasha Casey states in “*Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish American*,” “American popular culture during the last decade or so has reinforced distinct and often contradictory images of Irishness, images that simultaneously reject and encourage historically familiar stereotypes” (11). The presence of an historical Ireland familiar to Irish Americans despite the modern time period of *Waking Ned Devine* is apparent even at the very beginning of the film. During the titles, the film uses the song “Fisherman’s Blues” by The Waterboys, a fairly popular rock song in Ireland in the 1990s, which signals the film as contemporary, but the song is heavily influenced by Irish traditional music. This influence is paralleled by the sweeping camera shots of the Irish countryside that further set this film as a rural narrative.

The film portrays a small community in the West of Ireland that resembles an extended family, not always in perfect harmony, but strong in its support of its members. The quaintness of the community is highlighted by two of the main characters, Jackie and Michael, quirky, old country men who, with the help of their community, embark on a scheme to collect the recently deceased Ned Devine’s lottery winnings. In doing so, the men must outwit a slick Dubliner. Even though Jackie’s wife has doubts to his abilities, the rural community ultimately wins out over the Dublin city man who is so out of place in Tullymore. The film reinforces the purity and good-naturedness of people of the West

with their triumph through altruistic cooperation. But the quaintness of the film can be considered problematic in its portrayal of Irishness. As *Waking Ned Devine* wasn't even filmed in Ireland, the scenic Tullymore is imagined. The film's characters also fall into many of the trappings of Stage Irishmen (stereotypical characterizations discussed previously in this thesis). The characters are comical, a little backwards, and, as the youngest member of the community states, will "spend all of their winnings in the pub." Casey describes how the film maintains troubling stereotypes of Irishness:

[*Waking Ned Devine*] successfully managed to utilize stock characteristics from both traditional and decidedly modern Irishness repositories. While the film contains many clichéd and traditional cinematic signifiers of Ireland – including a dramatic rural landscape, white-washed cottages, excessive drinking, priests, and ubiquitous musical locals – folk values in the village are temporarily disrupted by the prospect and subsequent introduction of lottery money, and even the Catholic church agrees to deceive the authorities for £130,000. Predictably, though, by the film's conclusion the villagers quickly abandon their newfound greed and restore their "true" values. (12)

Maggie, one of the only characters that knows that her son's father was Ned Devine, and consequently that her son is the heir to his winnings, tells Jackie (one of the mastermen behind the lottery scheme) that it is more important for her son to have family (hinting that she might let Finn, a former and probably future lover, believe that her child is also his) than it is for him to have money. The film does attempt to play with Irish stereotypes through Maggie's and Finn's characters. The closest the film gets to making commentary

on Irish stock characters is in the conversations between Maggie and Finn. Maggie recites a love poem to Finn, but Maggie is not a romantic Bard; she is actually writing the poem to sell to a greeting card company. This usurpation of Ireland's heritage of Romantic literature for monetary gains exemplifies what Casey describes as a post-colonial response from Ireland to established images of Irishness. Maggie and Finn have several purposely melodramatic love scenes that parody stereotyped interactions of young Irish lovers that even international audiences would recognize as familiar. But, despite these attempts, the film does not manage to move beyond the stereotype of Irishness of the rural, old-fashioned small town of the West unaffected by new technology.

Selling Ireland in Tourist Films

In his essay, "Culture, Commodity, and Céad Míle Fáilte: U.S. and Irish Tourist Films as a Vision of Ireland," Harvey O'Brien states, "The Irish have long been aware of the necessity to commodify their culture" (61). This statement not only applies to films like *Waking Ned Devine* and *The Secret of Roan Inish*, but it also applies to promotional films made for prospective tourists of Ireland and is an idea that O'Brien keeps in mind throughout his discussion of Irish tourism films. Irish tourism films have reflected this commodification of Irish culture since the 1930's. Films such as James A. Fitzpatrick's *Glimpses of Erin* (1934), which featured ever-smiling, poor farmers, and Patrick Carey's *Yeats Country* (1965), which alludes to Yeats' Romantic poetry while showcasing Irish pastoral landscapes, are fairly indicative of early tourism films. These films would often appeal to the images of Ireland that the Irish diaspora held of their ancestral "home." The

filmmakers, in order to fulfill the diaspora's anticipations of the cultural experience their Irish adventure would be, needed to present a "friendly, leisurely Ireland" that is, above all, hospitable to the visitors returning to their ancestral roots. Tourist films also have the special ability to address both the voyeurism of the tourist and that of the film viewer.

Ruth Barton discusses this combination of consumption in her article "The Ballykissangelization of Ireland." She describes the connection that occurs through the action of viewing:

The tourist industry successfully marketed an organized mobility, arrayed prearranged 'sights' in narrative sequence. The guidebook served as textual captions to otherwise visual 'sights.' This commoditized combination of voyeurism (*sightseeing*) and narrative grew in parallel with the industries of telegraphy, photography, and the cinema. The subjective effects on the tourist are not unlike those of the cinema spectator. Tourism produces an escape from boundaries, it legitimates the transgression of one's static, stable or fixed location. The tourist simultaneously embodies both a position of presence and absence, of here and elsewhere, of avowing one's curiosity and disavowing one's daily life. (413-414)

With this in mind, cinematography is an extremely important aspect of tourist films as the camera's sense of space, movement and placement especially need to appeal to the gaze of the audience. O'Brien adds that the cinematography and other formal choices in tourist films are highly indicative of a kind of cinematic catering to a consuming audience; in projecting "images of the country designed to achieve specific ends, tourist films give perhaps the strongest indication not necessarily of what a country thinks of

itself, but of what its cultural industries believe is expected of it” (58). Tourism films have an ability to present featured images of Ireland outright as a product to be consumed and can manipulate the desire of the films’ viewers, a target audience. “Tourism is tailoring: it matches product to market in a way that engages both the qualities of the place in question and the expectations of the consumer” (59). O’Brien elaborates further with his comment, “Though it may not have been elevated to the level of an articulated concept of self, this approach is at least evident in the schism between the image of Ireland promoted by the tourist industry from the 1950s, (Bord Fáilte was established in 1955), which actively proposed a romantic, pastoral ideal, and informational films made for distribution within Ireland, which emphasized industry and progress” (61). The tourist industry both wanted to reassure Irish citizens of Ireland’s desirability as a flourishing, current country to live and work in and tourists of Ireland of its desirability as a beautiful, quaint and historic place to visit. The tourism films that showed Ireland as modern only in the convenience of its accommodations and shopping and that mostly featured the scenery and attractions of the west of Ireland were successful with both visitors from England and America because “they relied on established imagery and romantic myths of rurality which correspond with their view of the country formed in the past” (O’Brien 72). These pre-formed images of Ireland stand as symbols of the whole of Ireland. When the signifier is predetermined, cultural productions are easier to write or create and to understand and consume with an audience in mind, as in the case of visions of Ireland for English and American visitors. Although, the predetermined images make it more difficult for Irish tourism filmmakers to present modern, urban Ireland in the face of audience expectations. One needs only to consider the popularity of John Ford’s *The*

Quiet Man for proof of these interrelations in film consumption. The cinematography of and characterization of Irishness in *The Quiet Man* acted as a self-perpetuating signifier of Irish landscape and culture in that it was originally created in order to reflect the Ireland that English and American viewers would expect to see, but, following its popularity with international audiences, its cinematography and characterization became symbols themselves, in which the films' images and depictions confirmed and even developed English and American expectations of Ireland.

A good example of the usual tactics for tourism advertising for Ireland appears on the website Ireland.ie, the "Official Home Holidays website for Fáilte Ireland." The site offers three different methods to focus a search for travel plans in Ireland. The first, "Uncover your civilised side," uses a picture icon of an aesthetically pleasing ruined fort. This photograph is followed by an offer to "Experience Ireland's rich literature, traditions and heritage sites." This combination of image and text allows for a vision of Ireland that is both pre-modern and modern in that it features an ancient structure, focuses on tradition and keeps far from technology while remaining civilized and not at all primitive. The next image needs little description as it is the "featured location." This icon need do nothing else beyond mention a feature of Ireland's "splendid scenery," a typical selling point for tourism in Ireland. The last icon, the only to include people in its image, lures with promise of adventure. This image and text does something similar to the first in that it is modern, offering thrill-seeking adventure and the means of accessing that adventure (i.e. a motorized boat), but still keeps with the traditions of ancient Ireland by featuring fishing, an activity that has been both a common livelihood of Ireland's past and popular with tourists. In both the first and last icon the old has become new again. The website

offers what one would expect of Ireland, the stereotypes of heritage, landscape and tradition.



Figure 5

These three “categories” of what Ireland has to offer for tourism are completely devoid of urban landscape and indicate little contemporary development in general. The website confirms that the internet has somewhat taken the place of the tourist film for Ireland. The internet provides web users the ability to experience Ireland exactly as they want it to be and without physically having to travel. Diane Negra claims that “more than any other national identity, Irishness now both travels and inspires travel, increasingly manifesting symptoms of complete virtuality” (9). This virtual travel seems to be necessary according to Negra because “the expectations of diaspora tourists that Ireland’s present is always their past are less and less likely to be sustainable in contemporary Dublin or Galway, yet homeland fantasies may now no longer require an actual homeland visit’ (9). Now the internet can be used to sell the Irishness that the actual Ireland can no longer

maintain because it is too modern for the Ireland that cultural productions have led tourists to believe still exists.

But the above-mentioned Romantic Ireland campaigns aren't the only promotions that the Tourist Boards had used in commodifying Irishness. Spurgeon Thompson discusses tourism advertising campaigns for Northern Ireland in his article, "The Commodification of Culture and Decolonialization of Northern Ireland." Around the time of the IRA ceasefire in 1995, Northern Ireland was portrayed as a place of "anti-tourism" when appealing to visitors because it offered an alternative to traditional vacations in Ireland. The Northern Irish Tourist Board (NITB) listed "curiosity post cease-fires" as a draw for tourists in a report titled "The Cultural Sector: A Development Opportunity for Tourism in Northern Ireland" (53). The report recommended encouraging this curiosity to increase tourism. The report states, "Many people around the world have heard of Northern Ireland but often for the wrong reasons. They may be motivated to visit simply to see why there should be such conflict in modern society. The opportunity to harness this 'curiosity factor' should not be overlooked as a positive factor in encouraging people to visit and understand Northern Ireland" (53). In order to cater to this curiosity factor shared by people who most likely do not have a full understanding of the political situation in Northern Ireland, the NITB would need to allude to the history of Troubles without laying out particulars. The NITB does not want tourists to ask too many questions and the Board does not want to take a political stance. As Thompson states, the answer comes with consumerism: "If curiosity is managed within the strict orderings of consumer capitalism, where subjects are understood as consumers not critical agents, for example, then the tourist board can deflate the potential threat

represented by curious visitors” (54). The “curious” visitors will not ask questions; rather, they will consume the ordered, “visitor friendly” version of the Troubles that the NITB wants the visitor to have.

The Board recognized the curiosity that the violence in Northern Ireland piqued for tourists that wanted an “authentic” experience. The key for the Northern Irish Tourist Board was to de-politicize the situation in Northern Ireland, therefore making any signs of past violence non-threatening. The Troubles would become understandable and commodified. Spurgeon Thompson takes excerpts from a 1995 article written in *The Chicago Tribune Magazine* by American Louise Kiernan addressing this commodification of Northern Ireland’s “authenticity,” stating, “The time to visit Belfast is now. Before peace ruins it,” implying that once the dust settles, the Tourist Board will turn the gritty and noncommercial Belfast into an accommodating tourist attraction, and therefore, not representative of the “real” Northern Ireland (56). She points to the danger of Northern Ireland becoming “a twisted version of the Blarney World that has sprung up in the pockets of the Republic of Ireland” with bits of the Peace Lines being sold to tourists and Gerry Adams dressing as a leprechaun. She then urges the tourists to “Go now, while you can still get a glimpse into the intricate knot of poetry and bloodshed that makes up this land” (56). What is at stake here is Kiernan’s claim that once The Troubles are sold to tourists they become inauthentic, like the named “Blarney World.” Kiernan asserts that something that once would have been considered authentic (a true artifact or memory of an event) instantly becomes inauthentic in the context of using it as a commodity to sell a constructed idea of a “real” experience of Northern Ireland to tourists and “authenticity” itself becomes a commodity. In reality, The Troubles are no less

commodified than sites more widely recognized as “tourist traps” because the intentions in offering them as an experience for tourists are the same. As Thompson states, “the fake and the authentic are both cultural productions; it becomes impossible to locate ‘authenticity’ if the fact that both are manufactured is taken into account” (57). The notion of authenticity in this case is not in opposition to stereotypes in that it has become just as much of a commodity as stereotyped versions of Irishness (i.e. the “Blarney World”). Both the “authentic” in these tourist films and the stereotyped in other Irish films are produced in order to sell.⁸

The notion of authenticity in terms of portrayals of Irishness that are produced as commodities is especially confusing due to the fact that film is a production itself. Every film is a commodity in that it is a production meant to be seen and sold to an audience and, therefore, entirely manufactured as a form. Nonetheless, the historical and current events of Northern Ireland that are presented in these tourist films are not manufactured for an audience, they actually occurred. It would seem, then, that the weakness in Thompson’s argument lies in his generalized use of the term authentic without the acknowledgement that something that acquires a culturally produced “authenticity” (and therefore, an inauthenticity) does not necessarily become completely inauthentic. Regardless of how Northern Ireland is sold to tourists and its depictions become inauthentic in the process of commodification, there still remains a Northern Ireland that is separate from the tourist experience. It is not Northern Ireland itself that is inauthentic; it is the manner in which Northern Ireland is presented in order to become appealing as a commodity and “authentic” tourist experience. It would be more appropriate to designate

⁸ I use quotation marks with the term authentic here in order to separate the commodified “authenticity” in this discussion from the other ways in which the term is used throughout this thesis.

Northern Ireland and the Troubles as cultural productions (whether deemed fake or authentic) only in the form that they take when they are specifically commodified for tourists. The Troubles, as a time period of events in general and a part of history, maintain an authenticity that is not culturally produced. This authenticity is not something that many of the other type of “tourist traps” to which Thompson refers can claim. Those exhibits of the “Blarney World” (e.g. new cottages made to look old that recreate a quaint and imagined Ireland) are entirely manufactured, both in their presentation as a commodity for tourists and in the intentions of their existence. They have no existence outside of their portrayals of a manufactured “authenticity” and are reproductions and simulations of a Romanticized Ireland that tourists expect. Northern Ireland, the Troubles and the historical and current events that happen(ed) in Northern Ireland were not created with the intention of being commodities. The aspects of Northern Ireland and the Troubles that have become commodified are not simulations. Tourist may seek the commodified “authentic” Northern Ireland, but there still exists the authentic Northern Ireland that functions with no thought of its consumption as a commodity and stereotype of Irishness appealing to international audiences.

Historical Epics *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*

The question of the inauthentic versus the authentic (in the sense of correctly according to recorded facts) is very relevant to films dealing with Irish history, as it is with most films dealing with historical events. Films that center on history hold a precarious position between illustrating history in the films *as fact* or *as based on fact*.

Even documentaries are unable to claim they present unbiased events because the nature of film as a medium requires a chosen point of view and edits that decide for the viewer what aspects of an historical event will be seen and in what context. Narrative films, like Irish historical epics, are prevented from claiming unbiased portrayals to an even greater degree not only because they are films, but also because they recount historical events within a story that contains at least some interpretation of history and construction of events and characterizations (either completely fictional or based in fact) surrounding historical events. The filmmakers may decide to present the film as fact, thereby leading viewers to regard events and people in the film as completely authentic (true to their character and life), when in reality, complete objective and factual truth is impossible for film and especially unachievable for narrative historical films. Nonetheless, the viewer is likely to base his or her understanding of the historical events on the film's depiction of them. In films dealing with Irish history, assumptions of authenticity are particularly important not only because of the sheer number of Irish films that deal with history, but also because of the nature of Irish historical films to illustrate historical events that have large bearings on contemporary political events (such as films that deal with the Irish Rebellion of 1916, the Anglo-Irish War, and The Troubles period).⁹ For many viewers, these films will be the only education they have had concerning Irish history and they will, mostly likely, see the films' points of view as accurately depicting the events according to more objective historical recordings of the event. Two films, Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* and Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, both deal with the fight for an independent Ireland in the early twentieth century. The films are set in the

⁹ "Authenticity" in this sense as complying with recorded facts as well as being genuine to the character of Ireland's people and culture at the time period in which the particular film takes place.

past, with many scenes set in rural Ireland, but unlike *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Waking Ned Devine*, the films are not pastorals, but rather, historical epics. While *Michael Collins* features a main character who did exist, which may make the film seem more authoritative despite the invented conversations and other nuances that the film had to construct for the storyline, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* relies on a fictional character, Damian, who participates in both actual and fictional historical events, which blurs the lines of authenticity. In fact, *Michael Collins* pushes the idea of its own authenticity even further by including actual documentary film footage from the Easter Rebellion and Anglo-Irish War, which Jordan seamlessly slips into the film's 1996 recreation of events. The films do avoid some of the responsibility of the authenticity of their depictions in the fact that the films are somewhat character driven. Because the films' stories take place through the perspective of these two central characters, they are illustrated through the point of view of a character and not an unbiased and objective narrator. Both men become involved in the fight for Ireland's independence from England and the subsequent Irish Civil War in the early 1900s. Neither character is portrayed as bloodthirsty or violent. Rather, they are warm and generous men who are in the fight because it is the "right thing to do" for Ireland. Michael Collins, though praised for his abilities to preside over "general mayhem," often seems troubled with his participation in violence. He makes it clear that he is resorting to violence only because he has no other choice. At one point, Collins tells Harry Boland (his closest friend according to the film) that he hates the English because they gave him no other way out except for violence. He muses, "Yeah, I want peace and quiet. I want it so much I'd die for it," to which Boland responds, "You mean you'd kill for it first." Collins is quick to

clarify, “No, not first, last,” and laments the fact that he has been forced to involve others in this violence for Ireland’s independence. In *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, Damian is portrayed as similarly reluctant to be involved, but more for personal reasons than for abstract national ideas. Damian seems finally convinced that he must join the fight after he sees the terrible treatment that his neighbors receive from the British; this witnessing of violence triggers Damian’s commitment but so too does his desire to support his brother, who is already deeply rooted in the fighting. The film gives the impression that Damian’s decision to join the IRA was no choice at all, but rather, something that he was forced into in order to protect his friends from the actions of the British soldiers.

This characterization of the reluctant fighting Irish man is fairly different from depictions in early Hollywood of a more readily violent Irish fighter, although both arise from similar stereotypes of Irishness. These Hollywood portrayals must be taken into account when discussing Irish historical epics because the main characters of these contemporary epics are a continuation of the characterization that started in the Hollywood films. In Hollywood films dealing with Irish history one stereotype of Irishness that arose is that of the Irish gunman. In both a political/historic and gangster context, the Irish gunman was a prominent narrative device. Actors, such as James Cagney, made these roles not only memorable, but also Hollywood archetypes. Films like *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *The Informer* (1935) and *Odd Man Out* (1947) (among others) deal with central male characters caught up in violence either dealing with the underworld of American cities like New York and Chicago with the Irish American mob, or dealing with the fight for Irish independence. The troubled Irish gunman became a common feature of several popular Hollywood Irish films. Although

in the late twentieth century the Irish gunman still makes appearances in Hollywood films, such as *Patriot Games* and *The Devil's Own*, it is to a lesser degree. These later depictions of Irish gunmen rest on their participation in the Irish Republican Army of the late twentieth century, considered a terrorist group for that era. They are usually either peripheral characters (like in *The Devil's Own*), or rather two-dimensional enemies (as in *Patriot Games*). Nonetheless, the Irish American gangster and the Irish gunman of earlier films was often the most recognizable Irish cinematic figure and films featuring the Irish gunman were the most prominent among films focusing on Irish history and even Irish films in general. The genre associated with the earlier films of Irish gunmen would also be likely to be familiar to Irish-American audiences, a major consumer of Irish history-centered films. In this manner, filmmakers could make Irish history and the Irish historical epic more accessible to Irish American audiences by connecting the contemporary genre of Irish gunman with the established genre and stereotype of Hollywood Irish gunman, and thereby leading to more marketable and easily consumable Irishness in the modern films. In fact, the more contemporary Irish historical epics are even more marketable because they lose some of the darkness of the earlier Irish gunman films and, instead, emphasize the moral dilemmas and personal relationships of their main characters. In this sense, the Irish gunman character does not necessarily escape being a stereotype of Irishness, but it becomes more developed and complex. These Irish gunman-centered representations of Irish history serve as background to successive Irish history films like the historical epics *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. A different type of Irish gunman stereotype has emerged from Irish films in these historical epics - that of the Irish freedom fighter (like Michael Collins or Damian) who

was part of the initiation of the Irish Republican Army before it was considered a terrorist organization.

Michael Collins is a prime example of a film that features a troubled Irish freedom fighter. The plot of *Michael Collins* is based on the real events that took place from the early 1900s, mainly the Easter Rebellion of 1916, to the mid-1920s, ending with the Irish Civil War that erupted after the Peace Treaty with England in 1922. The title character is also based on a real person, but, as previously mentioned, with any film there is always the possibility of a bias that would render events and people of history in a more or less favorable light. The film seems to make the choice to portray Collins as a likeable and a sympathetic hero. He good-naturedly wrestles with his friends, croons a song of his rural hometown, plays the tender lover and encourages his men to fight. Collins even maintains his genial nature with the British government men who tail his car in an early scene in the film. When both cars are stalled by a flock of sheep very slowly crossing the road, Collins leaves his car and walks back to the British G-men's car. He tells them that if they back up their car, then his men can back up their own car and they can all get on their way, as he tells the G-men, so "you can chase us around some more." The film also emphasizes Collins' relationships with Kitty Kiernan, his eventual fiancé, and Harry Boland. The love triangle between the three provides poignancy to the political opposition that Boland and Collins eventually come to, making their division more about love than about politics. The film is also very deliberate in portraying Collins as a leader and commendable representative for Ireland. At the opening of the film, titles scroll down the screen which attempt to give some background to Collins and his place in Irish history. One set of titles briefly describes the Anglo-Irish conflict as a

predominantly guerilla war that followed the Easter Rebellion in 1916. The titles then read, “The mastermind behind that war was Michael Collins. His life and death defined the period, in its triumph, terror and tragedy. This is his story.” His role as gunman is distinctly intertwined with his role as a heroic freedom fighter and prominent figure in Irish history.

Michael Collins designates the Irish rebels as the good guys while the British forces and political figures are the “baddies.” Most importantly, the film strives to show that Collins was not a crazed murderer. It sheds sympathetic light onto Collins by juxtaposing the scenes where Collins is most associated with violence (i.e. when he orders the murders of twelve G-men on the infamous “Bloody Sunday”) with his most tender moments with Kitty Kiernan, showing that Collins must seek love to ease his sorrows about the violence for which he is responsible. As with the example of the assassinations on Bloody Sunday, *Michael Collins* shows that not only were the killings intricately planned out, but Collins was greatly emotionally distressed at the necessity for the killings. The film even elevates Collins, depicted as virile, gregarious and commanding, at the expense of De Valera, the future first president of The Irish Republic, depicted as sickly, standoffish and scheming. During the meetings of the cabinet of Irish ministers, the ministers are all seated at a long table with Collins and De Valera at either end. This positioning puts Collins and De Valera at opposing heads of the table, a symbol of their implied struggle over the rule of Ireland. In an article about *Michael Collins*, writer Steve Daly discusses Neil Jordan’s decision to cast Liam Neeson in the title role. Daly writes of Jordan:

He felt Neeson's charm could only heighten the sinister side of another key character: In Jordan's scheme of things, Collins' collaborator and eventual nemesis, Eamon De Valera – who went on to rule the Irish Republic as prime minister and president for nearly 40 years – is a warmonger directly responsible for plunging Ireland into a century of civil war. Ultimately, Jordan's film would even intimate that De Valera may have had a hand in Collins' assassination (though the director insists that was not his intention). (24)

The same article later quotes Neeson discussing the reception of this portrayal of Collins. He states, “Neil was very concerned that Collins would lose the audience...Despite the violence Collins gets involved in, you really had to like him, y'know? But I certainly don't come across as a thug, or somebody who'd kill for the sake of it. With any close-ups I wanted to show [Collins'] very, very soulful confusion” (26). Neeson's words are proof of the very intentional illustration of Collins as a moral and genial character. The film also implies that De Valera purposely sends Collins to negotiate with the English, knowing that there would never be a treaty that English officials would agree to that would leave Ireland entirely free from English rule, a reality that would leave many of the Irish unsatisfied with Collins' results and that Collins is very well aware of this selfish motive of De Valera's. Collins can only reiterate that he was acting according to what he thought best for Ireland. According to the film, De Valera can only eclipse Collins by sacrificing him and leaving De Valera to proclaim that had he gone, he would have been more successful with the Treaty. This insinuation is not considered a documented fact in history. Many of the Irish American audience would not know this nuance of history.

But, in keeping to the Hollywood aesthetic and the stereotype of the freedom fighter, there must be clear delineations of who is “good” and who is “bad.”

Marcia Landy sees a difference between Collins and the gunman of earlier Hollywood Irish history films because she believes the film “mystifies” his role in history, as well as the role of the IRA in history. This description of a mystified history would suggest that Landy regards *Michael Collins* as more revisionist with its history than the earlier American Irish gunman films that were created during De Valera’s presidency and reflected his vision of nationalist Ireland. Landy begins her discussion with comments on two earlier Hollywood films, *Beloved Enemy* (1936) and *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959), which deal with the Irish civil war. She writes, “the film [*Michael Collins*] is revealing about the strategies of popular historicizing, how historical romances make connections between private and public life, and how they are imbued with the romance of nation building even when the outcome is doomed” and that their plots become forms of a “familiar melodramatic scenario of the conflict between love and patriotism,” a scenario she seems to feel applies to most Hollywood films about the struggle for Irish independence (26). Most of these patriotic characters sacrifice themselves and are often victims of other cold-blooded Irish characters who will not ratify the Treaty. These demonstrations of Irish fighters killing other Irish fighters instead of accepting a Treaty with Britain perpetuates the negative colonial British ideology that it isn’t the British police that are the true enemies of Irish nationhood.

Landy also considers *Michael Collins* as an example of a postcolonial view of the Irish Civil War. This would also suggest revisionist history due to the nature of a later thought process (postcolonialism) informing an earlier historical event (Irish Civil War).

She does not see in Jordan's film a "conflict between love and patriotism," which is the dominant conflict of earlier American Irish gunman films, suggesting that *Michael Collins*, as an Irish historical epic, is a type of progression from that genre and more complicated than its American predecessors. One reason she gives is that "more than a conventional genre film, that is, a historical film, more specifically a 'biopic,' *Michael Collins* is an 'essay' on as well as an enactment of history and representation. Thus another layer of historicizing subtends the film" (23). By classifying the film as a "biopic," Landry may be attempting to offer an acceptable explanation for the many historical inaccuracies and distortions that are found in the film; she seems to view it not as a reflection of written history, but as the story of an historical figure and authentic in its category of biopic, which will not present an unbiased or complete historical record, although this explanation leaves the question open of whether the audience, particularly an American audience otherwise unfamiliar with the Irish civil war, will take the film as complete and accurate history. In contrast, critic Ruth Barton sees *Michael Collins* as showing a history that is "closed, knowable and recoupable," quite the antithesis of Landy's revisionist conclusion (*Irish National Cinema* 143). Landy also states that the film, in adding elements of fiction to historical events, does not offer a resolution to the conflict through Collins' personal life. She contends, "As is appropriate for a film that seeks to present the audience with a complicated view of Irish history in contrast to prevailing myths, the film offers enigmas rather than pat explanations. Also, the film works energetically against the grain of Irish representations to dispel prevailing images of Ireland as a pastoral paradise or as an inexplicable source of violence and bloodshed" (32). She makes this remark partly with the evidence of the film's use of urban sets,

rather than exclusively rural shots. This evidence is problematic in that the urban sets are of a particularly quaint historic Dublin of the 1910s-1920s, which most often appear in the film as scenes of a charming town rather than of a modern city.

She also supports her claim that *Michael Collins* does not reproduce the standard stereotypes of Irish film by explaining some of the reasons for the violence in Northern Ireland during the Troubles of the late twentieth century by providing historical background which is often completely omitted from Irish films that are set during the Troubles period. The film does keep its narration to the fight for independence in the early twentieth century and implies no connection to later events in Northern Ireland, but whether it stays away from the question of the IRA of the later half of the twentieth century in Northern Ireland to make a point of the separation or, instead, to keep the story simple and easier to follow without the complications of later events in Northern Ireland, is not clear. Certainly, it would be less controversial for the hero of *Michael Collins* to be unassociated with an organization that is often classified as terrorist. Regardless, the film does not escape stereotypes related to these films and the Northern Ireland Troubles film genre entirely in that it still favors the Catholic/Nationalist side of the struggle and could be seen as a sort of justification of the Troubles of the late twentieth century (as I will argue later). Although it makes attempts to use “the past to debunk prevailing myths,” *Michael Collins* isn’t free from fixed Irish cultural identities. In fact, it is a mix of stereotypes of the Irish, which follows the idea that Patrick O’Sullivan states in “Developing Irish Diaspora Studies,” that centuries of violence in Ireland have “left the strange legacy, of a cumulative English discourse of ‘the Irish’ that portrays the Irish as

both quaint and dangerous,” an apt description of the characterization of Michael Collins himself in Jordan’s film (O’Sullivan 133).

Another manner in which *Michael Collins*, exemplifies stereotypes of Irish cultural identity, thereby continuing the commodification of Irishness in Irish history genre films, is in its alignment with Catholicism and Nationalism and its treatment of Protestants. Even if one does not consider the film an example of revisionist Irish history (presenting a version of Irish history that would resonate and appeal to contemporary audiences) or a biopic, or question the authenticity of its illustration of historical events, the film is still problematic in that it perpetuates many of the stereotypical identities of Irishness that were first developed in the beginnings of the Irish gunman genre. Often in earlier American films of the Irish gunman, the political conflicts of Ireland in the 1910s and 1920s were portrayed as simple British versus Irish tensions. The later historical epics did little to dispel the myth of the absence of Irish Protestants and Loyalists in these historical events and concentrated on the stereotypical Catholic and Nationalist main character, like Michael Collins. Not only is the title character a “hero” of the Easter Rebellion of 1916 and the Anglo-Irish War, and therefore, a symbol of the Irish fight for freedom, but with the exception of one person, the film portrays *only* Irish Catholics. The one Ulster Protestant specifically featured in the film, a policeman, is killed with a car bomb, a device not normally used during the Anglo-Irish War, which implies an uncomfortable and unrealistic connection to violence in Northern Ireland during the more recent Troubles. This neglect of Irish Protestants is indicative of Irish film in general. As Brian McIlroy points out, the truth is that the “Protestant community in Ireland is not one that has attracted filmmakers to any great degree” (57). One of the reasons for this lack

of interest is the great number of the Irish diaspora who identify themselves as Catholic. In addition to this, many films sustain “the perception of the unionist and loyalist communities as backward looking, unduly attached to the status quo, in frequent opposition to left-wing politics and culture, too reliant on supremacist thinking, and as holders of more than enough privileges” (57). These perceptions are often present in films dealing with Northern Ireland where the films often rely on clichés of pathological and misguided Protestants. These portrayals are slightly ironic when one considers the popularity of Irish films that focus on Irish history and pastoral life, which is itself “backward looking,” and often “in frequent opposition to left-wing politics and culture.”

Films that omit the Irish Protestant also perpetuate the idea that the only story of an Irish American’s ancestry is filled with the stereotypical image of the poor Catholic immigrant from the rural west of Ireland who was forced to come to America after the threat of starvation. The St. Patrick’s Day parades full of priests, private Catholic school girls and representatives from Nationalist interest groups became symbolic of how American popular culture sees Irish Americans. Partly for these reasons, films that deal with Irish Independence, like *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, omit Protestants in order to present Irish American audiences with depictions of Irish history and Irishness that are recognizable and conform to what is expected. Although there were Protestants who were involved in the rebellions, ambushes and wars that led to the creation of an Irish Republic, fewer international audiences, particularly American, would know this information, which might complicate the films by having to offer an explanation for the Protestants’ participation.

The Wind that Shakes the Barley created a lot of controversy when it was released in 2006. In an article appearing in *Cineaste*, David Archibald quotes the *London Sun* as naming *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* as “the most pro-IRA film ever” (26). The film, like *Michael Collins*, focuses on the point of view of Irish fighters in the War of Independence with Britain and the subsequent opposing sides of the Irish Civil War, but does not offer any perspectives on the British side of the conflict outside their place as oppressors against the Irish independence. *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* also roots its main character on the side of the anti-Treaty Republicans in the Irish Civil War. By doing so, the film becomes more controversial in that it politically aligns itself with parties that rebelled against Michael Collins’ Irish Free State of 1922. This political alignment is often associated with Republicanism and with more recent factions of the IRA. Archibald states that the film resists some stereotypes in that it “is not simply a misty-eyed tale of nationalist struggle,” but he goes on to point out that “as a consequence of dealing with the complexities of an extended historical period, the characters at times become vehicles for political positions, and there is more than a tinge of melodrama” (26). Archibald’s statements show that the filmmakers wanted to include a lot of historical detail that would not be entirely familiar to perhaps a large portion of the audience of the film, so in trying to make those details and political positions clear they sacrificed character complexity.

In his article, Archibald interviews *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*’s directors, Ken Loach and Paul Laverty. Both directors make it clear that they were very attentive to keeping their depictions of events as accurate as possible while still having some freedom from the minutiae by featuring fictional characters and employing some events

that are merely based on actual occurrences. Lavery makes this point clear when he states, “You could be so easily crucified on historical detail...All that detail becomes a burden and stops us becoming true to the spirit of the times” (28). It could be argued, however, that it is the historical detail that keeps a film “true to the spirit of the times,” and therefore a worthwhile investment when a film takes a strong political stance. Ken Loach also defends his film against critics who call it “anti-British” by pointing out, “yet no one has challenged a single fact in the film” (30). A good portion of the criticism against *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* centers on the film’s concentration on the Irish side of fighting, with the British army in a clear position of “enemy.” But the directors seem to beg off creating a stereotypically biased film by stating that the film is politically balanced because it is really about the two Republican outlooks on the struggle. Lavery responds by doubting whether history can ever be truly balanced. He answers

We reveal our politics, values, and way of seeing the world in a very deep sense by choice of premise, character, and point of view. It’s like a historian who reveals himself by what he selects or doesn’t, and how he interprets it.

Objectivity is a very slippery notion. (27)

Lavery does not see the film as problematic in the way that it portrays the fight for independence. His statements confirm that he sees *all* films as biased because they are made by individuals with their individual points of view and that an audience should be aware of this nature of film. Loach, on the other hand, takes the approach that the film is justifiably biased. He states, “It is politically balanced between those who are engaged in a battle for political independence. The arguments of the colonial power are indicated...Do you have to be fair to the oppressor?” (28). Loach’s statements create a

tricky question of whether this film follows the films that romanticize Irishness in historical epics, or whether by taking a clear stance that they are choosing to give the points of view of one part of the fighting that they are reclaiming identities of Irishness for a native Irish perspective in native Irish film. There is also the question, then, of whether the film reclaims Irishness in the same manner that De Valera did, by only looking back to the past. Does the film look to the Nationalism of the early 20th century in too favorable of a light and at the expense of glossing over complexities of identities of Irishness? The film is located almost entirely in the beautiful Irish countryside. *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* also features mostly the poorer, rural residents of Ireland but, unlike *Michael Collins*, it also includes prominent Labor characters, like the train driver and fellow prisoner of Damian's, Dan -- a move that allows the film to address Socialist issues like economic equality and rights for the worker. The film heavily implies that it is not only the British who are harming the Irish people, but also the rich business owners, some of them Irish Catholic, who scam honest workers out of their money. The film can be seen as veering from stereotypes by even offering a Socialist point of view, which is rare to Irish film, as well as by the fact that it allows for some variation of Irish Catholics as both agricultural workers and business owners. On the other hand, the film could be seen as romanticizing the simple Irish worker of the countryside by highlighting the immorality of business owners, which would paint a negative light on modern industry by association.

The Wind that Shakes the Barley also falls victim to the romanticism of the Republican that would not "sell out" to the Treaty. After clearly villainizing British soldiers with their irrationally and absolutely uncalled for violent actions, the film

develops a negative view of the Irish Free Staters. Teddy, Damian's brother and hero of the Anglo-Irish conflict, changes into a jaded government official who kills his own brother for not giving up his fellow anti-Treaty fighters, and, as implied by the film, his principles. The viewer also cannot help but side with Damian, the passionate, tender and strong fighter who is made a martyr at the close of the film when he chooses to die at his brother's execution orders rather than give up his fellow anti-Treaty fighters and betray his ideals. Damian embodies the old-fashioned moral fiber with his commitment to taking care of his family and friends that, as discussed earlier, has come to be associated with Irishness in general, and, therefore, cannot be said as having avoided the commodification of Irishness. Damian's sympathetic hero character calls into question whether the film sacrifices historical objectivity at the expense of character development and appeal to international audiences. The filmmakers do not see their emphasis on character development and the partiality it might cause as negative because they see Damian as a representative of an oppressed group, and they feel the oppressed are justified in having biased points of view. The oppression Damian suffers only adds to his portrayal as a moral character.

Unlike most of the Hollywood Irish gunman films that involved the IRA of the early twentieth century, Damian's death does not imply that his is getting his "just due" for being a terrorist. Rather, the viewer's estimation of Damian's character rises when he writes his last letter to his friend Sinead, which is full of love and strong principle, and bravely faces his fate of execution at the hands of his brother. The enemy is no longer the British soldiers, but the Irish soldiers who gave up too soon. This standpoint could be seen as close to supporting some of the tenets of the IRA that fought in the Troubles (a

reason British and Loyalist audiences see the film as controversial) as *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* makes it clear that the largest hindrance to the acceptance of the Treaty was the partition of the Republic and Northern Ireland. In the same way that *Michael Collins* laments the losses of the anti-Treaty Irish but upholds the principle that Collins' decision was necessary at whatever price, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* projects that the freedom fighters who would not give in to the Treaty made a sacrifice -- to continue with violence and engage in a civil war -- that was necessary at whatever price. The crux of the controversy of *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* is not that it essentially romanticizes and supports De Valera's nationalism of the early twentieth century, but that it might also connect that nationalism to the violent republicanism of the late twentieth century (i.e. IRA violence in Northern Ireland). With the consideration that the film possibly implies a connection of a romantic fight for independence to paramilitary violence of the late twentieth century, the question of authenticity is important not only in accurately portraying historical events, but in conveying to viewers a fair understanding of the differing factions of the Irish Civil War and the relations and developments that led to the political parties, including the Provisional IRA, of contemporary Ireland. *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* pushes the genre of Irish historical epic in that it does not keep to the always safe and acceptable position that past political violence was performed out of necessity for freedom, but that contemporary political violence is morally reprehensible and unnecessary (like the genre of Troubles films). Instead, it leaves the issue of Ireland's partition still open to criticism.

Films of the Troubles

Several of the films that have achieved wide international distribution have chosen to feature more recent Irish historical events. Almost always centered on the political violence in Northern Ireland, these Irish films have begun to feature the “reformed” Irish gunman. Unlike the men characterized as brave freedom fighters from *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, these films’ main characters are fairly reluctant to participate in violence, but do mistakenly find themselves involved with the IRA during the last decades of the twentieth century. The characters realize their lapses in judgment and fight to do what is right, often clashing with the IRA in their struggles, for they ultimately resolve that the IRA are wrong. Also, in contrast to its portrayals in *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, the IRA is depicted as a terrorist group, not as a legitimate army fighting a “good fight” in films about contemporary Northern Ireland. The political situation in Northern Ireland that began in the late 1960s altered much of international public opinion to see the IRA as a terrorist group rather than a national army fighting for deserved independence. In light of this alteration, the violent IRA gunman was no longer morally acceptable to most international audiences by the late twentieth century. But, because most of the Irish American diaspora is Catholic, and often by default, Nationalist, Irish films that appeal to American audiences often take the Catholic/Nationalist point of view. Therefore, Irish films often need to find a balance, creating a Catholic/Nationalist character who is strong, but remains outside of the IRA violence. Whether it is by coincidence or intentional

choice, actor Daniel Day-Lewis has played two such characters in the films *In the Name of the Father* and *The Boxer*.

The Boxer opens with Day-Lewis' Danny Flynn leaving prison at the same time that an IRA prisoner's marriage ceremony takes place. Danny, who was in prison due to his involvement in paramilitary violence, demonstrates his separation from the IRA by neglecting to take part in the wedding celebration and by refusing to shake the hands of known IRA leaders after his prison release. Danny then meets up with his former boxing coach, Ike, who is now a homeless alcoholic because he gave up coaching after Danny and others in his boxing club participated in an IRA bombing. Ike, along with Danny's former girlfriend, Maggie, who was left with a broken heart when Danny went to prison, are two examples of how the film shows that Danny's choice to get involved with the IRA not only affected his life negatively, but also the lives of those around him. When Danny returns to his old neighborhood and sees the state of disrepair of the community center where he used to box, he decides to revamp the boxing ring, not only reviving his boxing career, but also Ike's career and the well-being of the community center. He is already becoming a filmic hero. Danny and Ike begin a boxing club, which is, of course, non-sectarian. An ironic comment on the Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist binary is made in reference to the club's non-sectarianism. One of the IRA men asks one of the members of the boxing club what the posters for an upcoming match mean when they state "non-sectarian." The boy answers, "Catholics and Protestants together." The IRA man answers, "What about the Jews, and the Arabs and the Muslims?" The boy answers back with a wry smile, "I suppose they could come too, if they want." This

subtle statement is one of the few made on cultures outside the Catholic/Protestant binary in films centering on the Northern Ireland Troubles.

Although the British government does not directly appear in the film much, *The Boxer* does show the British presence of authority through the British police. The manner in which the film represents the British police also appeals to a more contemporary audience with its focus on police surveillance, rather than violence. There are no exaggerations of British brutality, but there is the constant appearance of British helicopters always hovering, monitoring the events that take place in the film. Whether the police watch from a voyeuristic motivation or whether the surveillance provides a type of modern panopticon, willing the citizens to behave, vigilance is not depicted in any positive light. The helicopters seem symbolic as reminiscent of the colonial power that England had in Ireland. More specifically, the helicopters are reminders the need for an outside force during the Troubles to control the strife between the Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist factions in the North and from paramilitary groups on either side. Although the police do donate equipment to the Holy Family boxing club, a positive act, it is seen as a gesture of false generosity, and more about making the British police look good, rather than to help the boxing club. England is also tied to unfavorable allusions to its identity as past colonizer. After a car bombing which kills a British police officer takes place outside the gym during one of Danny's fights, Danny is so disgusted by the violence that he takes the boat to England to pursue a boxing career there. The boxing match that the film shows, which is ostensibly against an African, who could also be a member of a nation colonized by England like Danny, is pure spectacle. It takes place in an opulent locale, with a glamorous audience enjoying rich food and champagne. As

Danny fights, the African struggles and it is clear that the fight should not continue. The audience encourages the fight, throwing coins and clinking glasses, until Danny forfeits the fight, being the better man and exposing both the audience's refined brutality and making clear that that he will not participate in this spectacle.

But it isn't only the British that are shown in a negative light in the film. *The Boxer* uses the character Harry to show the evils of continued paramilitary violence. Harry, one of the more important members of the IRA in the film, is shown in contrast to Joe, Maggie's father, who runs the IRA in the film. Joe is depicted as strong, unwavering, and in control. But the audience can sympathize with Joe because what he cares about the most is what, ultimately, is the best for people in his community (and by implication Northern Ireland as a whole). It is Joe that Danny approaches to start the boxing club at the community center. Joe will continue the IRA's aims, but when there is a chance for peace, he will take it. He will encourage his daughter to stay faithful to her imprisoned husband, but when he sees that she truly loves Danny, and that Danny will protect her, he permits them to be together. Harry, on the other hand, is a depraved killer who seems only to care about revenge and upholding hard-lined political views rather than what is best for those around him. After the car bombing, in which Harry is suspiciously involved, that kills a high-ranking British police officer, Joe tells Harry "Stop living in the past and get your head into the future." The future, for the film's IRA, lies in politics more than paramilitary violence. *The Boxer's* IRA has moved on in the sense that it is putting its efforts into making the ceasefire work, as evident in the support that most of the IRA's members give to their leader, Joe, who is at the head driving the decision for peace. Then, Joe, being the "reformed" gunman that he is, orders Harry to

be shot before he can do more harm to those around him. Joe's decision to have Harry killed is evidence of the IRA's decision (in the film) to pursue peace. It does not leave any alternatives for those that might have supported Harry. They will see his death (ironically, from a violent act) as a clear signal that peace is the only option left. It seems significant that this final violent moment in the film, a scene between members of the IRA and Danny, takes place in a tunnel and out of view of the British helicopters. The violence in the scene is only between factions of the same side of the political binary, not between the Irish and British.

Although it does not deal with an IRA ceasefire and takes place (mostly) twenty years before the events of *The Boxer*, the film *In the Name of the Father* shares many of the narrative themes (and the leading man) of *The Boxer*, chiefly among them the character of the "reformed" gunman, his relationship to the IRA and the role of the British police in Northern Ireland. *In the Name of the Father* tells the story of Gerry Conlon (Day-Lewis, again, playing a similar character to Danny Flynn), one of the Guildford Four who were accused of bombing a pub in Guildford, England and later acquitted of the crime. Because the film is based on a true story, it has stirred up controversy, mostly in the country that it censures the most, England. Director Jim Sheridan was accused of distorting facts in order to support his narrative choices and characterizations, particularly those dealing with the moral characters of Gerry Conlon and the British government. The film features several instances of British police brutality and torture, which, obviously, negatively depicts the British police. The film also asserts that the person who was able to provide Gerry with an alibi was interviewed and a statement was recorded that backed up Gerry's story, but it was hidden from the defense,

further incriminating the British government. But, in reality, the government never actually hid the interview from the defense during the trials.

Also included in this narrative is Sheridan's addition of an IRA member who confesses to carrying out the bombing to a British police Inspector who ignores the confession and leaves the falsely accused Guildford Four in prison. The police inspector's decision not to act on the confession seems to come from the sheer embarrassment of the possibility of being discovered to have made a mistake, as well as from the nuisance it would make for the British government. These historic licenses taken by the film are problematic in that they give altered information of the trial and investigation of the Guildford bombing to the viewer. They also reinforce dimensions of stereotypical characters of Irish film, namely the reformed gunman in contrast to the deviant, cold-blooded killer and the cruel and abusive British government. The Guildford trial and investigation could also be seen as representative of a typical trial and investigation in Northern Ireland during the Troubles for viewers who have not had access to any other accounts of trials of this nature at that time, which would perpetuate even further misinformation. The Guildford bombing was a well known event in England, and the British audience would have a more knowledgeable background on the political violence in Northern Ireland and England. The American audience, on the other hand, would mostly be lacking that knowledge, and almost completely reliant on the film for information about actual events surrounding the bombing and the imprisonments.

The film was particularly criticized as IRA propaganda by some critics because of its Catholic/Nationalist leanings. Conor Cruise O'Brien notes, "For many Americans this film will represent most of what they think about they know about Northern Ireland.

What they are taking away from the film is a plausible but distorted picture; and the distortion is consistently helpful to the Irish Republican Army, the IRA“ (311).

O’Brien’s view is worth considering, although the reality of this misinformation is highly questionable, both in the extent to which the film favors the IRA and of the inability of an American audience to discern the reality of the political situation in Northern Ireland.

O’Brien could claim Sheridan’s decisions to somewhat skew information in support of Gerry Conlon’s favor seem to be at the expense of the British government. It is the British government that hides information from the defense and it is the British government that callously ignores a confession that would free prisoners that the British government mistakenly put in jail. These practices are not unfamiliar to the British government, nor are they absent from documentations of other trials of that time period. But, in contrast to O’Brien’s claim, these changes that add to the pathos for Gerry’s difficult plight are not “helpful” to the IRA. *In the Name of the Father* includes several pivotal scenes and characters that illuminate Gerry’s distance from the IRA and its theologies. In fact, Sheridan’s key representative of the IRA, a character named Joe who confesses to the Guildford bombing and ultimately ends up in the same prison as Gerry, is portrayed as calculating and heartless.

The addition of the IRA man, Joe, was important to American audiences beyond increasing the appearance of the “evilness” of the British police who ignore his confession and leave innocent men in prison because the film can use Joe as the anti-hero figure to highlight Gerry as the eventual hero. *In the Name of the Father* had a very different reception in America, which could be due to these characterizations (like Gerry and Joe) that Sheridan developed in the film. Sheridan might be more accurately accused

of emphasizing certain aspects of Gerry's story in order to commodify Irishness, in the form of creating a sympathetic "reformed" gunman character, which would appeal to American audiences. Sheridan was able to portray Gerry as a moral character, apt to make mistakes, but really a "good" man who loves his father in contrast to the cold-blooded Joe. Gerry is a bit of a "bad boy" at the start of the film, with a touch of rebelliousness that is attractive to an American audience, but it is a characterization that is tied to his youth. When Gerry matures and he needs to show strength to protect, he is able, even when it means protecting the authority that put him in prison. After Joe sets fire to a prison guard, Gerry saves the guard and turns against Joe, choosing his father's pacifist methods over the IRA's violent ways. Sheridan can condemn the IRA violence, while still focusing on a main character that has physical strength as well as moral integrity. Thus, the changes Sheridan made from Gerry's original text seem to be more about emphasizing a triumph of morals over injustice in general, rather than of a particular political stance (Grenier 322). After all, Conlon ultimately aligns himself with pacifism and is no longer anti-authoritarian.

Though the film is based on the autobiography, *Proved Innocent*, by Gerry Conlon, there remains the fact that there was some license taken with events recorded in the book. Sheridan maintained that the film did not take license with any of the facts essential to the larger narration and was only altered to fit into a cinematic narration. In any case, the film can always be considered in terms of other Troubles films, like *Some Mother's Son*, *Cal*, *The Boxer*, etc., that are based on real events, but are not told as "true stories." These films make less direct claim on the historical accuracy of every detail that they include in their portrayals.

In this light, as Martin McLoone explains, *In the Name of the Father* should be considered for the manner in which it focuses on a family and personal narrative amidst historical events: “The critical issue, therefore, is not the extent to which it takes license with the facts of the real case but how its aesthetic strategies force a particular melodramatic and humanist perspective on complex historical and social debates” (*Irish Film* 73). McLoone’s statement accurately describes the position that *In the Name of the Father* is placed in as a film based on true events, as opposed to Conor Cruise O’Brien’s troubling accusation that the film takes license with fact in order to support the IRA. The question of whether a film forces a particular perspective on historical and social issues is also especially relevant to Troubles cinema in general, which often falls into a genre related to Irish historical epics with their Irish gunman characters. The violence in Troubles films is often simplified with the IRA members who actually carry out aggression being of a more violent splinter group or erratic, defiant members of the IRA who often rebel against a leader’s stance on peace or the official IRA ceasefire.¹⁰ Main characters are always reluctant and often misidentified members of the IRA who are reformed or even initially against any violence. Northern Irish politics then become vague as Trouble violence becomes associated with a generalized “terrorist” character where violence is innate and irrational (McLoone *Irish Film* 72). The generalization of the violent character as irrational takes away from any historical or political validity as a motive force behind any of the violent acts performed in Northern Ireland.

The irrational violent character can also be seen as a form of the stereotyped gunman character (often an Irish American gangster) portrayed in early twentieth century

¹⁰ This simplification makes a complex and unresolved political conflict (that has deep roots in Irish history) falsely appear somewhat black and white, which is problematic considering the understanding that uninformed viewers will gather of Northern Ireland in these films.

Hollywood Irish films, as well as the colonial idea of the innately violent Irish character. Troubles films can fall into the danger of appealing to international audiences by featuring these “terrorist” characters that would be easily recognizable by many cultures and distance themselves from the details of Northern Irish politics and violence with which international audiences would not be familiar. In this way these Troubles films can avoid the difficult challenges that come with explaining intricacies of Northern Irish politics and trying to remain politically neutral. The filmmakers of the Troubles films can attempt to avoid criticism of their treatments of facts in that most Troubles films are ultimately character-driven narratives and not documentaries. Nonetheless, Troubles films are still marketed as based on fact and as they deal with actual events, viewers will assume their verity, therefore labeling the films as “authentic” even though they are biased in that they carry the points of view of the filmmakers who have a stake in the success of the films and want the films to draw as many viewers as possible. Troubles films, then, can be held responsible for the manner in which they perpetuate stereotypes of Irishness, mostly in simplifying Irish history and politics for their purposes, and sacrificing complexity in favor of popular forms of film and commodified Irish “reformed” gunman characters, not unlike other genres of Irish film like the historical epic. In their attempts to appeal to international audiences, filmmakers can deprive viewers of an understanding of Irish history and its main figures and may even instill in viewers a false conception of Irish politics because the filmmakers choose to make their characters fit into what they believe an audience expects from an Irish character in a political or historical Irish film.

De-Commodifying Irishness in Film

Despite the plethora of stereotypes of Irishness in Irish film, there are films that work against the commodification of Irishness. Some films, like *The Crying Game* and *In America*, highlight an entirely new aspect of the trope, like revealing an immigrant's experience in his new country and not his constant laments over his former country. These films do not show Ireland as a nostalgic "home" to which the character needs to return to in order to regain innocence. *The Crying Game*, *In America* and *Breakfast on Pluto* also exhibit another form of breaking the traditional commodification of Irishness on the screen because they depict some non-white characters and non-traditional lifestyles that are largely ignored in Irish film. Still other films work against commodifying Irishness by calling attention to the commodification in an exaggerated manner in order to reveal problematic aspects. *The Butcher Boy* and *I Went Down* use "kitsch" and a saturation of stereotypes of Irishness with heavy-handed irony, pointing out the absurdity of these stereotypes. These films challenge accepted depictions of Irishness and allow their films to address globalization, alternative lifestyles, religion, race, gender, politics and many other contentious issues that have not always been explored in Irish film. All of the films mentioned above, by widening the depictions of Ireland and the Irish and cinematically created qualities of "Irishness," allow for truer representations of contemporary Ireland and the issues that face it in the midst of globalization and modernization. By addressing these issues, the films can then speak to an audience of contemporary Irish citizens, and be more representative of an independent

Native Irish Cinema, rather than stereotyping and perpetuating false identities of Irishness that would appeal to the perceived expectations of international audiences.

Kitsch in *The Butcher Boy* and *I Went Down*

One powerful method that Irish themed productions can use to move away from the previously mentioned stereotypes is through kitsch. Kitsch can be defined as high art made low by its usurpation by the lower classes and common by reproduction. An example of this phenomenon is the way that more recognized works of art, like Da Vinci's Mona Lisa or Monet's Water Lilies, have been reproduced so that their images grace coffee mugs, coasters and t-shirts. In the context of this discussion, the definition of the verb kitsch in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "to render worthless, to affect with sentimentality and vulgarity," is particularly apt ("Kitsch" 1), considering the degree to which sentimentality is attached to artifacts of Irish popular culture. In her essay, "Kitsch as Authenticity," Ruth Barton discusses Clement Greenburg's definition of kitsch. She describes the development of kitsch as stemming from the movement of rural populations to urban areas during industrialization. The rural populations used their newly acquired free time to participate in cultural diversions that they did not fully understand in the "high art" sense, leaving them to seek a more accessible alternative to the avant-garde art of the time. Simply put, kitsch can be described as a sort of art of the mass culture. In particular, kitsch became associated with the consumption of "imitative, cheap and, above all, sentimental" objets d'art (194).

An understanding of kitsch is particularly significant to Ireland not just in the ways in which Irish culture created its own stereotyped and sentimentalized cultural pieces, but also in Ireland's place as a former colony, where another nation was involved in the transitions of Irish culture. The use of kitsch is especially appropriate for Irish productions in the manner that it reflects the disruption of power in the postcolonial binary structure through an ownership of Irish culture. Ireland, like many postcolonial countries, has used some of the cultural identities that Britain had thrust upon it to distinguish itself as a distinct and unique culture. The binary between Britain/colonizer and Ireland/colonized could be described as urban civilization ("high art") versus rural primitivism ("low art" or folk culture) where civilization is associated with education and invention, particularly industrial, and the rural is often associated with backwards, but genial, simplicity and superstition. Rather than simply letting its former colonizer dismiss Irish identities in stereotypes that the colonizer has created, Ireland, through film, can use the focus on its rural west and the connection with political strife with an awareness that can reclaim these definitions of Irishness for its own. Thus, Ireland can maintain power over productions that center on narratives that are desirable to Americans and particularly Irish Americans, but with a more critical eye that speaks to a native Irish audience as well. Rather than simply continuing to project stereotyped depictions of Irishness for consumers, filmmakers that employ kitsch when using common tropes of Irish film, like the idyllic rural west, create absurdities that point to the fact that these tropes have, indeed, become stereotyped conceptions of the identities of Irishness that they are supposed to represent.

Kitsch can also combat the consumption of the colonized culture by the colonizing culture through its inclusion of folk culture and the possibility of kitsch as a form of native culture. For example, the multitudes of Virgin Mary statues found throughout the countryside in suburban neighborhoods in Ireland represent the cheap, sentimental and imitative aspects of kitsch; nonetheless, they are definitely part of native Irish culture and completely authentic as a characteristic of Irishness. Kitsch, then, enables mass culture to embody a daily authenticity, which provides an alternative to narrow, essentialist, elitist and nationalist productions that dominated many Irish films, as well as other cultural productions, in the earlier twentieth century. Kitsch also became a method for some artist to express a postmodern comment on art and its consumption in society. In this manner, it moved to straddle both “high” art and mass culture. Kitsch is equally at home in an ironic art installation in an elite gallery as well as in a ceramic reproduction on the shelf of a truck stop gift store. Kitsch also fulfills a postmodern desire in its capacity to evoke nostalgia, which Barton explains as contributing to the commodification of Irishness in film:

Once-despised objects have become collectors’ items in the same way that cheap television shows are now fondly remembered as benchmarks of ‘innocent’ entertainment,” giving Irish films another method of portraying the simplicity and naiveté allied with Ireland that was, and is, often stereotyped and exploited. (194)

On the other hand, kitsch can be corrective to a postcolonial nostalgia. Its appreciation of the native Irish cultural identities that Irish nationalism and Catholicism prized is rooted in a conscious and often even ironic recognition of the aspects of sentimentality and surrealism with which they are associated.

Kitsch also uses the effects of the colonizer/colonized binary for its purposes in conveying meaning. Kitsch uses symbols, visuals and narrative styles that are easily recognized by widespread audiences as associated with Ireland. In employing these styles, kitsch acts as shortcuts to meaning, allowing productions to allude to these understood meanings while producing new, and perhaps more complex, meanings that move beyond generalization. As Barton discusses, kitsch can be used to portray authenticity as well as counter the romanticism of Ireland. In the second half of the twentieth century many Irish films, according to Luke Gibbons, centered on either “soft primitivism” or “hard primitivism.” “Soft primitivism” focused on the beauty of Ireland and its friendly, pastoral inhabitants, as shown in the landmark film *The Quiet Man*. “Hard primitivism,” on the other hand, displayed much of the Romantic sensibilities of the nineteenth century, adding grittiness and realism to the landscape that sought to provide it with authenticity, as seen in the film *Ryan’s Daughter*. Although Irish film expanded in the 1970s, exploring the Avant Garde and other alternative film styles, many of the productions made in the 1990’s drifted back towards the safety of romanticism. While much of the “hard primitivism” was altered by a turn towards the urban working class, like the film *The Commitments*, its method of aestheticizing a harsh realism was not necessarily reflected in the films that were focused on the Irish urban working class. Irish films of the pastoral, the “soft primitivism,” maintained their prevalence with a particular style. Barton states, “The overriding concern of the films of the 1990s was to present a tourist’s view of Ireland where a non-violent native population with an interesting but unexplained history lived a lifestyle marked by quaint encounters with capitalism and innocent sexual adventures” (193). The film *Waking Ned Devine*, fairly popular

internationally compared with other Irish productions, is a strong example of this style. Kitsch employs these stereotypes with alternative styles and narratives to create something that is both familiar and challenging. Kitsch can “celebrate” and explore the stereotypes of rural and urban Irish identities in film, while hinting at the surreality in aspects of the stereotypes. This, then, creates “a space for film makers to produce a cinema that carries a particular meaning for a local audience whilst displaying an internationally recognizable iconography – of kitsch” (193). Kitsch is a manifestation of the idea that “not only is Irish cinema inevitably tied into a global process of production and consumption but that Irish culture is itself a hybrid of the local and the global” (195).

One of the strongest examples of Irish film that used kitsch to create both a compelling and innovative narrative and style is Neil Jordan’s *The Butcher Boy* (1997). *The Butcher Boy* takes place in mid-twentieth century Ireland, showing the contrasting cultures of rural Ireland and imported British and American popular cultures. The film stresses the fact that the main character, Francie, is obsessed with the kitsch of comics and American Westerns, which, Ruth Barton states, is significant to the film in that the American/British media obsession is a common motif in Irish films set in the past: “This motif functions as a critique of essentialist cultural nationalism with its insistence on the superiority of an indigenous peasant culture” (194). The irony in statements from *The Butcher Boy*’s quaint Irish townspeople like “It’ll be a sad day for this town when the world comes to an end” manifests itself through the townspeople’s erroneous estimations of their own town’s importance by assuming it will survive amidst world destruction. Francie’s neighbors also show their own understandings of world events when they speak about communists (“With them, you never know who your dealing with”) and worship

Irish Americans and Catholic John F. Kennedy by hanging his picture alongside the Virgin Mary's. John F. Kennedy's Irish elevation to saintliness is only one of the methods by which Jordan satirizes Catholicism in the film. The immediate associations of the religion and bucolic goodness of pastoral Ireland are played with when Francie has visions of the Virgin Mary as well as a gentle mother-figure, which comes to life from a kitschy music box that Francie purchases. Sinead O'Connor plays both roles of Virgin Mary and gentle Irish mother.

O'Connor is an interesting choice for these roles, due to her shocking behavior in the past. In the 1990s she was known for her controversial actions when she not only defied stereotypes of feminine beauty with her shaved head and unconventional clothing style, but she also posed an affront to religion, particularly the Catholicism of her native Ireland, when she defaced a photograph of the former pope on live television. O'Connor brings her overtones of controversy and modernity to the absolutely kitsch-filled roles of the souvenir-come-to-life perfect mother and hyperreal mother of God, thus creating an instant circumstance for critique. But it isn't only Jordan's choice of a controversial actress as the Virgin Mary/devout mother that critiques Irish Catholicism. The film juxtaposes the image of "Our Lady," floating to Francie on a cloud of brilliant light, with arms outstretched and speaking, in a soothing voice, meaningless, trite statements, which fall into absurdity with Mary casually asking Francie "How are things?," and even cursing at times.



Figure 6

The *Butcher Boy* also juxtaposes the stereotypical concept of an Irish mother visualized so well in Francie's "A Mother's Love's a Blessing" music box (a great example of a tourist's stereotypical souvenir from Ireland). The film shows a woman playing a harp (a nationalist symbol of Ireland) in front of a perfect replica of the thatched cottage so often associated with rural Ireland. The music box is purchased as a present for Francie's mother, who, in accordance with the black comedy of the film, is dead, as Francie discovers when he returns to give it to her. The souvenir's message then becomes more of a taunt to Francie because of his mother's absence. It is further troubling to Francie in the manner in which it celebrates the aspects of womanhood (motherhood and domesticity) that Francie's mother escaped to in extremity with her frantic cake-baking that characterized her madness.

The Butcher Boy is also adept at rendering the last of what Ruth Barton describes of Colin Graham's "modes of Irish authenticity." As Barton discusses, Graham identifies these modes as "that associated with W.B. Yeats and the retrieval of an Irish folk culture;

the commodification of that culture through the idiom of tourism; and an ironic authenticity which problematises the notions of essentialism and originality” (Barton 195). Artists concerned with depictions of Ireland are able to use an “ironic authenticity” to assume the power of the commodifier as well as the commodified. Francie’s music box is a good example of all three of Graham’s modes of “Irish authenticity” in that it is a representation of Irish folk culture which has become commodified through tourism, where the reproduction assumes an “ironic authenticity” through its use in the film *The Butcher Boy* and is used to critique stereotypes of Yeats’ folk culture.

Paddy Breathnach’s film *I Went Down* is another example of a film that mixes the influences of consuming and consumed cultures. *I Went Down* follows an American gangster narrative with its two small-time crooks, but places that familiar narrative style in the rural areas of southern and western Ireland. Both the gangster narrative and rural Ireland are familiar, but when they are integrated they produce something different that challenges the ideas that are associated with each when each stands alone. Bunny and Git (the main characters of *I Went Down*) are not stereotypical, urban gangsters – cold, street-savvy and overly masculine. In fact, their manners of speaking and acting are more reminiscent of villagers of the Irish countryside with their geniality and lack of a gangster’s practiced airs. But Bunny and Git eschew characterization as peasants, simple, stuck in the past and overly sentimental, by staying in modern hotels and frequenting suburban lounge bars during their rural journey. These visits display some of the effects of commercial exploitation on the rural Irish landscape (198). Martin McLoone describes the film’s take on the stereotyped Irish pastoral as a road film in “a downbeat rural Ireland of boglands and cheap hotels” (“Reimagining the Nation” 34). The film’s

unique perspective also strives to take back some of the Irish identities that have been consumed by Hollywood. *I Went Down* is able to utilize a narrative style that created prominent Irish and Irish-American roles in 1930s and 1940s American gangster films, such as those played by James Cagney, while placing the narrative in Ireland. The film then becomes more of an Irish film that adapts a Hollywood genre, the gangster film, and combines it with settings like kitschy lounge bars, which are common to suburban Ireland and recognized as cheap imitations of classy and extravagant upscale urban bars (settings that would resonate particularly with the Irish audiences with which they would be familiar). *I Went Down* critiques the commodified and stereotyped versions of rural Ireland by shunning its scenery in favor of seedy lounge bars and plays with expectations of the gangster genre by making it uniquely Irish. Consequently, the Irish characters and their cultural identities are taken out of a position of easy consumption through stereotypes, and are instead able to project their own definition of Irishness in an Irish film that defies easy classification.

Regardless of similarities to Irish American gangster films, *I Went Down* is significant to Irish cinema in that its subject matter does not center on the Irish rural West (at least, not directly), the troubled North, or other clichéd themes of Irish films. In the film, violence is almost always synonymous with comedy. Scenes that include violence, like gunfire or physical abuse, are played out with black humor. In one scene, Git, one of the main characters, has to be taught how to hold a gun. The scene further satirizes his inabilities as a gunman when his “partner,” Bunny, has to also coach Git on how to seem convincingly tough while holding a gun. *I Went Down* also strays from Irish cultural stereotypes in that it gives a realistic depiction of Irish cities and suburbs, as well as the

Irish countryside. Although the film does use some sweeping rural scenes during the characters' journey, several of the shots of the landscape are bleak and empty, not at all the fertile, green rolling hills so often associated with Ireland. In fact, the major role of rural Ireland is as a hideout for some of the criminals in the film.

Modernizing, Alternative Lifestyles and Emigration in *The Crying Game*, *In America* and *Breakfast on Pluto*

There have been few examples of Irish films that have been successful in the United States in general, let alone ones that have not commodified Irishness. Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* was quite successful in the United States and touched on several controversial issues, both aspects of which are rare for Irish film. The film does feature a type of "reformed" gunman, one of the stereotypes of Irishness discussed previously, but one who is able to let go of some of his ideas of strength. While Daniel Day-Lewis' characters in *In the Name of the Father* and *The Boxer* do learn to let go of strength that comes from violence, they are still characterized as "fighters." *The Crying Game* attempts to portray a character that turns from reluctant gunman and fighter to an equally reluctant tolerant and gentle person who examines even the traditional gender identities of the heterosexual male. Fergus, the main character of the film, challenges stereotypes of male "strength" in that he is unable to carry out the execution of Jody, a British soldier. Fergus then flees to England, where he pursues a relationship with Dil, Jody's lover, and attempts to escape from any more participation in violence. In her essay, "I Kinda Liked You as a Girl'," Maria Pramaggiore describes how Fergus does

not align his masculinity with his identity as a member of the IRA, but rather, “It is in retreat, through the romance with Dil, not the nebulous battlefield of postmodern warfare, that Fergus seeks to prove his masculinity, to be the man that Jody was” (89). As he settles in to his new life as “Jimmy” in London and into his growing relationship with Dil and as he questions his place outside of the IRA, Fergus ultimately seeks to establish his identity in general, not just as a man. Fergus’ conflicting identities challenge the accepted clichéd identities of Irishness in Irish film, not only by showing a range of possible redefinitions, but also a range of identities in a single person who cannot live under a false stereotyped identity – in Fergus’ case, that of the violent and politically extreme IRA soldier.

The film is also unique to Irish film in that it features a main character, Dil, who is a transvestite. Gay, lesbian, transgender and transvestite communities were rarely featured in larger budget films when *The Crying Game* was made in 1993 and were especially absent in Irish films. The degree to which Fergus, the Irish man, is shocked at Dil’s true gender indicates how little alternate sexual identities were discussed at that time in Ireland. *The Crying Game* does lag in innovation in that it still relies on stereotypes of Irishness in its portrayals of women. Although the fact that Dil, a transvestite, is included in the film is progressive to some degree, she is English, not Irish, and therefore the film avoids the issue of transsexual lifestyles in Ireland. The film is also not forward-thinking in its portrayal of Jude, a female member of the IRA. Outside of the transvestite Dil, Jude is the only female represented to a substantial degree. Jude is ruthless and has basically sacrificed her life for the IRA, a depiction that relies on stereotypes of unfeeling, powerful and dominant paramilitary women using sexuality for

political gains. Jude, an example of a sort of matriarchal figure “with an absurd devotion to religion,” as well as the other central IRA member, Peter, are “overdetermined by their religious fervor, which partly defines their unambiguous ‘Irishness’” (Pramaggiore 89). Regardless of these issues, *The Crying Game* is an important film in the context of the Irish film industry in that after Neil Jordan won the Oscar for Best Screenwriting, the Irish government reestablished The Irish Film Board.

Jordan used another transvestite character in his more recent film, *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005). In this film it is the Irish character who is a transvestite, allowing for the film to include segments showing the treatment Patrick “Kitten” Braden receives as an unusual child and teenager in Ireland. Patrick has three close friends, one of whom is mentally disabled and another of whom is multi-racial. Mentally disabled and multi-racial characters are rarely shown in Irish film, so they are significant to *Breakfast on Pluto* simply for that fact, but also for the position they have as Patrick’s friends, leaving him even more markedly different from the rest of his Irish peers. The inclusion of a multi-racial character also disrupts the association of Irishness as a white ethnicity. On the other hand, the film is less broad in its depiction of mother figures. Patrick’s real mother leaves him and is mostly a “phantom lady” for the duration of the film. Patrick’s adoptive mother does not tolerate any part of his cross-dressing or exploration of his feminine side. Mrs. Braden is harsh and close-minded and, consequently, could be seen as a stereotypical domineering Irish mother. But Jordan is more balanced in his depiction of priests in the film.

The viewer learns that Patrick was abandoned by his mother and could not be raised by his father because his father is a Catholic priest. The film gives a satire of

priests' sexual purities in the guise of a story Patrick writes about his conception. The story is full of black humor as it gives a lighthearted account of a "randy" priest who takes advantage of his young housekeeper who bears a resemblance to Mitzi Gaynor and who shrieks that she is afraid she has caused an "exploding clergyman filling up the air with pent up sexual energy."¹¹ But the film does not leave Patrick's father's character in the position of the stereotypical neglecting and sinning priest. Patrick's father eventually finds him in London and not only tells him that he loves him, but also helps Patrick find his mother. Patrick's father also risks censure by his diocese when he takes in Patrick's friend Charlie, who is unwed and pregnant, and Patrick himself even though he is in his full-fledged "Kitten" clothes. There is even a moment where the priest can find humor in his relationship to Patrick. When Patrick asks him what he should call him, the priest answers kindly, "you can call me Father." The priest further highlights his position in the film as someone who is human, taking responsibility for his wrongs, tolerant and loving; he sacrifices himself to save Charlie after his house is set on fire by people who are not happy with his associations. Even the priests at Patrick's school are seen as caring. After Patrick gets into trouble for his controversial essay, he is not rapped about the knuckles with a ruler; rather, the headmaster asks him if there is anything they can do for

¹¹ Father Liam and Patrick's mother's relationship echoes the highly publicized Father Michael Cleary scandal. Father Cleary was a popular radio show host during the time period that *Breakfast on Pluto* takes place (late 1970's and 1980's) who often preached against pre-marital sex, abortion and priests breaking their celibacy vows. After his death in 1993, it was revealed that Father Cleary had had a 26 year sexual relationship with his housekeeper, Phyllis Hamilton and fathered two sons by her. In a September 2007 *Irish Independent* article, Hamilton is described as "vulnerable, flattered, in awe" and Father Cleary as "manipulative," a combination that is clearly reflected in the character traits of Patrick's mother and Father Liam in *Breakfast on Pluto* (16). Hamilton's psychiatrist, who confirmed the relationship, was initially regarded as not credible and antagonistic to the Catholic Church, but his statement that he "could fill the newspapers for a month with similar stories I've had with patients and victims and problems with priests" was later seen as reliable after so many scandals involving the sexual lives of priests came into light in the late decades of the twentieth century (16).

him to be able to be more successful in school after which they allow him to join the girls' home economics course.

Breakfast on Pluto is also unique in its views on the Troubles and Irish and British relations. The film is set in the 1970s, which puts the *mise en scène* near the beginning of the Troubles period. Although it is not the main focus of the film, Jordan does not ignore the violence that certainly would have affected Irish youth at that time. Patrick does not want any part of the political conflict, which is obvious even when he is a young boy. Patrick is playing guns with his friends and is "captured" by his friend who asks if he will die for Ireland. Patrick responds, "Die for Ireland? I'm sorry, but it would appear to me that some of you have taken leave of your senses." After Patrick meets up with Billy Hatchett, a macho singer played by Gavin Friday, and travels with his band, he is forced to leave the band. Hatchett lets Patrick stay in his caravan where Patrick discovers he is hiding weapons for the IRA. Later, when his friend Irwin is participating in a march to "Smash Internment," Patrick asks him if he can have pink camouflage if he enlists. Patrick protests after Irwin tells him to be serious, but Irwin answers that soon enough he will have to take things seriously.

Patrick's situation does turn serious after his mentally disabled friend is killed by a bomb after being lured into dangerous areas by a bomb-disarming robot that reminds the friend of the robot costume that he used to play in when he was younger. This death prompts Patrick to dump the weapons in Hatchett's caravan, not as a political statement, but because of his grief. Patrick's action leaves both himself and Hatchett in dangerous positions when the IRA comes back for the weapons. The IRA men are portrayed somewhat as thugs, only deciding not to kill Patrick because he is friends with Irwin and

a seemingly harmless “nancy boy.” Patrick sarcastically asks them (after begging for them to shoot him) “What is it about nancy boys that you can’t be bothered killing them. You kill everyone else.” The statement proves fairly true after the IRA kill Irwin because he told the police information in order to free Charlie, who had been picked up on drug charges. Jordan’s different Nationalist characters allow him to show a complexity of caring, humor and ruthlessness that transcends the stereotypes of freedom fighter hero and reformed gunman that are so easily marketable forms of Irishness in other Irish films. By escaping these stereotypes, Jordan’s characters are seen more as individuals whose actions are more personally and uniquely motivated, and not as types who behave according to storylines and characteristics that have been pre-determined for them because they are “reformed” gunmen or cold-blooded IRA men. Jordan’s characters also challenge the viewer to see the complexity of Irish Nationalism itself through the wide variety of people who are involved with it to different degrees and for different reasons, and, in turn, to see the intricacies of Irish politics and the situation in Northern Ireland.

Breakfast on Pluto’s characterization of British characters is significantly more forgiving than most Irish films. Patrick meets a British soldier who had been in Ulster at a bar. The soldier is quick to say “I don’t have anything against the Irish, mind you. I hear they’re very friendly. I don’t know. It’s the politicians will fuck it up, in’nt?” Sadly, the soldier’s kind words are made into a mockery after he is killed minutes later by a bomb. Ironically, Patrick is picked up for suspicion of planting the bomb. The police are fairly brutal with their interrogation, but eventually realize that Patrick’s stories of his undercover work, which involves spraying perfume as a weapon, are false. As the policeman carries Patrick back to his cell telling him that they made a mistake in blaming

him for the bombing, Patrick tries to turn the situation away from seriousness when he asks the policeman, “If I weren’t a transvestite terrorist, would you love me?” After he is freed from a cell that he never wanted to leave, Patrick turns to prostitution for money. One of the policemen who interrogated Patrick finds him and helps him to a job that is safe. Jordan’s portrayals of the British police definitely stray from the cold, brutal oppressors of other Irish films. *Breakfast on Pluto*’s British police are as human as its Irish priests.

Breakfast on Pluto also balances its time between Ireland and England. Again, unlike most Irish films, *Breakfast on Pluto* does not portray Ireland as a rural paradise, nor does it portray England in a very positive light. Jordan’s film seems to associate Patrick’s feelings of belonging and security with people, rather than with a stereotyped version of Ireland as “home.” Patrick only leaves Ireland because he does not feel at home with his adoptive family and goes to search for his mother. When things do not work out with his mother he returns to Ireland to find home with his father and friend. Jordan’s film *The Crying Game*, on the other hand, illustrates a character who is able to move on with his life by leaving Ireland. Fergus must leave the past, not return to it, in order to make amends for what he feels he has done wrong. In her book, *Irish National Cinema*, Ruth Barton describes an experience of an immigrant where “immigration entails erasing memories of the actual conditions that forced the initial act of emigration – famine, debt and lack of opportunity – and re-imagining the homeland as Edenic” (5). When Fergus relocates to London he cannot erase his memories. In fact, he must remember Jody, the man he was to kill, and he is haunted by that memory. He is able to start his new life and his new job outside of the IRA by confronting his memories in the

form of befriending Dil. Ironically, immigration does not make Fergus see his homeland as “Edenic;” he instead sees Jody, who was a British soldier, in an idealized form.

Jim Sheridan’s film, *In America*, focuses even more closely on emigration and opens new avenues of defining Irish cultural identities by illustrating an Irish family’s migration to New York and their first months of American life. *In America* follows the Irish family as they cross the U.S.-Canadian border to illegally settle in New York. The film then depicts the hardships the Irish family endures as they find an apartment and the parents find jobs. The film includes glimpses of the lives of other tenants in the Irish family’s building, mostly unsavory characters with drug addictions or morally questionable jobs. But the Irish family eventually befriends the mysterious Mateo, a Haitian immigrant living in an apartment below them. *In America* then shows how the Irish family adjusts to life in America and their growing relationship with Mateo. The film closes with the celebration of the birth of the Irish family’s new member and the family’s (and, in particular, the father, Johnny’s) finally learning to deal with the deaths of both Mateo and Frankie, the son who died in Ireland and whose death has plagued them from the beginning of the film.

As it focuses on a story of immigration in America, the film plays with the notion that the idea of the American Dream has been so prominent that it has become deeply embedded in Irish cultural identity. The film challenges the Irish notion of the American Dream by making an effort to stray from the accepted Irish ideas of America and shows a not-so-promising space for opportunity in its New York. Many films, like *The Field*, portray America as a nation that the poor Irishman travels to in order to make his fortune, which he can then take back with him to Ireland, his true home. *In America* does not

portray Ireland as necessarily a home for which the family to return, nor does it show America as a magical place where a little hard work will always bring an immigrant success (the American Dream many Irish were told repeatedly by relations who had emigrated before them or gathered from film and television). After Johnny, the father of the Irish family at the center of *In America*, returns to the newsagent clerk who would not lend him 25 cents so that he can buy a plug adapter for an air conditioner, a small relief for his family's extreme discomfort, he sarcastically addresses the clerk as "Mr. American Dream."

Sheridan, in his commentary on the film, revealed that he wanted to use mundane scenes to highlight issues, like materialism, that are prominent in America and hint at the negative aspects of values, like monetary success, that are associated with the American Dream. And, significantly, the film takes place entirely in the United States, therefore preventing any opportunity to display scenes of pastoral Ireland. In so locating itself, the film avoids creating nostalgia for rural Ireland. Ruth Barton quotes Sheridan as stating that the depiction of immigration in the film is somewhat motivated by his desire of "getting away from the death culture" and that "Ireland is associated with a trauma in the past that can be worked through by contact with the modernity of American society" (*Irish National Cinema* 189). Sheridan's words illuminate the attempts the film makes to demonstrate the need for the characters to confront and deal with the past as well as their need to accept their new country, America, as home and to see modernity as an aid, and not a hindrance, to self-discovery. So many Irish films project contemporary society as immoral and damaging to families (like *The Secret of Roan Inish*), where an escape to the pre-modern Ireland is the cure. *In America*, in contrast, depicts the past not as an escape,

but as something that should be confronted, just as contemporary society is not something to be escaped but rather, given the chance, something that offers a realistic opportunity to heal and move on in life. *In America* also never comments on the political situation in Northern Ireland, thereby allowing the family, and, in turn, the film, to remain neutral about Northern Irish politics and concentrate on other political issues, like poverty and immigration. In fact, by avoiding personal political alliances the film takes the responsibility of morality from a main character, as from the “reformed” gunman or historic hero, and places it within the entire family and community.

In America differs from many Irish films in that it takes the point of view of women just as much as it does men, in its concentration on the family. Johnny is still a protective father, exhibiting some of the same strength of endurance that Fergus does in *The Crying Game*, but Sarah, the mother, shows equal strength in taking care of her family. In fact, the “narrator” of the film is not only female, but also a child, which is a perspective most films neglect. The film also gives a voice, actually the most sophisticated voice, to Mateo, a Haitian and representative of the African and Caribbean Diaspora – a character type that rarely makes an appearance in Irish film, let alone in the context of any significant or influential roles. Mateo is, though an outsider (he does not associate with other tenants in the building and his tortured screams and his disease scare even the more suspect tenants, outsiders themselves, and leave them to speculate about his character), the voice that promotes true community, love and understanding. Mateo, with his Spanish name and African ethnicity, is a symbol of globalization and transnationalism in New York. It is no accident that it is Mateo (and consequently, the multiracial and multicultural internationalism that he represents) who is the savior of the

Irish family. Mateo is also important to the film in that he draws attention to the very contemporary and widespread problem of AIDS. *In America* never directly names Mateo's disease as AIDS, but it is heavily implied, allowing for the film to portray Mateo's struggle without becoming a simplified moral lesson. Sheridan performs a similar act in his illustration of drug addicts, showing them as neither despicable nor saintly victims, but rather, as desperate people with a consuming addiction that is unglamorized.

Sheridan also addresses the idea of the unfixed nature of Irishness with the struggles that the family endures in coming to terms with their Irish cultural identities in their new country, which he shows in a realistic balance with their developing American cultural identities. The film opens with an extremely grainy shot of the American flag. Though the flag continues to become clearer during the shot, it still remains somewhat obscured, reflecting the transitional and unfixed nature of America and its culture, both for the family as they first experience America, and for America as a constantly changing country involving many cultures. When the family first moves into their apartment, the youngest daughter uses the word "cool." Her sister chides her with "You're American already. It's disgusting." When she asks her younger sister where she learned the word "cool" her sister replies that she "just heard it." This short interaction is indicative of the prevalence of cross-cultural influence depicted in *In America*. The father of the family, Johnny, also mimics cross-cultural influence when he practices his lines for an audition and he looks into a mirror while he repeats one line in several different American accents. His place as immigrant is reinforced when he arrives at the audition and the casting directors ask him to say the line in a British, not American, accent. The scene is ironic in

that Johnny is Irish, and definitely not British, but also in that the American directors seem to have no idea that there are a multitude of different British accents, which Johnny proceeds to demonstrate. Nevertheless, the family wants to be able to fit into their new lives. When the girls dress up for Halloween in homemade costumes they are embarrassed because their costumes look different than everyone else's and they "want to be like everyone else." And, meaningfully, when the older daughter, Christie, sings for a school talent show, she wears a cowboy hat and sings "Desperado," evoking images of the American, not Irish, West. But the family does not lose its Irish cultural identity altogether. When they have Mateo over for dinner, Sarah cooks traditional Irish food, which opens up a discussion of the family's and Mateo's different cultures when he asks about the dishes served. Even though they have all moved away from their home countries, they have not lost their traditions. And they are all able to share without falling into defining stereotypes. In fact, when Sarah is talking with Mateo she tells him that the word for "black man" in Irish actually translates as "blue man." The literal translation of the words "black man" in Irish means kettle. This comment is interesting in that it both addresses how little Ireland has been faced with people with black skin and suggests a lack of racism in early Ireland by its lack of use of the word "black," which often has been used in a negative way, in reference to people of races with dark skin.

In America also plays an important role in achieving new definitions of Irishness in tying the Irish American diaspora more closely to Ireland and suggesting that the Irish cultural identity can apply to Irish Americans as well. Even though the family is living in the United States, they are still considered Irish, not American. This inclusion broadens not only identities of the Irish diaspora, but also of Ireland as a nation. Some writers of

the Irish diaspora, like Sean Kenny, take the standpoint that until the late twentieth century, the Irish diaspora was taken in to account much in definitions of cultural identity outside of its place in the migration that was so prevalent in Ireland's history. He states, "The Irish who emigrated were universally successful wherever they went, and yet up to the present generation the country they came from never mustered the political will to make use of that fact" (105). This is a compelling argument in favor of the adoption of the diaspora as part of Irish national identities. In "The Irish Diaspora: Globalized Belonging(s)," Breda Gray discusses this same issue.

The term diaspora, as a means of unsettling traditional assumptions about migration, nation, state, identification and belonging, emerged in the work of some diasporic academics and intellectuals in the metropole in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Diasporas were also being embraced by many emigrant states as a means of transnationalizing the very meaning of the nation. The latter trend was evident in the Republic of Ireland in the 1990s when notions of the diaspora circulated in official and media discourses of Irish identity. At the same time, issues of Irish cultural specificity and continuity came into question, if not more acutely than at other times, then in different ways. (123)

There does still remain a hurdle in placing Irish American identity in the larger context of Irish identity because of Ireland's increasing move towards Europe economically and culturally. But, nonetheless, on the whole Irish emigrants are no longer ignored and are recognized as having the ability to alter meanings of "belonging" when considering Irish identities. In the late twentieth century Ireland was faced with greater globalization and the "deterritorialization" of culture from globalization. Ireland also had to continue to

deal with its lack of complete control over its cultural representations from past “deterritorialization” as a colonized nation, as there were now several nations that might have claims to Irish culture. The Irish Diaspora were subsequently more often included in discussions of Irish identities because they are representative of transnational contribution and they have the ability to disturb “settled” notions of Irish identity” (Gray 124). This disruption is often absent from Irish films but necessary in understanding the range of identities of Irishness. The inclusion of the Irish diaspora can add diversity and challenge stereotypes of Irish cultural identity by taking away the notion that traditional Ireland is the only authentic version of Irishness. But, ironically, it is the diasporic conception of the historic, rural Ireland that Irish citizens can turn to for reassurance in a constantly changing and modernizing Ireland.

As discussed previously, Ireland is often portrayed in films and advertising as an idyllic land driven by pre-modern family and community values, untouched by the ills of the contemporary societies where the Diaspora reside.¹² Thus, the diaspora influences Irish national culture and maintains an idea of cultural continuity. And, as emigration could be seen as a part of Ireland’s history, the Irish diaspora provide a link between tradition and modern globalization. “Emigrants and non-emigrants in different ways became sojourners building on the groundwork and spirit of previous generations in the Diaspora and emblematic of a globalized nation” (Gray 128). In this sense, the film *In America* generates discussions of Irish belonging, as well as Irish transnationalism and cross-cultural influences, by exploring emigration without relying on stereotyped Irish identities. It can encourage Irish citizens to embrace the Irish diaspora as included in

¹² See previous discussions for Irish Spring advertisements, “Celtic” marketing, Irish tourism and films of the rural West of Ireland for more specific examples of Ireland as a pre-modern escape from contemporary society.

concepts of Irish cultural identity as well as serve as a reminder to the Irish Diaspora that they must, in consequence, broaden their ideas of Irishness. In James McAuley's introduction to the issue of *The Irish Journal of Sociology* in which Breda Gray's essay is published, he comments on that need for the Irish Diaspora to update their understandings of identities of Irishness in order to accommodate globalization. He states, "If notions of Irishness are changing, then so too are the diasporic community's needs to refurbish senses of identity that may transcend ideological, generational and geographical differences" (McAuley 7).

Using Film as a Medium to Disrupt Commodification

Not only does *In America* disturb stereotypes of Irishness through its unique subject matter and address to the Irish Diaspora, but it also does the same work through its cinematic form. Sheridan's most significant formal choice is his use of screens (most obviously the viewing screen of Christie's video camera) to call the viewer's attention to the fact that she is watching a film. These screens stress the place of film as separated from reality by a layer of simulation – film is not just storytelling, but also a re-creation of reality. Part of *In America*'s narrative is delivered with home-movie-ish footage. These moments in the film interrupt both the smooth movements of the camera and the seamless editing that lulls the viewer into the belief of the reality of the film, and, in particular, the possibility of personal identification with that reality. The film also shows members of the family, especially the oldest daughter who also narrates the film, watching the footage on the video camera. This footage provides another screen between

the viewer and the film's story as well as reinforces the idea that this is, actually, Christie's story. There is a moment when Christie is watching footage on her camera and she says, "This is make-believe." *In America*, rather than making claims of its authenticity, purposely calls attention to its nature as a simulation (biased through point of view and revisionary through re-creation), making it unable to be completely authentic. In this manner, the film escapes many of the problematic aspects of Irish history in films because it does not need to rely on historical facticity nor draw viewers into developing stereotyped understandings of Irishness or Irish history.

In fact, the film deliberately rejects some common film techniques. Instead of using a traditional montage to pass time, when *In America* shows the family is getting their apartment ready to live in, Christie states, "I'll fast forward through this bit," showing her ability to physically play with time with the film itself. Christie's comment is indicative of the contrast between the cinematic simulation of reality ("make-believe") against the viewer's actual reality -- a theme that runs through *In America*. Christie's ability to fast forward through time in the film reflects the viewer's ability to fast forward the film (and cinematic reality) itself. Christie's comment is also interesting in that it highlights the relationship between time and history -- in this case, personal history. Christie is retelling her history, and because it is through the re-creation of film, she is able to hurry through what she feels is not important to fully reenact for the viewer in the same manner that a filmmaker can summarize events in an historical film. This correlation then confirms the notion that even historical films, although based on actual events, are not reality, but only simulations of reality. Sheridan's address of these issues of history and time in film are especially relevant considering the sheer number of Irish

films dealing with history as well as the importance that history has in the narrative of Irish films.

But the use of the home movie footage in the film is not entirely given to addressing history in film and pointing to the simulated reality of film. It is also employed in creating a telling point of view, as it does in the several important scenes which are illustrated through Christie's video camera. When Sarah tells Christie and Ariel (the younger daughter) that she can feel the baby kicking (even though she cannot) in order to reassure the girls, the film switches to the point of view of Christie's camera, getting a close-up of the interaction of expressions from both her mother and father, betraying Sarah's nervousness and Johnny's disbelief. If Sheridan had used the usual techniques in filming these reaction shots, the viewer could have concluded that Sheridan wanted the viewer to notice Sarah and Johnny's reactions. Instead, because it is Christie's video camera that provides the reaction shots, the viewer can conclude that it is Christie that would like the viewer to see her parents' reactions, and not just the main "action" of the scene. Christie is calling attention to her role as filmmaker, controlling the reality that the viewer is witnessing in the film.

But perhaps the most disruptive actions in the film happen when the characters directly address the viewer. There are a couple of moments when one of the actors, specifically the mother or Christie, looks straight into the camera, almost confronting the viewer, challenging him or her to pay attention to what is being said. This method becomes intensive, and very effective, at the close of the film. Christie tells the viewer, "I'm going to switch this off now [referring not only to her camera, but to the camera filming *In America*], it's not the way I want to see Frankie anymore." She then looks

directly at the camera and continues, “Do you still have a picture of me in your head? Well, that’s the kind of picture I want to have of Frankie. One that you can keep in your head forever. So when you go back to reality, I’ll ask Frankie to please, please let me go.” This seems to be Sheridan’s message to the viewer — know that this is not reality, but a re-creation of reality that is a method of telling a story and conveying meanings and ideas. It is a warning to the viewer to not be dependent on the images of the film for an absolute authenticity or a manufactured Irishness commodified for the viewer, but instead, to take the meanings and ideas of the film and create her own conclusions. This message of independence not only gives imaginative power back to the viewer, but also provides the viewer with a sense of social responsibility and the conviction to utilize that responsibility (thus avoiding blind consumption). *In America* does not allow the viewer to be ignorant of the idea of film as commodity or as vehicle for ideology; rather, it convicts the viewer to assume responsibility as part of the re-creation its viewing generates.

Like *In America*, Paddy Breathnach’s *I Went Down* combines an entertaining narrative with alternate innovative formal techniques that can break accepted ideologies and defy stereotypes of Irishness. Although he does not necessarily challenge the viewer to question the nature of “reality” in film, Breathnach is, nonetheless, deliberate with his use of film as medium and his position as an Irish filmmaker. Also like *In America*, *I Went Down* is unusual for Irish film in that it does not follow a completely traditional narrative line and takes place in a contemporary society that rather than a pre-modern Ireland. As Kevin Rockett argues in the article “Irish Film,” though the film still centers on “a decidedly Irish male universe,” it “stylistically broke with the dominant realist

conventions of films made in the 1970s and 1980s” (25). *I Went Down* uses original camera angles and unconventional editing to create a unique and, more importantly in the context of this discussion, modern film. The wide-angled shots are static, clean and graphic, showing cement buildings and unbroken horizons, disregarding Irish cinema’s traditional usage of sweeping wide-angled shots to highlight lush Irish countryside. *I Went Down*’s juxtaposition of scenes is very heavy-handed in its use of editing to insinuate and connote and not simply narrate. The film is a type of “gangster comedy,” not political at all, which is a style of film that is common in American cinema, but is rare in Irish film as an “adaption of genre filmmaking to an Irish setting” (Linehan 48). The film may owe at least part of its success to its Hollywood influence, but it might also be indebted to independent cinema from the United States for its mixture of styles and genres.

Both *I Went Down* and Jordan’s *Breakfast on Pluto* also disrupt commodification by calling attention to their natures as film and, in part, by disallowing the consuming gaze of the viewer with the addition of chapter titles that appear throughout the films. The chapters not only highlight the films as productions and narratives, but also give the viewer a context in which to view the scenes that follow the chapter titles. In *I Went Down*, the chapters are often excerpts from published works, like Plato’s *Republic*, or from things characters have said. These titles gain additional connotations by interplaying the original meanings of the quotations with the meanings the quotations acquire in the context of the particular parts of the film in which the titles appear. In *Breakfast on Pluto* the chapter titles are used most often for irony. For example, when Patrick narrates his version of how he was conceived, the chapter title in the scene reads

“In which I am mis-conceived,” implying, humorously, both that his father is a priest and that he was accidentally conceived. The title could also apply to how he is often misunderstood. Later, Patrick spends a hard night trying to find a place to sleep and seemingly finds refuge in a cozy hut. The chapter reads “Fairy Tale” and the subsequent scene shows Patrick waking up to find himself not in a cozy hut in a secluded wood, but a structure in a bizarre children’s theme park where he is eventually hired to wear a costume and portray a female dancing creature. The title adds irony to the scene as the park is revealed as anything but an Irish fairy tale, but rather, a financial endeavor that shows its commercial motivation by forcing Patrick to perform in order to stay and firing Patrick’s partner when he gets disgruntled by a customer.

I Went Down and *Breakfast on Pluto* also employ distinctive cinematography and editing, which technically and formally disrupts the viewer’s consuming gaze. *I Went Down* recalls sweeping shots of the Irish landscape, but uses its long shots to show an empty expanse of bogland, the entire length of a rundown and outdated casino bar building, or the blank concrete walls and high fences of the entrance to a prison. They are not beautified scenes, but rather, realistic shots of things common in Ireland but rarely displayed on film. In fact, the long shots with their simplicity of subject and clean lines add to the contemporary style of *I Went Down*. *Breakfast on Pluto* largely stays away from simplicity and instead seats its style in the 1970s, which is the time period of the film. The colors are often highly saturated and clashing, adding to the surreal feel of the film. The cinematography also relies on extremely high and low camera angles, jarring the viewer into new perspectives on the characters of the film. It even allows for the point of view of the birds that the camera follows as they flit in and out of the film

between scenes. The birds resemble the innocent and saccharine cartoon birds seen in Disney fairy-tale films, but when their conversations are translated in subtitles at the bottom of the screen, the audience can read that the conversations are almost entirely gossip. Once again, *Breakfast on Pluto* creates a pointed irony by refusing to comply with the viewer's expectations and humorously dispelling stereotypes of an innocent and harmonious Ireland.

Conclusion

April 2008 will mark the fifteen year anniversary of the reconstitution of the Irish Film Board. It is still uncertain whether Irish film has changed greatly during those fifteen years. It is equally difficult to gauge the reception of Irish film in general during that time period. It is interesting to note that Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto*, a film with a modern and unique narration style and cinematography, was not chosen for the Cannes Film Festival while Ken Loach and Paul Laverty's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, a film with a classic narration style and cinematography, won the Palm d'Or, the highest prize given at the Cannes Film Festival, in 2006 despite the controversy surrounding the film as possibly pro-IRA. It is also interesting to note the differing subject matter of the two films. *Breakfast on Pluto*, although set in the 1970's, deals with alternative lifestyles and avoiding violence, which are subjects that seem ingrained in contemporary Western culture. *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, in contrast, is clearly set as a 1920s historical epic that would seem to fit De Valera's conservative and Nationalist requirements in style and subject matter. This difference of reception cannot be said to represent a strong shifting towards past cultural sensibilities of Irish film; it can merely be said that Irish film today varies greatly in subject matter, narration and style. It is obvious that the old stereotypical tropes of Irish film are still present along with innovative and distinctive themes. In her book *Irish National Cinema*, Ruth Barton skillfully summarizes the state of filmmaking in Ireland today. She states, "These images (stereotypes), themes and characters form the foundation of an Irish cinema and have

become, for each new generation of filmmakers, a way of defining their own work, whether they chose to reject them, incorporate them, or rework them” (7).

One must also note that, despite critical acclaim, neither film was very popular in America, nor has an Irish film reached a wide level of distribution in the past five years. Even if the native Irish film is underrepresented in the American box office, Irishness is still prevalent in film, television and advertising. The “allure” of Irishness that Natasha Casey speaks of has not lost its potency in the same sense that the allures of a white ethnicity or an idyllic homeland have not lost their potency. By analyzing the stereotypes of Irishness and the popularity that that Irishness in all forms has reached in America, I have shown the level and nature of the commodification of Irishness. And, by examining those identities of Irishness in Irish film, I have shown the manner in which and the degree to which Irish films commodify Irishness. Film is a cultural production, and like other products, it is developed to appeal to the greatest number of consumers. A great part of the consumption of Irish film is operated by the large audience that Irish Americans comprise. The reciprocal relationship of producer and audience in making Irishness appealing is evident with Irish Americans. Whether Irish film is simply catering to an audience that already has set expectations of identities of Irishness, or whether Irish films themselves also create those expectations of identities of Irishness is hard to discern. As the relationship of expectation and production is symbiotic, one might question whether the commodification of Irishness in Irish film is, actually, problematic. The question may come simply because the gulf between the realities of what contemporary Ireland is like and the expectation that the consumer has of what Ireland should be will be too wide to sustain itself, as was signaled by Diane Negra in her

introduction to *The Irish in Us*. In that case, film viewers may look to films like *The Butcher Boy*, that play on their expectations in order to comment on stereotypes of Irishness, or films like *In America* that deal with experiences of immigration and multiculturalism in contemporary society. Or, they may even look to a film like *I Went Down* that uses established film genres, but modernizes them in style and makes them applicable to contemporary Ireland.

Perhaps a resolution to the troubling aspects of the commodification of Irishness by Irish Americans can come through Irish Americans addressing the power they have as their own entity in defining meanings of Irishness, rather than accepting meanings that have already been defined. Medb Ruane discusses the Irish inclusion of the Irish American diaspora in her article “Greening of Irish Americans Now Finally in Place,” which appeared in the *Irish Times* in 1998. She describes the initial reluctance of the Irish to value the diaspora’s opinion of meanings of Irishness. She states:

Irish American was a potentially powerful political seam, but the premise was that we owned Irishness, not them. Perhaps the name was appropriated when James Cagney starred in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. Certainly by the time Gene Kelly and Donald O’Connor went *Singing in the Rain*, Yanks were Irish-Americans who might spend money visiting Ireland, but were no more than tourists in what we knew to be ‘our’ culture, never mind having one of their own. We were snobs about being Irish: Yanks might buy into Irishness, but we alone had permission to interpret it. The copyright was ours. So we decided what the Famine, the Easter Rising and the euphemistically-named Troubles did or did not mean – for them as well as for us – and raised hell when they saw it differently. We might hate their

sentimentality, but we understood their economic power. If they were Irish-American, then we had more purchase on telling them what symbols made sense for them and for us. (16)

Ruane states that a shift has been made from thinking that Irish Americans having any say over meanings of Irishness was “outrageous.” She believes that the changes from globalization and growth in the Irish American community and its interest in a relationship with Ireland call for an alteration to definitions of Irishness, as she states in her proposal:

But the nationalist narrative which governed Irish-America has finally and formally ended: the energies of both Irish-America as a series of communities and the United States as a world power are redirected as de facto stakeholders in new elaboration of Irish and Irish-American identities in a way history has never witnessed before. (16)

Although I think the assumption that the nationalist narrative is dead is premature, Ruane’s idea of the new collaboration of Irish Americans and Ireland is something that should be acknowledged. In that case, Casey’s question must be asked all over again: “In respect to the consumption of Irishness in the United States, however, it remains to be seen just what problems are being solved, whose desires are being fulfilled, and to what end?” (*Riverdance* 25). Although, even if Irish Americans are reconsidered and included in what constitutes Irishness, that reconsideration does not negate the commodification that Irishness has achieved in Irish films, despite the fact that the target audience would itself represent a part of Irishness. The “allure” of Irishness in all its forms -- the pre-

modern rural escape, the return to family values and community, the realism of the gritty, urban North, the sympathetic hero and the welcoming homeland that provides authenticating origins – is no less alluring and still constitutes the desires that filmmakers will continue to fulfill in Irish films. What has, perhaps, changed in contemporary Irish films is the degree to which the consumption of Irishness is addressed in Irish films themselves, offering a manner of critique to a film that does not disregard international audiences while still speaking to a specifically Irish audience. These films cannot erase stereotypes of Irishness, but can call attention to their existence and the ways in which they are possibly false or absurd. Contemporary filmmakers can also bring to light modern Ireland and a modern, innovative native Irish cinema which can attempt to solve some of the problems of the consumption of Irishness. Filmmakers can move beyond the stereotypes and depictions of Ireland as a nation imprisoned in history. They can offer cinematic alternatives that can compete with and challenge their predecessors' and call into question "to what end" Irishness will continue to be commodified.

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