

Narrative Strategies in Contemporary Irish Cinema: 1993-2003

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I hereby declare that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my own work.

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SUMMARY

This thesis is concerned with the exploration of narrative strategies in contemporary Irish film between 1993 and 2003. Central to the methodology is the relationship between theory and practice, executed through an approach which combines the theory of narratological studies with a practical approach to craft analysis and screenwriting, contributing to the growing debate around praxis by academics and trainers in film schools throughout Europe and North America.

This study examines the role of Bord Scannán na hÉireann during its first ten years after it was re-activated in 1993, examining shifting policy as it relates to scriptwriting in particular. My interest lies with how writers and directors construct story-worlds to express in the filmic medium. Hence I am less concerned with issues national but rather how Irish films explore aspects of the human condition that can resonate beyond limited national boundaries. I examine how films can act as educators of the emotions and how narratives can explore different levels of the human experience through internal and external characterisation. I am also interest in how this contemporary era relates to its predecessor and how filmmakers have made the transition from the 1st wave to the 2nd wave. Keen to situate storytelling and its expression within a global, international and historic setting, I analyse how ancient forms, such as tragedy, can be appropriated for modern stories.

While most critics view this period (1993-2003) negatively compared to what is considered its more radical predecessor, this study concludes that these films emerge from a different context and reflect a film culture that is rooted to an international framework. The tensions and fissures within contemporary Irish film result from an era of filmmaking that is developmental, evolutionary and teleological.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Chapter One – Narratology and New Irish Cinema 1

Chapter Two – Educating Emotionally through Universal
Storytelling - *The Boy from Mercury* 59

Chapter Three – Characters that “say and do” and characters
that “see and hear” - *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* 97

Chapter Four – Negotiating narrative Coherence through Internal
and External Struggles - *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*,
A Man of No Importance, *About Adam* and
When Brendan met Trudy 132

Chapter Five – *Nora* - a Love Story of Equality 173

Chapter Six – The Tragic Potential in the Story of
Song for a Raggy Boy 218

Conclusion 256

Appendix 1 266

Bibliography 269

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To my daughters, Aoife (5) and Ailíse (3), let's go to the cinema!

curiosity about native film developed, becoming a fascination which has intrigued and absorbed me ever since. Initially as a post-graduate student completing a Masters thesis on the work of Pat Murphy and Margo Harkin as Irish feminist filmmakers, later as a lecturer in Film Studies, Irish Cinema and Scriptwriting and also as a story developer / scenarist on the Writers' Team of *Glenroe* (RTÉ television drama), I have followed keenly the developments, changes, evolutions and ruptures within Irish cinema over a fifteen year period. This thesis emerged specifically from observations made about contemporary Irish cinema since the re-activation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann in 1993, is influenced by a dual interest in narrative form and how contemporary writers and directors are mastering and exploiting its potential and out of a keen interest to contribute to the discourse from the perspective of *praxis*.

Most writers on Irish cinema agree that there is a marked difference between the cinematic material which emerged from the 1st Bord (1981-1987) and that which is being produced since its re-activation in 1993, principally at the level of narrative form but also with regard to content (Barton, 2004; Ging, 2004; McLoone, 2000). Assessing the differences between these two periods in Irish filmmaking, how and why they emerged and hence establishing the more recent 'wave' as distinct and separate yet evolutionary and developmental is the primary focus of this thesis. In achieving this goal, the methodology strives to establish a clear and practical nexus between theory and critical analysis as the dominant mode of interrogation of Irish film and practical and specific script/storytelling strategies as a method developed here, thus establishing a meeting point between theory and practice. As an observer and participant in the scriptwriting process and an academic engaged with the debates in Irish cinema, my interest in theory and practice seemed an isolated one. However, just as storytellers do not operate in a vacuum, my search was not cast without context. Some may argue that this need to relate theory and practice is a 'new millennium' urge on behalf of the *academy* for legitimacy beyond the enclosed world of the university or maybe evidence of the imminent implosion of Cultural Studies; either way it points towards a widespread *praxis* concern among academics, from the work of media commentator and practitioner Des Bell (2004) to high-end cultural theorist Edward Said (Cleary, 2005). Teaching on an academic programme within the Institute of Art, Design and Technology which houses the National Film School, my

explorations along these lines have a comfortable habitat, particularly as I explore contentious issues around the pedagogy of scriptwriting and Film Studies broadly.

This study is not a genre analysis of contemporary Irish film principally because the industrial context is dissimilar. As genre is a term developed for the analysis of the Hollywood Studio System which relied on the vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition as an economic model for success, it is not wholly appropriate here. The economic infrastructure for Irish film production has, for the most part resisted such industrial norms. Furthermore, Irish writers and directors have forgone working within genre (either for artistic or economic reasons) and Bord Scannán na hÉireann has highlighted the lack of genre scripts landing on their desks. While a generic analysis therefore would more than likely end in a *cul de sac*, what it may reveal however is whether the scripts eschew 'genre' as a consequence of flawed structure or because appropriating genre does not fit the context for or expression of contemporary Irish stories, a ponderable this thesis will elucidate on.

Neither is this thesis a thematic or content analysis of Irish film, principally because such analyses focus on one aspect of narrative, content or subject matter at the expense of narrative form or story strategy. This thesis is not concerned with what 'issues' preoccupy contemporary Irish filmmakers as this has been expertly evaluated by others in the field (Barton, 2004; Ging, 2004; McLoone, 2000; Pettitt, 2000). The primary aim of this thesis is to examine narrative strategies in contemporary Irish film through a formalist address while exploring the purpose or function of such stories through an appropriation of cognitive theory, myth-criticism and Jungian analysis. Consequently this combined methodological approach will shed light on the theory/practice debate within cinema studies.

While not focused on the work of Jim Sheridan specifically or tangentially, this thesis sits chronologically between *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and *In America* (2003) by coincidence rather than design. However, the position adopted for analysing narrative strategies is inspired by Sheridan's approach to story-telling which is regarded as humanistic, universal and concerned with prevailing myths about humanity, both local and global. The re-activation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann as partly a consequence of his work (and Neil Jordan's) who received international

recognition through Oscar Academy Awards and thus launched Irish film on the international stage, is what historically frames the boundaries of this thesis.

Chapter 1 sets out the context for this study by presenting a brief history of the re-activated Bord Scannán na hÉireann, detailing the factors that gave rise to its re-emergence and highlighting key developmental moments in its first ten years which impact on the films produced in this period. Linking back to the previous era of film activity in Ireland, this chapter assesses the state of the national identity discourse within film studies and examines its relevancy to contemporary debates. Finally, the notion of 2nd wave, assuming there is a coherent one, is teased out and presented as a framing device for the purpose of this study. Having established the parameters of the study, Chapter 1 also presents the methodology for analysing the texts. Drawing on the work of David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Noel Carroll and David Herman as narratologists and combining it with the New Structuralists' approach of Robert McKee, Stuart Voytilla, Kristin Thompson, Ari Hiltunen and Christopher Vogler, the formalist approach to textual analysis is demarcated. In an attempt to examine the symbolic functioning of the films, this chapter appropriates the cognitive theoretical approaches of Gregory Currie, Carl Plantinga, Torben Grodal and Greg M. Smith and combines them with philosophical enquiry of Alex Neill and Susan Feagin against the backdrop of myth-criticism and a broad Jungian approach to interpretation.

The Boy from Mercury is examined in Chapter 2, starting with a narratological analysis followed by an appropriation of Alex Neill's *Aristotelian* theory of 'educating the emotions'. Situating the story in a local milieu, Martin Duffy chooses a narrative trajectory that follows a dramatic form whereby the character grows and changes internally as he journeys through the narrative, recognising an emotional loss, mourning and celebrating it and moving on in life *Jungian-like*, thus revealing a growing tendency within Irish cinema to adapt classical universal forms of dramatic structure in telling a story that comments not on the social, political or cultural but on shared meanings of humanity.

Chapter 3 analyses the relationship between plot and character as structural devices of the screenwriting process that shape the story-world in different ways, within a

framework of Bordwell's *historical poetics* and reveals what is at work within two Irish films concerned with youth culture, *Disco Pigs* and *Accelerator*, subsequently arguing that the range of narrative choices offers the potential for a diversity of text outcomes. Exploring the widely-held assertion that narrative form and thematic content are inextricably linked, this chapter tests its applicability by applying a structural reading of the narrative (form) and uncovering the symbolic meaning (content) of these two films, at a local and global level.

Chapter 4 appropriates the narratological theory of focalisation to reveal the emotional depth and complexity of character formation and construction in a series of films, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, *A Man of No Importance*, *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*, stories that are distinctly linked to a local milieu yet comment on prevailing human fixations, such as the pursuit of love, 'coming out', sexuality and sexual activity, in diverse situations. Developing the thesis further and contributing to the pedagogy of scriptwriting by testing different narrative strategies, this chapter argues that when a complex range of formal devices are employed, a story is told that sheds light on aspects of the nature of humanity and human existence, in this instance features of masculinity and femininity, anima and animus. These texts can be read as illuminating on issues cultural, not national but culturally *human*, framed by a universality which is rooted spatially and temporally through representation in the text.

In an attempt to link with Ireland's cinematic history, this chapter explores the work of Pat Murphy, 1st wave director associated with feminist film and the avant-garde, who makes the transition to 2nd wave both narratologically and thematically, revealing that contemporary Irish film is situated within a developmental and evolutionary phase as it responds to Ireland's 'filmic' past but more importantly the wider, global cinematic present. Looking at a number of contemporary Irish love stories, this chapter argues that Murphy's film *Nora* articulates a progressive discourse of equality by simultaneously embracing and rejecting generic elements of the conventional 'love story', re-affirming the intricacy of form and content. This chapter, therefore, provides a historical, aesthetic and discursive link with earlier Irish cinema while at the same time illustrating how contemporary Irish cinema can be innovative and progressive within the classical, generic and universal realm of the 'love story'.

Continuing the discourse that broadens out narratological analysis beyond the confines of the national to embrace the universal elements of dramatic form, Chapter 6 analyses the theme of tragedy formally, as defined by Northrop Frye and reveals the dramatic opportunities embraced and eschewed in the film *Song for a Raggy Boy*. Rather than concentrating the discussion along ideological lines as has been the tradition in Irish cinema scholarship, this chapter makes the case for a formalist analysis in revealing how this subject matter is treated by the cinematic apparatus. In this chapter a theoretical approach is applied in a practical way, exploring how subject matter that lends itself to 'tragedy' can be structured within a pre-defined narrative formula to achieve particular story outcomes. Aware of the dangers of essentialist and prescriptive formulae or reductionist methods and their counterpart, the over-determinism of contextualised approaches, this chapter argues that formalism as a methodology can illuminate the theory/practice debate and contribute to the pedagogy of scriptwriting by focusing on the 'filmic' nature of the texts.

The work of this thesis therefore is to examine how contemporary Irish cinema adopts conventions and techniques of the cinematic apparatus and synthesises them into narrative form, remaining a subsidiary of an international model yet exhibiting clear and distinctive local inflections. The basic techniques and conventions are understood universally while the meanings are often modified locally. How contemporary Irish cinema variously accommodates the two within one design or construct is the central focus and thrust of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

NARRATOLOGY & NEW IRISH CINEMA

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

While Jung couched this path [from rational consciousness to ‘insanity’, unconsciousness] in terms of Greek mythological narratives and the esotericism of the alchemical path, contemporary film narratives achieve their powerful effect by displaying the character affected against a backdrop of familiar, suburban, hyper-ordinariness. (Hauke in Hauke & Alister, 2001: 157).

The era of filmmaking launched with the reactivation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann (Irish Film Board) in 1993 has defied critical terminology and while scholars have focussed on specific texts that lend themselves to analysis within particular discourses, it can be argued that the recent Irish cinema has, by and large, not received the focus of attention that its predecessor did, arguably because it embodies an ‘ordinariness’ that requires different analytical frameworks.¹ While naming and labelling are contentious exercises, for the purposes of this study the period between 1993 and 2003 of Film Board activity is termed the 2nd wave, a term first used by Martin McLoone in *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (2000: 127-128), the rationale for which will be examined and defended later.² The term 2nd wave follows on from the era book-ended by Bob Quinn’s *Caoineadh Airt O Laoghare* (1975) and Joe Comerford’s *Reefer and the Model* (1988) known as the 1st wave and generally accepted within Irish cinema studies as an epoch of formally and thematically challenging filmmaking (McLoone, 2000: 131). Within the critical literature and according to Ruth Barton, the seminal text *Cinema and Ireland* (Rockett, Gibbons and Hill, 1988) through its influential effect set the tone and parameters for the examination of Irish cinema, principally by guiding and directing researchers through the Irish national identity debate. According to Ruth Barton (2004: 7) a national cinema relies on being able to create films from within its own boundaries and away from other filmmaking practices, ‘[t]his imperative formed the

polemical basis of *Cinema and Ireland* which was conceived just as that process appeared close to being realised by the new wave of independent, deconstructive and avant-garde Irish films of the 1970s and 1980s'. Despite having three distinct strands³ and approaches to the study of film, *Cinema and Ireland*, part of a culturally reforming history as the 1st wave was, has left an enduring legacy to the analysis of Irish film.⁴

While this thesis is similarly influenced by Rockett, Gibbons and Hill (1988), it embraces among its objectives an attempt to find critical and creative space for an alternative discourse to emerge, pertinent to this study, in the examination of contemporary Irish cinema. While the 1st wave has been pivotal to the emergence of an Irish national cinema, principally because it was the first time that there was a substantial body of work produced in Ireland by Irish writer and director teams since the development of motion pictures,⁵ and has contributed both to the theoretical investigation and critical practice of filmmaking, it could be argued that its critical success has consequentially hindered the emergence of the 2nd wave from rightly claiming its place within the field of study.⁶ Against this back-drop this study proffers new approaches to film and narrative analysis by appropriating established discourses and applying them to a new film landscape. In this chapter, therefore, following a brief historical analysis of the era under investigation, an examination of the methodological approach of this thesis will be set out, one that appropriates various strands of narratological studies, bringing together relevant literary and film approaches to the analysis of story construction, combined with an adoption of myth-criticism. Consequently, this thesis situates itself within the wider debates emerging within Visual Arts studies centring around the relationship between theory and practice.

BORD SCANNÁN NA HÉIREANN 1993 - 2003

The era under investigation in this thesis spans ten years, from 1993 to 2003. There are a number of reasons for demarcating this study chronologically in this way but principally because the decade between 1993 and 2003 was the first time there was a sustained level of film activity in Ireland that produced a body of work closely resembling the output of a national cinema (outside of the 1981-1987 period) and

provided technicians, writers, directors, producers and other film personnel with sustained employment in an industrial context. The re-activation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann⁷ is significant given that it came about as a combination of political lobbying (on behalf of film groups such as Film Base⁸) and the Oscar winnings of Irish films such as *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1987) and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992).⁹ The Academy Awards presented to Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan brought Irish film dramatically into the mainstream giving it Hollywood recognition, even validation, signalling that Irish directors were capable of telling stories that crossed cultural boundaries and spoke beyond the national. Even though the legacy left by 1st wave directors (who in the main were the beneficiaries of the 1st Bord Scannán na hÉireann (1981-1987)) had its impact, it was the internationally successful mainstream directors such as Jim Sheridan, Pat O'Connor and Neil Jordan that provided the impetus for the action to be taken that would facilitate an Irish-based production environment emerging.¹⁰

However, Hollywood's recognition alone could not have accounted for the re-establishment of the Bord. The 'Celtic Tiger' economy was developing and establishing itself by 1993/94 and thus there was a growing confidence in Irish cultural matter and an economic basis for re-establishing the Bord.¹¹ Furthermore, like all Irish political decisions which are based on *clientelism* it took a minister with a vested interest to push forward and implement the decision. Michael D. Higgins, Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaelteacht at the time and a member of the Labour Party, a poet and academic serving the Galway constituency, had a commitment and passion for the arts and his local community. Farrell Corcoran in *RTE and the Globalisation of Irish Television* (2004) describes O'Higgins as 'a public thinker, with his own ideas about media and the arts and passionate convictions about their role in a small nation exposed to major global trends and influences' (Corcoran, 2004: 47), Higgins, it could be argued, was also a reforming minister not afraid of tackling the organisational structure of Irish public service broadcasting, as well as introducing infrastructural changes to the Irish film industry. Hence, shortly after Neil Jordan's Oscar success, 'Best Original Screenplay' for (British-financed) *The Crying Game* in March 1993, Minister Higgins announced the re-activation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, to be located in his native Galway.¹²

Any assessment of Bord Scannán na hÉireann in the period 1993 to 2003 must take into account the particular management style and characteristic philosophy of the first Chief Executive Officer, Rod Stoneman.¹³ His tenure spans the period under investigation in this thesis, having been appointed as a result of public competition in 1993 and serving for ten years as CEO before resigning in 2003. While the CEO of an organisation can influence to a greater or lesser degree the day-to-day operations as well as the mission of a board or organisation, examining Rod Stoneman's approach is illuminating in many ways. The appointment of someone who on the one hand is perceived as an 'outsider' while having close links with the Irish film community is interesting given that the new Bord would inevitably be blighted by past activities and future expectations.¹⁴ Stoneman had been working in Channel 4 when it was concerned with Irish-related subject-matter during the 1980s through the community initiatives, and was involved in Irish productions such as *Hush-a-bye Baby* (Margo Harkin, 1989), *High Boot Benny* (Joe Comerford, 1993), *The Kickams* (Brendan Byrne, 1992) and *Ireland: The Silent Voices* (Rod Stoneman, 1985). His close alignment to Irish projects while at Channel 4 positioned him sympathetically as a candidate for the position while at the same time his status as 'outsider' meant that he might be immune to some of the idiosyncratic practices of Irish state organisations as evidenced by the 1st Bord Scannán na hÉireann.¹⁵ He was duly appointed and took up the post as CEO of the Bord in 1993.¹⁶

From the outset, Rod Stoneman set a particular style and objective for how he was going to manage the Bord. In the 1993 Review and Annual Report, Stoneman wrote

let a thousand flowers bloom and a thousand schools of thought contend: we set out to achieve a rich and variegated Irish cinema, with its roots embedded in a vigorous culture. A genuine aspiration towards a radical pluralism.¹⁷

This statement, in summing up his vision for Irish film was appropriated from his time at Channel 4 in the 1980s and was to characterise his approach for ten years, even admitting himself in 2003 that 'the flag we flew in 1993 had not changed all that much'.¹⁸ In some respects, it could be argued that he was simply transposing an ideological and artistic approach to production that existed in Channel 4 when that service was first set up. However, running a state agency for film production is quite a different venture to a public service broadcasting institution particularly at the level of

finance. Unlike Channel 4 which was a publicly funded body (public service broadcaster) when it was first launched, Bord Scannán na hÉireann was not in a position to offer 100% finance to any one production. Producers would have to enter co-production deals as a *modus operandi*. Furthermore, as a result of closer European integration, film production must now operate in an international arena. While this has consequences in a tangible way for film finance, it also has implications for how 'national cinema' is conceptualised.

What Stoneman meant by 'radical pluralism' is revealed in the subsequent Bord Scannán report when, reflecting on his vision for Irish film he states that there should be

a wide diversity of styles and subjects: the rural and the urban, the contemporary and the ancient, the high brow and the low brow, the "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited..." in Polonius' words'.¹⁹

The relevance of these statements is in revealing the vision Stoneman brought to the Bord while also suggesting an underlying contradiction in what emerged.²⁰ At one level, Stoneman envisioned a diversity and eclecticism towards style and content in the new era which appears, superficially, to have transferred to the body of work supported by the Bord, certainly at the level of content. However, on closer scrutiny, Stoneman's proclamations suggest a contradiction borne out by the historical record, a body of work that is less eclectic and broad-ranging than the expressed intentions and vision of these statements. Stoneman aligned himself to European art cinema while at Channel 4²¹ and was rooted mainly in French intellectual criticism through his own formal education and work experience. Furthermore, his vision as described displays remnants of 1st wave ideology, envisaging film as a way of expressing a multitude of ideas through art practice, an auteurist approach to cinema. However, this becomes modified as the decade progresses to include more economic descriptors of film (when Stoneman shifts the emphasis from content and form to the economics of the industry). These statements therefore reveal (in hindsight) the direction Stoneman would take the Bord and hence Irish film over a ten year period which notably involves a significant shift. The 'theory' behind Stoneman's philosophy suggests a trend, although not stated, towards less commercially driven projects with an emphasis on art-house film, which is not realised in practice. While Stoneman

expresses the idealism of a previous age, the realities of a more commercially demanding environment take hold and win out.²²

The key question therefore centres around change: does Stoneman shift in his ideological position; do Irish filmmakers through the scripts they write and submit to the Bord reposition the emphasis; or is the shift a result of international trends and developments? Through a narratological examination of ten films of this era, this thesis will implicitly explore these questions. This thesis is not centrally examining policy-making within a political and economic framework but concentrating on narrative examination can shed light on wider concerns in a cultural and historical way. The output of the Bord over the ten year period contains a noticeable absence of art-house productions seeking to challenge formally dominant narratives in favour of writers and directors formulating more mainstream narrative stories.²³ A quick overview in survey form of the films supported by the Bord between 1993 and 2003 might suggest that Stoneman's vision of 'radical pluralism' did indeed transfer to the product created by writer/director teams, principally because the subject matter is diverse and wide-ranging across contemporary issues and concerns that relate to 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland, yet this approach did not impact stylistically. Critics of this era highlight the absence of stories that challenge and interrogate this Ireland (Barton, 2004; Ging, 2003; McLoone, 2000) and on closer scrutiny a less radical and less plural approach to issues of the *condition humaine* may be revealed.

Reading the statements from the early days of the Bord, one can detect a mixture of looking backwards (to the 1st wave) combined with an anticipation of new directions for the future. Given that there was such a rupture in 1987 when the 1st Bord was terminated so abruptly, it is not curious to uncover remnants of 1980s thinking some seven years later, at both an ideological and practical level. In the 1994 Review and Annual Report of the Bord, Lelia Doolan as Chair writes, reflecting on the first year of production under the new Bord

our vantage point on the journey is presented in the pages which follow – postcards from the probings of our national psyche by passionate explorers. They plunge into the chaos of the unknown and draw out inner and coherent forms for our inspection, jolt our assumptions, fill us with wonder or anguish or laughter – and flesh out new identities and landmarks in the unfolding actions of fiction.

It is unsurprising that the ideological positioning of the Bord in 1993 would look back to the 1980s and attempt to form links between the two phases even though culturally, economically and aesthetically the film environment had changed quite significantly. When Stoneman pays homage to the 1st wave in the Review of 1993 by writing that '*Eat the Peach, Reefer and the Model, Anne Devlin [and] Angel* were amongst the films, which in very different ways, initiated a rich period of filmmaking' in Ireland, he is recognising and acknowledging the more avant-garde and modernist era and linking with the past as he advances forward. Indeed, the appointment of Lelia Doolan as Chair to the Bord could be read as a formal continuity link with the 1st wave and in keeping with minister Michael D. Higgins' position of cultural nationalism.²⁴

However, cognisant of a new era and in an attempt to strike political balance, Stoneman followed the previous statement by saying that '[the] second board sets off with the intention of achieving a judicious equilibrium between cultural and economic imperatives. To some extent even the short hand of this dichotomy is inaccurate as both factors are deeply entwined in a capital-intensive activity such as filmmaking: the largest budget movie produces a cultural artefact as an end result and the smallest amateur film has an economic life.'²⁵ While 1st wave practitioners tended to underplay the economic underpinning of film in favour of its art practice,²⁶ Stoneman shifts the parameters in the direction of an industrial model while clinging on to the notion of art cinema. He displays a fine balance between appeasing the former generation while introducing the new realities of the 'Celtic Tiger' era whereby the 2nd film board will be under more economic scrutiny if it is to survive.

Beyond Production

While it is not intended to overstate the CEO's influence in defining the Bord's activities,²⁷ it is interesting to characterise the operational approach of the organisation to reveal how this may impact on what developed over the next ten years. From the start the Bord had a wide remit. Not only charged with issuing production loans, the Review and Annual Report for 1994/95 reveals that the Bord undertook research into the distribution of Irish (and other European) films in the United States, analysed rural cinema exhibition and examined the facilities for production in Ireland and the state of the post-production base. Taking their role to encompass more than just production, as the decade progresses the Bord became increasingly involved in a

wider range of activities including developing film companies and encouraging script development. While the Bord's output has been criticised for being too 'mainstream' (Quinn, 2000: 27), its activities have not. Located in the west of Ireland city of Galway, the Bord inevitably was conscious of its regional obligations, something that could easily have been overlooked if it was more centralised in the capital city, Dublin. Concerned with the non-metropolitan audience, the Bord sought to develop regional exhibition centres leading to the launch of a mobile cinema, the *Cinémobile*, which toured local and regional centres that otherwise would not be exposed to Irish and other non-mainstream cinema, an interesting development in cinema exhibition given the ever increasing centralisation and domination of the multiplex cinema and the alleged threat of homogeneity as a consequence of globalisation. However, the production outcomes or the content of the films supported by the Bord between 1993 and 2003 does not reflect a regional bias or interest and as the decade advances displays an increasing urban, even Dublin predisposition. While the filmic activity that the Bord sought to support focussed in one direction, swayed regionally, the concerns of the new generation of Irish filmmakers are less national and regional than global and international, more urban than rural thus directing content in the opposite direction.

Unlike many state organisations, it could be said that Bord Scannán na hÉireann was a 'filmmakers' board', that is it fostered close links with the community it was charged with representing.²⁸ It saw a role for itself in co-operating in public events and devising fora whereby it could contact and debate with its constituency. Gerry McCarthy, writing in *The Sunday Times* (Culture Section),²⁹ states 'much of the criticism that has been targeted at Stoneman is probably a result of his high profile, hands-on style. He is credited as a producer of every film the Board backs and, like any producer, tends to oversee minor details, suggesting cuts and changes of emphasis... But Stoneman's situation is paradoxical: he is both bureaucrat and entrepreneur'. Revealing Stoneman's idiosyncratic approach to managing the Bord and in turn the tone he set for the fledgling industry, the sub-text suggests an uncomfortable level of interference. McCarthy goes on to question whether it is healthy for one person to be involved in every film. While he doesn't see the concentration of power as necessarily a bad thing, he does see the Irish film industry being shaped largely in Stoneman's image. A key task of this thesis therefore is to

investigate what types of stories Irish writers and directors created between 1993 and 2003 and in what structures, styles and aesthetics these were executed. It is important therefore to assess Stoneman's relationship with Irish cinema given his hands-on approach and establish whether he positioned himself like a 'patron of the arts' who would reveal personal preference through executed choices. Not only is this important historically for the assessment of the period, but it has implications for the future developments of Irish cinema.³⁰

Culture and Economics

Another characteristic of the Bord is the way in which it strove for a balance between culture and economics, albeit by imagining and appropriating new industrial models, a clear departure from what may be considered the failings of the 1st Bord and a potential point of tension for the way in which the fledgling industry was viewed. One of the reasons proffered for dissolving the Bord by Charles Haughey in 1987 was the insufficient financial returns made on Irish films that received state finance.³¹ While national cinemas of this nature require state subsidy and use the cultural argument by way of insulating themselves from market forces, the 2nd Bord claimed a recoupment level of between 20% and 25%,³² a percentage which they argue is higher than the Australian Film Commission which claimed 9.8% for the same period and the British Film Institute which scored 5.7%. According to Stoneman, the Dutch, Danish and French National Film agencies averaged a return of 1%.³³ Earlier in 1995, Stoneman said that there 'has been some tendency to characterise the Board's approach in black and white categories, but it is neither an elite cultural enterprise geared to the aesthetic film appreciated in obscure academies and distant festivals, nor is it an implacably commercial venture orientated entirely towards the pursuit of profit.'³⁴ While this may be simple political rhetoric and displays an attempt by Stoneman to appease both sides, it will be interesting to reveal, through the work of this thesis, what types of films emerge as a result of trying to balance the 'art' and 'industrial' influences and elements of film production.³⁵

Striking a balance between 'economics' and 'culture' entailed directing Irish cinema production away from the models under which the 1st wave operated while not trying to ape the industrial model of Hollywood, which would not have served Irish film

well even if it could be achieved. A state-sponsored subsidy-structured industry cannot, for economic and political reasons, compete with the Hollywood model. The approach adopted in this instance is not a radical departure in terms of national cinemas and ties in with developments since the 1970s between 'second' and 'third' cinema as a response to the dominance of the Hollywood model, developments which Stoneman would have been very familiar with through his work in Britain in the 1980s in particular.³⁶

It is time to recognise the important differences of [the] cultural approach and mode of production and play to our strengths, throwing out the fantasy, especially persistent in English language cinema, of competing with Hollywood on its own ground. Whatever the illustrious histories of various European cinemas, the future does not lie in attempting to make inadequate imitations of large scale industrial product from America. The plural range of films, of very different budgets, genres and aesthetics, being produced in Ireland at this time is a contribution to this wider project.³⁷

In an interview in *Screen International*³⁸ Stoneman refers to 'an exciting and dynamic range of Irish cinema' but states that he would not use the term 'industry' for Ireland or for most of Europe, despite different European countries having, at different times, an industry that is more than just 'artisanal production', France, Britain, Italy and Denmark for example. According to Stoneman, 'what goes on in Ireland is a more cultural, more artisan level of production that plays to cultural strengths', which on the one hand suggests ties with 'second cinema' and 1st wave, yet is clearly located in a different economic system. Further elaborating on his conception of artisanal cinema in an article published in the journal *Kinema*³⁹ he suggests that the main difference between the artisanal and industrial approach is located at the level of budget and style. The artisanal budgets are inevitably low and the style is one that emphasises diversity as opposed to Hollywood's repetition. Another feature of the artisanal approach is the way in which national cinemas can work together. Citing the film *The Scent of Green Papaya* (Tran Anh Hung, 1993)⁴⁰ as an example of the hybrid nature of artisanal production, he states that '[d]ifferent countries can work together in different configurations to create a broad range of modestly budgeted film. As long as they respect, and indeed intensify, their cultural specificity...'.⁴¹ While the effects of this approach could be seen as just another version of the euro-pudding phenomenon that dilutes creative autonomy to the point of narrative construction by committee, it is a worthy attempt to move beyond the industrial models handed down

by Hollywood. On the other hand, negating the possibility of an industrial model in favour of an 'artisanal' approach surely limits the potential for commerciality and industry.⁴² Stoneman, not only in a philosophical way but also economically, brings with him an approach to film production that was fostered and developed in the early days of Channel 4. Whether this would suit the Irish production and creative environment of the 1990s is something that this thesis will explore.

Rod Stoneman's appointment to Bord Scannán na hÉireann, it could be argued, was a result of what is termed in the recruitment industry as 'the fit'. Philosophically he offered a bridge between the ideologies of a post-1960s generation who were clinging on to a perceived radicalism despite the encroaching conservatism of a more commercially driven and economically oriented society. His ideas could incorporate the remnants of 1st wave ideology while his approach to production would cater for the expectations of a new generation, on paper at least. According to an article in *Screen International*⁴³ '[to] filmmakers in Ireland, his appointment was inspired. After commissioning and co-producing more than 20 Irish features and documentaries, Stoneman is well aware of the strengths of Irish filmmaking: films such as Joe Comerford's *Reefer and the Model*, which Stoneman bought for Channel 4, typify the uncompromising "personal" cinema that he has always championed'. While he provided reassurance in the early days for filmmakers that the art form would be protected, his combination of a cultural and economic model no doubt contributed to the extensive range of films produced over the past ten years and also to the longevity of the Bord, given that its continued existence was threatened on more than one occasion, despite the criticisms waged against its film output, commentary which will be addressed throughout this thesis.⁴⁴

Developments And Initiatives 1993 – 2003

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail all the developments and initiatives of the Bord in its first ten years, in this section I propose to outline those developments that are relevant to this study, policy decisions and initiatives that are focussed narratively, primarily on script development. The early years of the Bord's re-instatement were regarded within the industry and the national press as quite

successful. Writing in *The Sunday Business Post* Marion McKeone states that the previous year (1994) the Bord backed eight features.

All were produced by Irish production companies, and all were written or co-written by Irish screenwriters – and six of them featured first time directors. Given the number of inexperienced filmmakers who got projects off the ground as a result of film board backing and a s.35 investment, you would expect a fairly high dud ratio. But not so.⁴⁵

Inevitably when the call for scripts was made in late 1993, there were numerous writer/director/producer teams waiting in the wings whose careers had been abruptly terminated with the axing of the 1st Irish Film Board.⁴⁶ Significantly however, these directors were not to dominate the early output of the Bord, as many new directors and writers had graduated from the various film schools in Ireland, UK and North America and had been establishing themselves in Ireland and abroad since 1987, some in the advertising industry and others in short film production..⁴⁷ The first annual report of the re-constituted Bord Scannán na hÉireann shows that in the year 1993-1994 the Bord allocated IR£945,000 to film production, with a return on its investment of 25% or IR£200,000.⁴⁸ In this period nine features were produced at a cost of £6.7 million, the balance accumulating from a variety of other financial sources. Eight of these productions had Irish writers and directors and five were regarded as ‘first-timers’.

By the end of 1998, thirty-seven features had been produced with the support of the Bord: in fact, 1998 was a key year in the Bord’s development given that it now had five years behind it, and a critical mass by which it could be judged. Thus, around this time one can detect a shift in attitude towards the Bord’s output. While a certain amount of good will could be expected for the early productions from film reviewers, critics and the wider film community, this appeared to be running out by 1998. At the launch of the annual report in 1998, the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht at the time, Síle deValera, suggested that while ‘many of the Irish films being made were worthy and notable efforts’, they lacked commercial value, ‘the emphasis has got to be on entertaining the audience’.⁴⁹ Again, while it is important not to make too much of ‘launch speeches’ more likely written by civil servants, it still reveals a shift in thinking and suggests that automatic support is not inevitable; more would be now

expected of Irish films. The Chair at the time, documentary-maker Louis Marcus, saw funding as the primary issue and argued that the capital grant of the time - which was IR£3.4 million - was far too modest to meet the demands of the industry. All the same, having enjoyed a five year running-in period with little criticism from the wider media, the Bord's lack of commercial or critical successes was now being highlighted. When Marion McKeone in *The Sunday Business Post*, who previously had been less critical of Irish film, put it to Rod Stoneman that 'a significant number of these films failed to attract any level of critical acclaim. Fewer still have been commercially successful', his response was simply to reiterate the recoupment levels which he claimed remained at 20-24% and admitting it was not a commercial return, he emphasised that the Bord was not a commercial company.⁵⁰

While 1998 was a year of more critical commentary towards the Bord⁵¹ it was also a time to reflect. The British Press accused the Bord of being pro-Republican because of the apparent emphasis on 'nationalist' themes in the films they supported,⁵² however 1998 marked the year when it appeared that the 'holy trinity' of subject matter had finally been cleared out of the 'national' system. The 1950s and the Troubles had dominated many of the films' themes in the first few years (*Broken Harvest*, Maurice O'Callaghan 1994; *Bogwoman*, Tom Collins 1997; *Nothing Personal*, Thaddeus O'Sullivan 1995; *A Further Gesture*, Robert Dorhhelm 1996; *Some Mother's Son*, Terry Gorge 1996; *The Boxer*, Jim Sheridan 1998) which was to be expected given the vacuum for expression since 1987. The end of the representation of repressed sexuality (*Gold in the Streets*, Liz Gill 1996) and the 'coming of age' films (*Last of the High Kings*, David Keating 1996; *Circle of Friends*, Pat O'Connor 1995; *Drinking Crude*, Owen McPolin 1997; *Moondance*, Dagmar Hirtz 1994; *Spaghetti Slow*, Valerio Jalongo 1996; *The Disappearance of Finbar*, Sue Clayton 1997) transpires around this time, particularly evident when compared with the types of films to emerge subsequently (*About Adam*, Gerry Stembridge 2001; *When Brendan met Trudy*, Kieron J. Walsh 2001; *Goldfish Memory*, Liz Gill 2003). These latter films reveal a shift post-1998 in the direction of a more liberal, progressive and eclectic representation of sexuality in particular, situated mainly in an urban milieu.

These developments are precisely relevant when positioned alongside the change in direction detected from 1998 onwards. The following year saw the launch of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group's report, the deliberations of a Think Tank set up by the minister, Síle deValera, the previous year. Reporting on the contents of the report Michael Dwyer in *The Irish Times*⁵³ states that

The report places particular emphasis on an area that the [Bord Scannán na hÉireann] should have placed more stringent criteria in the past. Calling for a radical increase of funding for script and project development, the report pinpoints a critical priority often underestimated by Irish film-makers. This will be clear to anyone who has seen some of the Irish films which have been bypassed by, or failed at Irish cinemas. The report notes how the Hollywood studios routinely spend as much as 10-15 per cent of a film's budget on development, and how their films are rarely put into production without being subjected to skilful editing, a series of re-writes and development team inputs. Typically the figure for Irish film projects is about 3%. In its recommendations for a strengthened and restructured BSE, the report commendably prioritises 'the provision, either directly or by access, of expertise in high quality script development that is strong on both artistic and commercial criteria.

Interestingly (and astonishingly) Rod Stoneman notes that the issues of narrative, script development and story technique would never emerge in discussions with filmmakers or BSE personnel prior to 1998, even at the pre-production stage when funding applications were being considered,⁵⁴ but as the filmmaking activity consolidated, these aspects which are clearly a concern of the audience, became a preoccupation with those on the Bord and of filmmakers themselves. Stoneman sees a wider context for this development, particularly in English-speaking Europe which witnessed the arrival of the Robert McKee 'road show' and the proliferation of scriptwriting and story manuals from Vogler, McKee et al., all of whom contributed to the growing and widespread interest in script development and the normalising of the process within film pre-production. While scriptwriting manuals had been available in Hollywood since the 1920s⁵⁵ and script development was an inherent part of the pre-production process under the Studio System, the European tradition had been founded on improvisation of scriptwriting and non-studio based production to a significant degree (French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, British Social Realism). The use of the term 'development' is a much more recent phenomenon and its emergence in Ireland reflects a wider European trend, which includes the support mechanisms put in place for script development such as the MEDIA initiative funded by the EU, particularly through the *Arista* and *Sagas* programmes, Screen Training

Ireland's (FÁS subsidiary) concentration on script development and editing and the growth in scriptwriting courses in Irish higher education. The emergence of the script development process marks a key moment in the history of Bord Scannán and is particularly relevant to this research, principally because the focus of analysis in this thesis is on narrative strategies and story telling techniques. The development of this process interestingly came about not as a consequence of increased funding but resulted from the internal reorganisation of resources within the Bord. This study, therefore, closely examines whether the attention to script development had a notable impact on the film scripts (structurally, narratively and stylistically) and subsequent filmed versions that were produced in the post-1998 period.⁵⁶

Another development relevant to this study was the appointment of Ossie Kilkenny, accountant and media entrepreneur, to the position of Chair - Bord Scannán na hÉireann in 2000. In the same article mentioned above, Michael Dwyer notes that Kilkenny's appointment comes with a more commercial, corporate and non-protectionist approach to film with an apparent concentration towards international markets, more so than before. When Lelia Doolan was appointed as the first Chair (1993-1996) a continuity link was established with the 1st wave while Louis Marcus' appointment (1997-1999) continues the cultural connection some years later: both of these Chairs are considered 'production people' and therefore sympathetic to the artistic and creative practice of filmmaking. A shift can be detected away from the 'cultural' in the direction of 'economics' when Ossie Kilkenny (2000-) is installed as Chair in 2000. Whether this shift comes about as a result of the Bord responding to external factors or their political masters initiating or insisting on change, with the emphasis moving towards economics and away from culture, it will have a notable effect on a change in policy into the new millennium. In an interview published in *The Sunday Business Post*⁵⁷ Kilkenny highlights script development as a key area needing attention. While it is difficult to ascertain exactly the influence a Chair can have on the workings of the Bord, whether the Chair is appointed to reflect the new ethos of the Bord or whether the new Chair directs the Bord in a particular way by responding to requests from key personnel, there is a notable shift in 1998/99 towards script development and the market culminating in the creation of a new post of Development Officer (later Manager) around this time.⁵⁸ This key moment will be pivotal to the work of this thesis as the films are textually examined. Do the scripts

improve in terms of story design and structure as a result of increased funding for the development phase? By introducing structured funding and attention through the appointment of a Development Manager to this part of the production process, one that was central to the success of the Hollywood studio system and the promotion and sustainability of the classical narrative system, the Bord is acknowledging a weakness heretofore in Irish film production, particularly in the area of scriptwriting.⁵⁹ The development budget accounts for 10% of the overall budget, comparable to Hollywood yet the attrition rate in Ireland is not as severe. Whereas one in four scripts going through development can expect to reach the production phase under Bord Scannán na hÉireann funding, the level is one in ten in Hollywood.⁶⁰

It is noteworthy therefore that 2001 is documented as a record year for Bord Scannán na hÉireann with nine films being released in Irish cinemas.⁶¹ Again, it is difficult to draw a conclusive correlation between the increased attention given to script development and the record year for Irish films at the box office in 2001. While the scripts that in turn become films may well have improved in narrative competence and story design as film critics and commentators begin to argue and this thesis will assess, so too have the opportunities for distribution. With the launch of Clarence Pictures and Abbey Pictures (Irish distribution companies) and the development of Buena Vista International focussing on Irish productions, there are increased opportunities and pathways for Irish films to progress towards box office release and DVD/video distribution. This thesis, through textual analysis and formal examination of the narrative attempts therefore to ascertain the real impact, if any, the script development process had on Irish film.

In conclusion, what can be noted here and has implications for the following discussion, is that while Irish films produced over the past ten years have achieved relative successes with Irish audiences either through theatrical or DVD/video release or television exhibition, most films have failed to make an impact on foreign markets. According to Ruth Barton 'none of the small films made in Ireland during the 1990s broke into the mainstream as *My Left Foot* and *The Crying Game* had done; nor has there been any equivalent of *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, GB, 1995), *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, GB, 1997) or *Billy Elliott* (Stephen Daldry, GB, 2000). By and large their core audience has been Irish, with few of the productions achieving notable

success in overseas markets' (Barton, 2004: 179).⁶² As a film-supporting agency this must be a key concern of Bord Scannán na hÉireann as it attempts to consolidate and continue to develop and grow.

DELINEATING 2ND WAVE

Labelling and naming are contentious activities and once a term enters the lexicon it is difficult to remove it. This thesis refers to the period being studied (1993 – 2003) as the 2nd wave of Irish filmmaking. The 1st wave is widely accepted as the period between *Caoineadh Airt O Laoghaire* (Bob Quinn, 1975) and *Reefer and the Model* (Joe Comerford, 1988) (Rockett, Gibbons & Hill, 1988; McLoone, 2000). Although this movement is delineated by time, it refers more to an aesthetic and artistic practice that involved interrogating aspects of national identity at the level of form and content. While this period of filmmaking has been well received among critics and academics and its legacy has been felt in the approach to the later period, it failed to impact on a wide-ranging and diverse audience. Most of the films were restricted by distribution, largely being confined to the film festival circuit, which is an important but limited way of accessing audiences. It could be argued that these films were simply made for a ciné-literate elite, not necessarily a negative off-shoot as it is important for a national cinema to have an engaged and challenging body of work, but forming a bias if this is set as the standard for what is expected of national product.

Many countries have a body of films in their historical repertoire that challenges the mainstream as a way of launching a national cinema at a particular historical juncture. These film activities were generally organised in the form of a political movement (French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, British Social Realism) and while on the whole they were short lived, their impact was remarkable and wide-reaching, not just on their national cinemas but on world cinema. These movements or '1st waves' generally emerge as a result of political and ideological struggles (McLoone, 2000: 165-166) and in reaction to historical events. What happens when the political climate changes is often the emergence of a more commercial cinema, 'a characteristic of cinema everywhere. The great 'Second Cinema' tradition of Europe has itself taken something of a battering, the cinemas of Germany and Italy in particular increasingly resembling localised versions of commercial cinema' (McLoone, 2000: 166).

In Taiwan directors such as Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-Liang and Yi Chih-Yen emerged as a 2nd wave, following the end of martial law in 1987, the death of the President in 1988 and the enormous change to the political situation through a relaxation and modernisation of legislation in that society.⁶³ In a similar way to Ireland, this period of filmmaking was viewed as less ground-breaking than its 'New Wave' predecessor, mainly because there were few taboos left to break and structures to challenge. It dispensed with the aesthetic concerns of the 'New Wave' and moved in the direction of the mainstream, bringing Taiwanese film to a much wider world audience while also opening Hollywood opportunities for some of its directors. It can be argued, in a similar vein, that Ireland produced its version of a 2nd wave since the reactivation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann spanning the period 1993 – 2003. Ruth Barton, while not labelling this era as a 2nd wave, alludes to a new era in Irish filmmaking:

It is possible to detect in works such as *Accelerator* (Vinny Murphy, Ireland, 2000), *Disco Pigs* (Kirsten Sheridan, GB/Ireland, 2000) and *On the Edge* (John Carney, USA/Ireland, 2001) a sustained critique of 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland with particular and, given the youthfulness of the films' makers, unsurprising focus on issues of youth and exclusion. The sense of a new a-political generation, divested of social concerns and corrupted by their positioning within the global economy is not wholly substantiated by their output. Many of them in turn have rejected the concerns of earlier cultural practitioners and have deliberately sought to create a space for themselves in the new economic order (Barton, 2004: 111).

The arguments, therefore, for presenting this era as a 2nd wave are as follows: 2nd wave offers a chronological term that follows on from the well-defined 1st wave (McLoone, 2000: 165); it categorises a distinct historical period of Bord Scannán na hÉireann that spans the tenure of its first CEO, Rod Stoneman; the financial packages that distinguish these films' budgets are relatively uniform (the micro-budget and low-budget schemes were introduced in 2003 signalling a radical change in policy⁶⁴); the term 2nd wave encapsulates a clearly defined feature film of medium budget that adopts a conventional yet multifarious approach to aesthetic and subject matter which neither seeks to challenge or ape mainstream Hollywood production and finally, in its approach to visual style, the 2nd wave is clearly influenced by the technological development of non-linear editing, which facilitates a fluidity of montage matching the fluidity of camera movement launched by the hand-held camera.⁶⁵ Not only does the technological development implicate visual style across mainstream and art-house

cinema, it has the effect of shaping policy of the Bord through the introduction of the micro-budget and low-budget schemes and the promotion of digital technology.

This period defines an evolutionary and teleological phase in Irish cinema that was shaped and formed by various political, cultural and economic events. It is the aim of this study to explore the story strategies adopted in this phase of Irish cinema, a period of filmmaking that, whether overtly or covertly, attempts to work simultaneously against the legacy of 1st wave films and the dominance of Hollywood while being firmly located in a society that is more modern, liberal, multi-cultural and economically stable. While most analyses and commentary of Irish film takes a distinctly cultural studies approach, (Barton, 2004; Ging, 2004; McLoone, 2000; Pettitt, 2000) this study, although concerned with how these films engage with key cultural and national concerns, is more focussed on revealing the strategies used to tell stories which consequently shed light on how the writers and directors combine the local with the international, the global with the national as it applies to the medium of film.⁶⁶ In the next section, therefore, I will detail the methodological approach to this study by conducting a survey of narrative theory combined with an appraisal of different approaches to theory and practice as it applies to film schools engaged in the pedagogy of scriptwriting, while outlining the approach this thesis will take.

PART TWO

RECLAIMING THE NOTION OF STORY

[T]he storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb goes, but for many, like the sage... The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. (Benjamin in Arendt, 1968: 84).

The cinema, like the detective story, enables us to experience without danger to ourselves all the excitements, passions, and fantasies which have to be repressed in a humanistic age (Jung (1931) quoted in Hauke & Alister, 2001: 151).

While there has been a tendency to characterise the filmmaker as a ‘cultural commentator’ either reflecting challenges to the dominant ideologies of a given time (1st wave film or avant-garde practice) or as someone who simply reinforces the status

quo (mainstream Hollywood cinema and realism), this study suggests that there is another way to look at the filmmakers' role in society and reclaim their function as storyteller contributing to our experience and understanding of humanity. While not underestimating the contribution the field of Cultural Studies has made to our appreciation of the relationship between cinema and society, my interest lies in the structural and formal approach to film that embodies skill, craft and creativity in the pursuit of telling a story, occurring in a particular context.⁶⁷ Rather than concentrating on the political relationship between film and society, this study explores the role of the filmmaker as storyteller, who imparts, through the story form, some aspect of what it is to be human, through all its virtues and vices. Cognisant of the criticisms of the notion of universality, particularly from the left, this study, while not seeking to establish one monolithic stance towards the *condition humaine*, is concerned with revealing that facet of cinema that speaks across national and cultural boundaries, in the way early Hollywood cinema had to, when it directed its narrative at a multi-racial, ethnic and linguistic audience. Whether this was because there was a need to integrate this new population into a world of 'Americaness' or create a new culture in the New World, it could be argued that it was one of the first examples of seeking a space that would embrace the local and global. It is this attempt at revealing the points of contact between the local and the global that influences the methodological approach of this thesis, as a framework that can explore the tensions and harmonies of such endeavours as it is enunciated through the work of storytellers who choose film as their medium.

Far from being a regressive, romantic inclination, this approach finds support in the writings of Roy Foster when he states that the 'idea of narrative is back in the air' (Foster, 2001: 1) and by Richard Kearney when he suggests that 'the power of narrativity makes a crucial difference to our lives. Indeed, I shall go as far as to argue, rephrasing Socrates, that the unnarrated life is not worth living' (Kearney, 2002: 14). Rather than giving the filmmaker the role of cultural and political commentator, this study examines their contribution as storytellers in the way Benjamin imagined. While not denying that some filmmakers use the medium to comment on wider society, the approach appropriated here attempts to reveal, in story-world terms, what is at work within the narrative at a universal and humanistic level, principally through a formalist address. In doing so, rather than presenting a monolithic function of film

and its relationship to society, this study reveals the complex styles and techniques of story that filmmakers of the past ten years in Ireland have adopted and realised.

This method, therefore, requires the examination of the function of narrative and story within societies, both old and new. For example, Levi-Strauss's definition of narrative explores 'totemism and kinship, which provide cohesion and stability for every social group in a given society: such is the importance of story in our world'. Igor Korsic in an article entitled "Theory for Practice" (2000) for the Kalos k' Agathos project⁶⁸ refers to Roland Barthes' comments on theoretical positions within the field of photography that concentrate on the technical aspects or the historical or sociological. When Barthes says that 'I realised with irritation that [no theory] discussed precisely the photographs which interest me, which gives me pleasure and emotion', he reveals the initial impetus for engaging with theory. Through an exploration of the methodological potential of narratology in analysing film texts, this chapter presents a theory of the story-world in fiction film appropriate to this study.⁶⁹ If film functions to provide 'cohesion or stability' or give expression to some aspect of society through storytelling as is the presumption of Film Studies and Cultural Studies, negating the structural elements of the story is to ignore a key aspect of the form. In appropriating narratology as an analytical device, this thesis will focus on the story-worlds constructed and the approaches adopted to reveal the elements of craft involved in contemporary Irish filmmaking. The principle focus of this study is to reveal, through an analysis of character, plot and narrative structure, what approaches to the form contemporary Irish filmmakers are appropriating. This will reveal that far from being thematically and structurally conservative as is often maintained when comparing to the more radical predecessor, recent Irish cinema displays a complex developmental and evolutionary relationship to the form. The first step, therefore, is to construct a methodology that facilitates a reading along these lines which will focus on the main components of story, that is, plot and character, and narrator. Key narratologists, particularly the work of Edward Branigan, David Bordwell, David Herman and Noel Carroll, will be appropriated to posit a theory of analysis. In devising such a theory, it will be applied to a corpus of narrative texts in order to answer some central questions that relate to contemporary Film Studies.

By returning our attention to the story-world, it is hoped to shed light on key concerns and issues in the world of contemporary Irish cinema which centre around what is fundamental to storytelling: structure in the form of character and plot; craft and skill in executing stories that resonate locally with its intended audience, and speaking with a voice that embodies the universal features of drama. In order to consider these notions, a working hypothesis is called for that holds the assumption that story-structure or narrativity can be evaluated in isolation to its cultural and social context as a preliminary. Non-contextual studies do not have to be essentialist as narratology, unlike structuralism, testifies to. Accounting for context, not in a social or political, but filmic way, is the direction narratology takes film studies. When linked to genre, as Bakhtin does, it widens the context to include the social dimension which becomes relevant later.

Theorists of narrative who are interested in how an infinite variety of stories may be generated from a limited number of basic structures often have recourse, like linguists, to the notions of deep and surface structure (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). This strategy assumes a formalist and structuralist position, which this study embodies. In recent years, there has been a return to a formalist approach to narrative studies, particularly since psychoanalytic theory and ideological studies have come under suspicion for their monolithic stance and dominance (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996: 3-36). While it is not intended to deny the relationship between film and culture / society or to negate the huge contribution the field of Cultural Studies is making to our understanding of this relationship, this is not what this study is about. Instead this work is clearly situated within a field that seeks to find a space whereby theory and practice can relate to each other. While cultural analysis has a distinctive role within social, political and economic realms, my interest lies in the part of the *academy* that sees a relationship between theory and practice.

THEORY / PRACTICE DEBATE

Henry Breirose of Stanford University in an article entitled “Useful Theories for Teaching Documentary Studies” states that the ‘social psychologist Kurt Lewin said that there is nothing so challenging as a practical problem. He also said that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. While there is a plethora of theories about

theory, we lack helpful theories about practical problems' (Breirose, 1998).⁷⁰ Echoing Des Bell's reflections on the relationship of theory and practice within British universities, Breirose points to a tension within film schools that has divorced theory from any relevance to practice. This is most discernible at graduate level when students can engage intellectually with high-end theory yet are challenged when putting together a documentary or fiction film that seeks to be discursive with the story realm or simply 'getting ideas on screen with clarity, precision, and economy' (Ibid: 2). This study, therefore, engages with the debate on theory and practice and proffers a form of practice that will be useful pedagogically in film studies and screenwriting, by combining theoretical approaches to narratology with applied readings of the screenwriting process.⁷¹

As narrativisation has been defined as one of the commonest ways of applying an order and perspective to experience (Onega and Landa, 1996: 4), this approach will formulate the methodology of this study. When Umberto Eco refers to the rights of the text, the right to be interpreted and the right not to be over-interpreted, he suggests that there is the potential for formalist analysis that seeks to reveal an essence of text. The narrative text, therefore requires an analysis based on what it is as a medium, a structure or a process; a structure that embodies form and a process that realises an ultimate goal. Thus narrative theory is a means to an end. While this approach in recent times has been over-shadowed by the interdisciplinarity of cultural studies which goes as far as undermining formalism by declaring it reductionist and essentialist, because this study is concerned with the relationship of theory and practice, it is quite separate from the central debates of cultural studies.⁷² This study places the world of story creation and construction in a wider *filmic* and *narrative* context, thus contributing to the debate about theory and practice. The aim of this thesis is not to simply discuss, analyse and interrogate the meaning of the story for meaning's sake, rather to look at the act of storytelling and crafting.

Central to this study, therefore, is the need to construct a clearly defined methodology for the analysis of narrative strategies in contemporary Irish screenwriting and out of this, it is proposed to contribute to the advancement and development of the pedagogy of scriptwriting.⁷³ In defining a methodology, this study is influenced by the work of the CILECT organisation, which brings together professionals from film schools

throughout the world, and is host to a research project called Kalos k'Agathos.⁷⁴ The part of Kalos k'Agathos exploring Scriptwriting took place at FAMU, an internationally-recognised film school in Prague.⁷⁵ The conference acted as a forum to explore different methodological approaches to teaching scriptwriting. Some speakers shared their philosophical thoughts and approaches to teaching while others revealed direct experience and examples of teaching screenwriting in film schools and universities throughout the world. It represents an interesting meeting point of theory and practice and raises as many questions as it presents answers, some of which can be appropriated here in an attempt to define a methodological approach to the analysis of contemporary Irish screen story strategies.

The conference at FAMU took the writings and teachings of Frank Daniel as its inspiration and sought to explore, therefore, the relation between analysis and criticism; writing and dramaturgy which the conference established as being central to screenwriting. Consequently, it ties in closely with Frank Daniel's curriculum concept and teaching method. Daniel divides scriptwriting into two parts, actual writing and what he calls dramaturgy:

It's not difficult to find out what's wrong with a script and to see how the story is built and what its needs are and which points need to be stressed. That's the cerebral part of writing. Writing itself is for artists to do, and there are no rules, there are no ready made recipes that you can apply....Unfortunately our education stresses only the critical thinking. We are always learning how to do things right. We know that one and one are two. Out in creative thinking it can be eleven. It can be a couple. You have to look at things from different sides and angles, and free your mind, try things that nobody has tried before.⁷⁶

On the topic of curriculum, which he designed for the screenwriting programme at Columbia University with Milos Forman, Frank Daniel stated that '[curriculum] for us means a step-by-step outline of the tasks and problems that the student should go through and solve. That means that the curriculum, in this sense, is clearly designed so that any professional who comes in to teach can start functioning. He doesn't need to invent anything. He just follows the outline and uses his professional expertise to help the students' (Ibid). While this suggests an absence of a need for theory, it assumes that there is something to be taught and therefore the need to devise a curriculum in addition to imparting, in some way, the unique artistic, creative and inspirational

bestowal of the practitioner. Because this approach successfully conceptualises screenwriting in a way that embraces both European and US practices without creating a hierarchy between them it is particularly useful to this study in informing the methodology. Ireland, due to its linguistic location within the English-speaking world and its geographical positioning on the edge of Europe, finds itself culturally in a tug of war between US and Europe, both vying for influential effect.

There is no shortage of scriptwriting manuals available to the aspiring writer and contrary to popular belief this is not a new phenomenon. Scriptwriting manuals were necessary to the maintenance of the studio system in the 1920s and 1930s whereby writers were employed under contract to create scripts 'factory-like'. In this era, being a screenwriter was similar to working in a newsroom of a newspaper, whereby specific craft skills were employed daily in executing one's duty to writing scripts.⁷⁷ The methodological approach of this study therefore combines an applied approach to screenwriting with a theoretical underpinning of narrative. While these two areas have been pitted against each other with the *academy* scoffing at scriptwriting manuals and the practitioners negating the importance of theory, in more recent times the divide is being bridged.⁷⁸ Des Bell (2004: 737-749) suggests that this has taken place, not in Film Studies but in the growing field of Visual Cultural Studies. In outlining his model for screenwriting which he calls the 'Creative Matrix', Phil Parker contributes to the debate that seeks an applied approach to theoretical inquiry (Parker, 2000: 66-74) stating that 'the Matrix was developed in the context of the debate in screenwriting between the need to remember Aristotle's 'Poetics' as opposed to Syd Field's paradigm, or Robert McKee's story structure'. Recognising the importance of manuals such as Dancyger and Rush (1990), Horton (1994) and Vogler (1998) which he labels the 'new structuralists', Parker, like Bell, creates the space and issues a call for theory and practice to dialogue (Parker, 2000: 66).⁷⁹ This dual aspect which embodies a theoretical and applied approach to the writing process is what makes it difficult to devise a methodology that facilitates both dimensions of the practice.⁸⁰

Central to the debates around the pedagogy of scriptwriting is the need to explore the following: craft versus creativity; inspiration versus skill; education versus training *and* philosophical enquiry versus the acquisition of tools. In training programmes teaching is generally about imparting skills and if inspiration is transmitted it can be

considered an 'added-extra'. However, due to the nature of scriptwriting which requires a combination of the rational or cerebral with the creative and the visceral, the scriptwriting course needs to combine both. How this can be achieved depends on the philosophical approach to the task in hand and may involve a combination of quite different and in some ways oppositional approaches. For instance, the Socratic method which seeks to ask questions and discover answers combined with the Platonic method which is premised on the notion that there is something in the ether or 'out there' goes some of the way in accommodating both. The scriptwriter, along Platonic lines, can believe in the perfect script or aspire to a perfect structure or perfect format subscribing to the prescriptive instructions of many screenwriting manuals that suggest plot point one appears on a certain page to be followed by the 'false solution' for example, whereas in contrast, the Socratic approach encourages the student to discover and uncover by asking questions. Frank Daniel's approach, which Kalos k'Agathos adopts, attempts to merge the two pedagogical methods without offering generic formulae as solutions.⁸¹ Striking a workable balance between the two poses the challenge in constructing a methodology which requires separating out the dramaturgy from the writing and the narrative from the dramatic. The dramaturgy can be analysed by measuring devices achieved within individual case studies while the writing can be assessed by outlining various tools of structure which facilitate engagement at an emotional level.⁸²

The work of Kalos k'Agathos acts as a spring-board for this study and in devising the methodology a combination of theoretical perspectives alongside practitioners' applied schema are appropriated to create a working tool that will shed light on what has been happening in contemporary Irish cinema between 1993 and 2003. While a study of this kind is always tinkering on the brink of prescription, it is important therefore to engage dialectically with the methodology. What is useful about the approach discussed in Blueprint 1 and 2 is that it engages with both sides of the process, the cerebral and the creative, the structural and the emotional, the narrative and the dramatic. Most screenwriting manuals focus simply on structure and consequently are useful as a toolbox that facilitates the execution of the idea and can act as a reference book for the writer. On the other hand as Brandon Vard, a contributor to Kalos k'Agathos 2, identifies a key problem in the process is an attempt to analyse 'the spirit of the story'. It is very difficult to break this aspect down in an

analytical way and account for it structurally because 'the harmony of the parts, assembly of the pieces, the spirit...exists in whole and not in parts' (Blueprint, 2003). Similarly Northrop Frye maintains that the text is approached and received as a coherent whole by audiences: it is the critic that breaks it into parts.

Analysis of any sort generally requires breaking the whole into parts and while this works quite well when one is exploring the structure it is more difficult when what is being focussed on is Vard's 'soul' or 'spirit'. While the visceral nature of these terms does not lend themselves well to academic discourse, they are aspects of stories that are central to the work of the screenwriter. Analysis is difficult because while the script and film is made up of parts, they are more than mere constructions. It can be argued that once the screenplay or film is complete, there is no more construction on behalf of the writer or director and the focus of analysis ought to remain here, specifically at the text.⁸³ However while a script or film can be analysed for its constituent parts, an aesthetic appreciation requires an incorporation of the whole. The methodological approach developed for this study therefore incorporates a structural analysis that examines constituent parts but also allows a framework for the analysis of the 'spirit' and 'soul', principally by examining the whole.

NEGOTIATING THE UNIVERSAL AND THE LOCAL

Before movies were ever invented, human beings collectively projected the unconscious psyche onto the stories, myths and folk tales handed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. As consciousness evolved, differentiating exponentially over the last 600 years, the unconscious has held more and more of our collective human potential than the present era excluded. The dominant consciousness of modernity eclipses an Other compromising the feminine, the mytho-poeic, the religious, mystical, spiritual, subjective and uncanny while promoting the fantasy of a detached, objective rationality as the dominant *Weltanschauung*...The cinema [is] the place where we gather in the dark together to witness the story and participate emotionally in the sharing of the projection (Hauke & Alister, 2001: 171).

As will be explored later, negotiating the points of contact between the local and the global (or the centre and the periphery) is central to any analysis of the film medium, a cultural and art form taking on increasingly globalised guises. But firstly, it is necessary to tease out this notion between the local and the global, the centre and the periphery and the universal and the particular. This study places contemporary Irish

cinema within its filmic context by teasing out the elemental aspect of narrative. In doing so, it touches on wider cultural questions that inevitably emerge within an Irish Studies context. By appropriating narratology as a framework, this analysis moves away from notions of identity yet is still concerned with how the narrative relates to its specific *and* general cultures – that is to Ireland and to film. Martin McLoone cites Kenneth Frampton's notion of critical regionalism in *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (2000: 120-121) as illustrative of what may be happening in contemporary Irish culture.

The space identified here seems to fit admirably the experience of Irish culture in the 1990s. The best Irish cinema in the last twenty years has operated within this complex and the success of various forms of Irish music (U2, Sinéad O'Connor, The Cranberries, Van Morrison, The Corrs) or the *Riverdance* phenomenon raise interesting questions about Ireland's particular relationship to both its own traditions and to universal culture (McLoone, 2000: 121).

It is within this context that new Irish cinema is explored, how it is illustrative of moves away from a preoccupation with the national by clearly aligning itself with a global phenomenon yet inevitably emerging from a particular time and place. In appropriating the term universal, this thesis refers to a shared experience of humanity embodied in story-telling expression. This form of expression is conceived along the lines of Propp and Aristotle, whereby by structure is taken to represent a method that will transfer across cultural and social borders. While not negating a local resonance, in this case, through the use of a local iconography, a local accent (actors) and, as will be explored later, an idiosyncratic form of humour, this thesis examines the combination of local and universal factors in narrative creation to assess what is specific, in a developmental and evolutionary way, to 2nd wave films.

The paradox highlighted by Paul Ricoeur in *History & Truth* (quoted in Frampton, 1985: 16) of how to become modern and return to sources, 'how to revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization' is a key question within contemporary Irish cinema analysis. While critical regionalism as espoused by Frampton applies specifically to architecture, its resonances with film are uncanny. As McLoone notes, assuming an *arriere-garde* position is key to sustaining critical practice, '*arriere-garde* has to remove itself from both the optimization of advanced technology and the ever-present tendency to regress into nostalgic historicism or the

glibly decorative' (Frampton: 1985: 20). This strategy is the mediation between the universal civilization and the peculiarities of a particular time and place but is clearly not about revitalising a 'lost vernacular'. It is this description that befits the analysis here by attempting to locate contemporary Irish cinema within the history of Irish cinema and the global medium of film. The following chapters will appropriate narratology as a method of revealing what is local and universal, thus revealing the tensions that lie therein.

Critical Regionalism seeks to complement our normative visual experience by readdressing the tactile range of human perceptions. In so doing, it endeavors to balance the priority accorded to the image and to counter the Western tendency to interpret the environment in exclusively perspectival terms. According to its etymology, perspective means rationalized sight or clear seeing, and as such presupposes a conscious suppression of the senses of smell, hearing and taste, and a consequent distancing from a more direct experience of the environment (Frampton, 1985: 29).

Transposing this notion to film, a central concern of this thesis is the analysis of narrative strategies that construct a story-world of emotional expression. Through this analytical framework, a different approach to cinema is revealed, one that attempts to unite the universal and the particular in the expression of stories that resonate within and beyond national borders. To what extent this has been achieved, theoretically, will be assessed as well as identifying elements of development and evolution within the decade under scrutiny.

Noam Comsky's contention that language structure is largely a biological process and those central features of language involve not cultural variations but universal regularities is usefully appropriated here, as is CS Jung's position echoed through the work of Ari Hiltunen that 'certain stories and mythologies transcend national and ethnic boundaries' (Vassar, 2003). As Bordwell and Carroll (1996) point out, this position is not compatible with the dominant position in film studies of subject-position theory but it does present a new departure for narrative studies and particularly theorising the story-world. Bordwell and Carroll's criticism of mainstream Film Studies leaning towards Grand Theories gives space for more focused approaches to emerge, in their words, middle-level research. While post-modernism had the effect of envisaging the world as a fragmented space preventing

any certainties, this approach, ironically involves a return in the direction of modernism, whereby guiding *rules and regulations* can be assumed in order to advance the analysis.

Theory involves evolving categories and hypothesising the existence of general patterns. Central to recent work in Film Studies (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996) is the appropriation of cognitive science. However, Bordwell and Carroll argue that cognitivism is not a unified theory, it is a stance towards film research, one that advocates the exploration of hypotheses about film reception in terms of the cognitive and perceptual processes of spectators. One will find cognitivists talking about aspects of cinematic reception or narrative comprehension, without talking about the political or ideological consequences of the processes. Cognitivists contend that in some instances, part of these processes are politically or ideologically neutral, an opposite position to many theorists in the post-structuralist and post-modernist schools. This study, while not theorising on cognitive behaviour, will adapt the 'cognitivist stance', tying in with Chomsky's theory of 'universal grammar', thus positioning storytelling at the level of the universal. The approach, therefore, is situated within a broader geographical and temporal world of cinematic structure and construction.

Taking this notion of universality further, this study explores the *Aristotelian* theory that fiction can be used as an 'educator of the emotions' (Neill, 1996), whereby human emotions are not always culturally or nationally defined. While not establishing Hollywood cinema as definitive, its global dominance it can be argued results from its ability to speak to audiences across geographical, cultural and even temporal borders.⁸⁴ Aristotle argued that mimetic works present pleasure in learning while according to Neill, our emotional responses to what we know to be fictional have typically been treated as monolithic with the 'pity and fear' that works of fiction may evoke from us being lumped together. Yet he still argues for fictive emotions, *Aristotelian*-like. While audience and spectatorship analysis has contributed to the understanding of the reception of film texts (Hooks, 1992; Monk, 1999; Stacey, 1994) and often confirms a global response, Neill calls for an examination of our emotional responses to fiction which will shed light on the broader concerns in the philosophy of emotion and mind. In doing so, the debate is expanded to include issues of

universality and human nature and how the fiction piece works the imagination which arguably is central to the study of story structure and story-world analysis.⁸⁵

TS Eliot's view that the poet's work was not to find new emotions but to use ordinary ones in poetry, 'to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all' (Eliot, 1999: 21) is a useful appropriation in drawing parallels to other art forms. The effect of art upon a person is different to any effect not of art, principally because of the process involved in dealing with non-rational and unconscious domains.

For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts' (Ibid: 19).

If some films move the audience to a state of 'pity and fear', or evoke intense emotional responses in the spectator while some fail to evoke at all, is it as a result of the intricacy of form or content? A narrative analysis can reveal to what depth the audience is plunged in getting involved with the story-world by peeling back the structural layers to reveal how the narrative, which is composed of character and plot, is constituted. Furthermore, films which work at different emotional levels of involvement can be explored using theories of narration, a central focus of this thesis.⁸⁶ While Eliot distinguishes between emotions and feelings Neill argues that one of the most important ways in which we can gain new emotional experience is through empathetic response.

In responding sympathetically to others, we may respond in ways that we did not know were 'in us'. But in responding empathetically...we may respond in ways that are not in us at all: in ways that mirror the feelings and responses of others whose outlooks and experiences may be very different from our own. Hence empathetic engagement with others may play an important part in the education of emotions (Neill, 1996:179-180).

Neill therefore confirms an underlying presumption of this thesis: that an audience can emotionally engage with an experience that they have no experience of directly, thus accounting for the universal appeal of mainstream narrative cinema and counter cultural practices. While the study of Irish film has been overly concerned with the 'national', it has done so at the expense of understanding what film does best, that is

communicate shared human emotional experiences across cultural, geographical and temporal borders. Eliot's position that many people can appreciate what is being expressed in verse while a smaller number can appreciate technical excellence is appropriate here. For a poet (or filmmaker), who he describes as a 'rare species', to achieve the emotion of art - that is communicating to an audience in an emotional way - he has to surrender himself

wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but what is already living (Eliot, 1999: 22).⁸⁷

While the filmmaker (or poet) can comment on their contemporary society and Cultural Studies has contributed to an understanding of how this is done, consciously and unconsciously, this study seeks to tap into the way the film text resonates emotionally at a local level but also in the wider human and universal realm. According to Neill empathy is central to our engagement with fiction, empathy being an emotional state that often develops prior to language.⁸⁸ The purpose of this study, therefore, is to abstract the story-world in order to make a global application to the Irish films under scrutiny while also accommodating for local diversity. This approach, which will act as a model or template, will facilitate the analysis along the lines outlined above. The omniscience of narrative in culture makes a return to narratology theoretically relevant. Richard Kearney makes the case for bringing 'the most ancient theories into critical dialogue with their most cutting-edge counterparts today,' (Kearney, 2002: 128) by taking five headings from the earliest attempt by Western philosophy to formulate a model for narrative, namely Aristotelian poetics.⁸⁹

THEORISING THE STORY-WORLD

Mieke Bal lists three levels for the analysis of narrative – fabula, story and text. Tomashevski lists only two: fabula and syuzhet. Bordwell adds style to Tomashevski's fabula and syuzhet to accommodate cinematic devices. Rimmon-Kenan defines narrative as comprising events, verbal representation and acts of telling or writing. Gerard Genette uses the terms *histoire*, *recit* and *narration* to correspond to story, text and narration. Literary and film theorists continuously return to narrative

and the formalist approach despite other theoretical attractions and trends. While literary theorists generally are concerned with text and act of narration, film theorists are preoccupied with style and cinematic devices. This terminology has become confused as different theorists appropriate the terminology in different ways. For Bordwell *fabula* corresponds to story and *syuzhet* corresponds to plot (Christie in Hill & Church Gibson, 1998: 58-67; Lothe, 2000: 28-29) whereas Mieke Bal distinguishes story separately, and structurally refers *fabula* to what this study terms plot events. In summary this study focuses narrative as encompassing story, plot and character, the latter being a less defined aspect in narratology (Rammon-Kenan, 1983: 30).⁹⁰ Of particular interest is how the writer encodes the narrative to tell a story that the viewer reads and understands thus revealing what is specific to contemporary Irish screen stories. In devising a theory of the story-world, three key areas will need exploration – narration, plot and character, assuming narration to be the plots way of distributing story information.

In order to theorise the story-world codes which readers/viewers/writers use in constructing and deconstructing, a narrative require identification. The theoretical possibility of abstracting story-form corresponds to the intuitive skill of users in processing stories: being able to re-tell them, to recognise variants of the same story and to identify the same story in different media. The difficulty for the theorist is in placing a rational explanation of a process that is more often than not intuitive. What attracts scholars to film studies, it can be assumed, is a love of cinema which is an intuitive, emotional and often unconscious response, probably stemming back to childhood and before the age of reason. However, intellectual activity requires engagement at a rational and conscious level and even when one responds intuitively to a text, in order to render an explanation in argument form, a rational process must be employed. This is the challenge posed by film studies and arguably why the approach being adopted here, while explored from time to time in the history of literary and film studies, has often been superseded by the more ideologically and intellectually rational explanations. Yet have been consistent attempts to offer intellectual explanations for this intuitive process, from Propp to Vogler, by revealing the infinite possibilities of stories generated from a limited number of basic structures through structural analysis, a method appropriated and relevant here.

Narrative in film is an abstract in the sense that it is a creation of itself and of its own world, it is *hermetically sealed* and stands alone, it relates only to the real world by connection after the event. As Eliot states, the significance of poets and artists can only be read in relation to other 'dead poets and artists', an aesthetic rather than historical criticism (Eliot, 1999:15) thus reclaiming the study of poetry within the confines of poetry itself. Similarly, this study seeks to position the study of film within the world of *film* and evaluate filmic texts according to the narrative world that governs the activities of writers and directors. While clearly these writers and directors belong to a wider society which has been the focus of representational and ideological studies, the dominant branch of film studies in recent times, this study positions the work of filmmakers within the world of filmmaking as an aesthetic principle.

Space and time define narrative and story whereby it can be assumed that space and time are the boundary walls of diegetic and extra-diegetic space and thus central to theorising the story-world.⁹¹ Time, according to Bakhtin's theory of chronotope, be it adventure or biological, is abstract. There are no identifying traces of a historical period. Both space and time are essentially abstract and non-specific. Bakhtin uses the 'boy meets girl' story to illustrate his point.

According to their typical narrative formula, a young boy and girl of marriageable age, beautiful and chaste, meet and fall in love suddenly and unexpectedly. But their marriage cannot take place because they are parted. There are shipwrecks, pirates, slavery, prison, miraculous rescues, recognition scenes, court trials, and sleeping potions. The story ends happily, with the marriage of the two lovers. This plot is, in other words, the original of the boy meets girl, loses girl, gets girl stereotype. (Clarke & Holquist, 1984: 281).

What Bakhtin is illustrating here is the importance of time. There are only two main story events: falling in love, which refers to the process and getting married, the outcome. These events are two poles in story time and it is between these events that everything else takes place. What remains unchanged in the story is the hero and heroine's love: it is the events in between that change. This is an important point in theorising a story-world by illustrating that the world of the story is bound at either end by laws set down by the writer as experienced through his/her involvement in film: it is between these poles that events happen. While the events of the fabula can

mean different things to different audiences and cultures, the use of events in the *syuzhet* are universal, they hold meanings that are understood across cultural and national lines. It is the way that the writer uses these boundary walls that will be the focus of this study, how events are positioned in time and space. Bakhtin facilitates a reading of film by using narratology in a contextual way: it is a filmic context, often a generic context that he suggests. Thus a Bakhtinian schema forms a link to the dominant branch of film studies and cultural studies (that hitherto appeared quite separate from this study) which concentrates on presenting cultural arguments and conclusions, thus revealing that a structural analysis can illuminate cultural specificities while at the same time supporting analytical rigour.

There is no such thing as an objective, unchanging world...[D]ifferent societies carve up reality differently, and the most sensitive indicator of the co-ordinates that give shape to any culture's world picture is to be found in the characteristic arrangements of time and space in the texts that each society nominates as art. (Ibid: 294).

Noel Carroll (1988) appropriates from VI Pudovkin in *Film Techniques and Film Acting* what many scholars deem formulaic: Pudovkin is telling prospective filmmakers how they ought to construct films. The theory uses the concept of a question as a starting point in narrative studies, that is, the spectator frames a question subconsciously (rather than unconsciously) and expects answers to it. While the position is problematic when the ambiguity of art is considered, it is a useful starting point in structural analysis, echoed in similar schema used by Bordwell and Branigan. When following a narrative film, a spectator internalises the whole structure of elements depicted in the drama. This structure includes alternative outcomes to various lines of action that the spectator must keep track of in some sense before one alternative is actualised in order for the film to be received as intelligible (Carroll, 1988: 173).

The ways in which a question is made salient by a scene or group of scenes is diverse...[a] great deal of work is done in the writing, not only the dialogue and/or intertitles, but also in the choice of subject and the dramatic focus of given scenes. (Ibid:174).

Carroll presents a basic appreciation of the skeleton of a sample of movie narratives which he describes as 'an idealized, erotetic, linear, movie narrative' (Carroll, 1988: 171).⁹² An elaboration on Bordwell's cause/effect model⁹³, Carroll describes an event

or scene in an erotetic narrative in the following way: an establishing scene; a questioning scene; an answering scene; a sustaining scene; an incomplete answering scene; an answering/questioning scene (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996), a schema very close to Branigan and Todorov's paradigms which are also based on a linear structure of progression (Branigan, 1998). While offering at face value a simplistic structure, this is a useful starting point for a structural analysis of the story-world. Whether a scene or an event is part of the core plot of a linear movie narrative depends on whether it is one of these types of scenes, i.e. whether it is part of the circuit of questions and answers that powers the film. In summary, the erotetic model or question/answer model answers questions posed in earlier scenes. This model holds that the major connective between scenes and scenes, events and events in movies is an internal process of questioning and answering. While the erotetic model is concerned with how the viewer makes sense of the movie (like most theories), there is potential in it for analysing how the writer makes sense of the story for the viewer.

In adopting the hypothesis that the narrative structure of a randomly selected movie is fundamentally a system of internally generated questions that the movie goes on to answer, you will find that you have hold of a relationship that enables you to explain what makes certain scenes especially key: they either raise questions or answer them, or perform related functions including sustaining questions already raised or incompletely answering a previous question, or answering one question and then introducing a new one (Carroll, 1988:179).

While this may appear at face value rather prescriptive, it facilitates 'digression' and challenges to structure, a fundamental of any art form appreciation. While it concerns itself with linear narrative, Carroll acknowledges that this is not the only narrative form and it would lend itself to analysis of alternative structures. Given the shifts in narrative form in recent times as a result of technological development, particularly non-linear editing, putting the approach into practice is timely. Where it is most useful is by offering an alternative to the equilibrium model as an analytical tool for the dominant narrative form. As Carroll says, unlike those of real life, the actions observed in movies have a level of intelligibility, due to the role they play in the erotetic system of questions and answers. He would argue that it is not the realism of movies that compels us but rather this erotetic relationship which presents the analyst with a way of intellectually engaging with an intuitive form. Accordingly 'erotetic

narration endows the movie with an aura of clarity while also affording an intense satisfaction of our human propensity for intelligibility' (Ibid:181).

Carroll goes further in challenging the dominance of Grand Theories of film studies making a distinction between movies and cinema/film.⁹⁴ The former, he says, is widespread and intensely engaging. Theorists, he argues, are primarily interested in movies and not, as it would appear the apparatus of cinema, which he suggests is where they hide. This reality makes contemporary film theory misleading by engaging in the totalising attempt to erect what Carroll calls 'The Theory of Film... a theory that contrives to explicate in one unified theoretical vocabulary queries into issues as diverse as the mechanism of point of view editing, the nature of the avant-garde, the mechanisms of movie advertising, the nature of the soundtrack, the nature of the camera lens, the operation of ideology etc.' (Ibid: 230).

This study, in an attempt to avoid the Grand Theory fallacy, therefore proposes to explore film in a more specific way by theorising the story-world. Without attempting to answer all questions relating to narrative, it will examine how Irish screenwriters construct stories that have a universal application, which are constructed within a wider world of film both national and international, while also displaying a local resonance. It is the writer and directors' ability to use his/her craft in a particular way, along certain lines that this thesis seeks to explicate. In doing so, it will reveal pertinent concerns and issues, of structure and aesthetics, of recent Irish cinema as part of a global / international art form.

THEORISING PLOT

Plot as a focus of exploration has occupied an important position in the history of narrative theory and can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Plot, the work of *mythos*, gives life to action, which is fundamental to human existence. In Kearney's words, this action is given a grammar 'by transposing it into a telling; a fable or fantasy; and a crafted structure' (Kearney, 2002: 129). Structuralists and formalists traditionally have put the greatest degree of emphasis on plot in their analysis of narrative, primarily because plot is most closely associated with action. Character is then considered simply as the *actant* of action, agents of cause/effect, or she/he who

propels the plot forward. In order to present a closer reading of the story-world, character and plot require separating out, their distinctive roles being highlighted and individualised within the narrative structure.

Plot is intrinsically linked to space and time, and to cause and effect. Cause-effect is basic to narrative and takes place in time. Story-time is constructed on the basis of what the plot presents. The plot may reveal clues or withhold information and functions to increase suspense, to keep the viewer guessing or simply raise expectations. Narration involves the plot's way of distributing story information in order to achieve specific effects. In theorising plot, one might ask how does something happen which in turn generates an answer that is, firstly, linked to the laws of verisimilitude (fits in with who the character is) and, secondly to the structural needs of the plot.

Because narrative texts can be found in all periods of human history, all cultures and all levels of society, Roland Barthes concluded that narrative texts are based upon one common model, a model that causes the narrative to be recognisable as narrative. The studies that gave rise to structuralism are based on two assumptions. Firstly, there exists a homology (similar state), a correspondence between the (linguistic) structure of the sentence and that of the whole text composed of various sentences: secondly, a homology was also assumed to exist between the 'deep structure' of the sentence and the 'deep structure' of the narrative text, the fabula, or as Bordwell states, sometimes translated as 'story' (Bordwell, 1985). The fabula, he elaborates, is a pattern 'which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences' (Bordwell, 1985: 49). The narrative makes sense by establishing connections when drawing on the 'homology'.

While there has been much criticism of this structuralist approach (modernism and post-modernism have traditionally found it 'meaningless'), rather than see it as reductionist, it can explain the existence of a logic and therefore can be useful in theorising around plot. An argument follows that readers, intentionally or not, search for a logical line in texts (Ibid:176). They spend a great amount of energy in this search, and, if necessary, they introduce such a line themselves (or in some cases, simply give up). Responses which are intrinsic to drama depend on it, 'emotional

involvement, aesthetic pleasure, suspense and humour'. While an audience allegedly does not retain precise details of a plot, they maintain a sense or feeling for the story.

What is most useful for analysing screenplays, therefore, is this presumption that the plots of most narrative texts display some form of homology. Most plots, Bal argues, can be said to be constructed according to the demands of human 'logic of events', provided that this concept is not too narrowly defined. 'Logic of events' may be defined as 'a course of events that is experienced by the reader as natural and in accordance with some form of understanding with the world' (Bal, 1999: 177) which draws parallels with the work of Propp, Campbell and Vogler, as they also subscribe to the existence of a homology and consequently map it out. For example, Propp's 'Call for Help' is analogous to Campbell's 'Separation or Departure' and Vogler's 'Call to Adventure'. 'Misfortune is announced' (Propp), 'The Road of Trials' (Campbell) is introduced or in Vogler's term the hero must 'Cross the First Threshold'. The homology therefore referred to is a state related to the story-world, not the 'real world'. While Bal's intellectual loyalty is to structuralism, this definition can be appropriated for the purposes of this study. Tying in with the local/global debate, Bal believes that fabulas (which unlike Bordwell, she distinguishes from story) are comparable transculturally and transhistorically. In order for universality to exist, the homologies must pertain to the story-world of the stories and not the national / local world of the makers although the stories can resonate at these latter levels.

In conclusion, a plot may be considered as a specific grouping of a series of events, as a whole that constitutes a process, while every event can also be called a process, or at least, part of a process. Aristotle and Bremond distinguish three phases in every plot as follows: the possibility (or virtuality); the event (or realisation); the result (or conclusion). The initial situation will always be a state of deficiency in which one or more characters want to introduce change. The development of the plot reveals that, according to certain patterns, the process of change involves an improvement or deterioration with regard to the initial situation (Ibid:193). The situation brought about by the conclusion of the fabula and syuzhet may be advancing to a higher plain, resolving conflict, gaining greater insight or simply solving the puzzle. Far from being

formulaic, this approach offers a structure for the craft to work within; such is the advantage of constructing criteria within a theory of plot.

THEORISING CHARACTER

Where this study deviates from the trajectory of structuralism within literary and film studies is in its approach to character. As mentioned already, plot is paramount when analysing narrative from Aristotle to Vogler. However, when engaging at an emotional level with a narrative, it is through character identification that empathetic responses are formed. It is for this reason that this thesis gives primacy to characterisation and where the analysis of the writers' and directors' work resides. It is through the actions of Harry (*The Boy from Mercury*) and Eamonn (*The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*), for example, that the narratives and plots can be analysed revealing what is intrinsic to the narrative construction. 'Characterization and Fictional Truth' by Paisley Livingston in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* offers a good vantagepoint from where to launch a theorisation of character. As Livingston points out, working with intentionalist principles is the most promising way of approaching some of the problems that arise with regard to fictional characterisation (Livingston, 1996: 149) and thus elucidating and defending intentionalist principles are Livingston's main goal. The intentionalist thesis states that an intentional action of representation is necessary for characterisation, forming a theory about how the reader is effectively guided in judging what happens in a story.

A more promising alternative is the idea that the appropriate choice of background beliefs is underwritten by a complex intentionalist principle. Competent readers and spectators do not make inferences about the implicit truths in a story by obeying the reality principle or by activating entire belief systems of bygone or alien communities. Instead, they do so by paying attention to the text's features and reasoning about the aims and attitudes of the actual storyteller. Yet this intentionalist principle must be one that does not succumb to various familiar objections against intentionalism (Ibid: 163).

In probing character one is not simply looking at 'the belief set of a fictional author who tells a story as known fact', but what the author intended in creating a story-world, or put another way, the intentions of the author when creating a story-world. What Livingston is proposing, as an intentionalist theory, is one that concerns itself

with the authorial, that is that the story is determined by authorial attitudes and the text's features. The story content is as a result of authorial intentions, principally, in the process of creating a story-world. The intentionalist principle implies that knowledge of authorial intentions with regard to a story can warrant a decision between, as Livingston says, 'our interpretative alternatives, in other words, the intentions we want viewers to rely upon when they think about story content'. This is based on 'the authors' effective, communicative intentions, not idle musings or solitary imaginings' (Ibid:167). Of course, this raises a conflict with the 'readerly' aspect of narrative engagement and negates the possibility of meaning being created at the point of consumption. However, as a theoretical approach to characterisation, it is useful in deconstructing the narrative functioning of its main agents, and thus contributes pedagogically to scriptwriting.

The relevance therefore, at this juncture, is its value as a theory that concerns itself with the story-world without postulating on what is extraneous to the story-world. At the same time, it must be noted that this theory is not without its faults. As many critics have suggested, the reader can never really know the intentions of an author (and does he/she really need to or want to know?). Livingston responds by pointing out that there are often claims made as to what is in the readers'/viewers' minds without pointing out similar concerns as to where these postulations have their basis. Another common objection to the intentionalist theory is that in many film versions of stories, there is multiple authorship and collectively produced works, due to the collaborative nature of the medium which cannot be accommodated by intentionalist principles. While these are very real concerns, the intentionalist principle offers a point of entry to the story-world that gives due credit to the artist at work, that is, someone who creates a world in which the audience enters and measures its properties by its own internal workings. For this reason alone, it is useful to point out the possibilities of the intentionalist theory.

Livingston presents a definition of characterisation as

a matter of someone's describing, depicting, or representing something....the something being represented must be an agent or agents....Agent can be defined broadly as referring to any entity capable of performing an intentional action. And

intentional action can, in turn, be identified as behavior produced and oriented by the agent's intention... (Ibid: 150).

Thus, Livingston reveals the problematic nature of defining character and characterisation. For there to be an event of characterisation, there must be an actual agent that performs the plot action: the agent is generally a character (although it can be something else).⁹⁵ Defining character in this way continues the historical definition of character from Aristotle onwards, a definition that places characterisation and character intrinsic to plot or action. Characters have historically been seen as necessary only as 'agents' or 'performers' of action (Todorov) while Bordwell defines characters as agents of cause and effect. On the other hand, some authors went as far as pronouncing character as 'dead'. Structuralists found that they could not accommodate character within their theories, because they embrace an ideology that 'decentres' man and runs counter to the notions of individuality and psychological depth (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 30). At the same time, mimetic theories of character which present characters as people equally sits uncomfortably with the story-world posited here, giving undue credence to the notion of 'reality' while semiotically they are perceived as 'dissolving into textuality' (Ibid: 32).

Theodor Adorno points out that fictional characters in novels never resemble empirical persons while Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that what makes the cinema so different is that it does not give us people's thoughts, as novels do. Cinema gives us behaviour, 'their special way of being in the world'. Livingston states that Merleau-Ponty believed that the cinematic medium offers direct perceptual access to character while the philosopher, Stanley Cavell suggests that everyone accepts that there are no live human beings in cinema but what there is, in the form of character, is a human *something*, 'we need to consider what is present or, rather, since the topic is the human being, *who* is present' (Cavell, 1971:26-27).

Philosophical definitions of character have the effect of theorising character beyond a simple definition that positions this narrative aspect as simply *actant*. One method of executing in this theoretical direction is through focalisation. In an unusual move, Branigan's eight levels of narration isolates and separates the last four levels, giving them over to characters whom provide the audience with information about the story-

world, but in ways quite different from narrators. Characters may 'tell the story to us in a broad sense, but only through 'living in' their world and speaking to other characters. Indeed, one might also say that these conditions, or restrictions, define what we mean by the concept of a 'character'. There are several different ways in which characters may 'live in' their world.' (Branigan, 1998:100).

In his writings on narratology Branigan placed character on a similar footing to action through his statement that each defines as well as limits each other's logical development. Introducing the narratological concept of focalisation is meant to remind us that a character's role in a narrative may change from being an actual, or potential, focus of a causal chain to being the source of our knowledge of a causal chain. Focalisation involves a character neither speaking nor acting, instead experiencing something through seeing and hearing it. Focalisation goes further, it involves 'thinking, remembering, interpreting, wondering, fearing, believing, desiring, understanding, feeling guilt' (Ibid: 101), thus replicating or imitating authentic human emotional states. Focalisation is important in analysing characters in different settings. In *Disco Pigs* (2001), for example, the characters of Pig and Runt clearly 'see and hear' but go further in their experience of emotional states, as suggested by Branigan whereas the characters in *Accelerator* (2000) 'say and do' (Bordwell, 1990) as they partake in the drama of the race. These alternative and apposite narratological constructions are scrutinised more closely in Chapter Four. Focalisation is valuable in assessing the impact of character on the story-world they occupy, revealing what homology the writer intended them to resemble. Propp's thirty-one functions and Vogler's Archetypes will further elucidate the role the character is performing in his/her particular story-world.

Focalisation, therefore, facilitates the theorising of character beyond the position of *actant*. It reveals character as a fully active participant of the story-world depending on its engagement internally and externally. Internal focalisation ranges from simple perceptions (point of view shot) to impressions (the out of focus, point of view shot depicting a character that is drunk, dizzy etc.) (Branigan, 1998: 104). Bordwell distinguishes between characters that 'say and do' as opposed to 'see and hear' which is a direct link to range and depth of story information. Narration not only manipulates the range of knowledge but also the degrees of knowledge. A question central to

analysing character is 'how deeply does the plot plunge us into the characters' psychological state?', a spectrum which ranges from restricted to unrestricted and objective to subjective narrative (Bordwell, 1990).

It is Branigan's definition of focalisation that this study will work with and which will contribute to the pedagogy of scriptwriting (although there are other definitions that will hold a peripheral relevance).⁹⁶ The possibilities offered by focalisation are to explore character at a deeper level. Focalisation can reveal how the character performs in the overall narrative and what their role in the story is. It can contribute to analysing what the writer created in a given character and the level of skill and craft involved in creating diverse and curious characters. As an analytical tool it can make statements about the character's perceptions, feelings and thoughts. At the level of structure, it can illustrate how the narrative presents or withholds story information. This approach, therefore, will place character in the centre of the narrative, not as 'something' which simply advances the plot forward but as 'someone' who is central to the story-world that the writer and director created.

THEORISING NARRATOR

Narration, according to film theorists, has ideological ramifications, insofar as its *hermetically sealed nature* contributes to the appearance of a harmonious wholeness in the film. Mainstream film theory has historically hinged itself on the notion that the narrative effaces all marks of enunciation, and therefore the argument follows that narrative is inherently ideological, with classical narrative supporting a patriarchal, bourgeois framework. Carroll, however, stresses his contention that narrative is ideologically neutral, while not ignoring the potential of film to be used in an ideological way.

Contemporary film theorists assume that the alleged effacement of enunciation in film narrative has the effect of positioning the spectator as unified subject. When the film effaces enunciation, the spectator identifies himself/herself as enunciator. Carroll disputes this by positing the difficulty of the audience's reaction to suspense, mystery or horror films. Many of the viewers' typical responses to these films relies on them not knowing or being aware of what is going on, in Carroll's words, '[c]learly,

characteristic responses to films in terms of suspense, mystery, shock, surprise and so on presupposes that I do not have knowledge that the enunciator has, and that I am often aware of this' (Carroll, 1988:160). This problematises the position of narrator in film texts as defined by mainstream film theory but at the same time presents a key opening in the discussion of the writer and director's craft: how does the writer/director construct a world that allows some information disseminate while withholding other story details in order to elucidate a given response? The skill and craft with which the writer and director constructs such worlds, is the focus of this research.

Of relevance to this study is the question of narrator in contemporary Irish film. Central to any discussion on film is the notion of voice and from where it is emanating, particularly when probing national cinemas. In 1st wave films, the voice is generally seen as one that challenges and interrogates the status quo. Through avant-garde practices and counter cinema, filmmakers of this era clearly positioned themselves as critically engaged commentators on wider society or in some instances were placed there by academics and film historians. What is interesting in analysing and positioning 2nd wave films is detecting the narratorial voice, whether it is positioned in dialogue with its film culture *or* societal culture.

While some theorists like Bordwell believe there is no narrator in film, others make a distinction between a presenter of a story, the narrator (who is a component of the discourse) and the inventor of both the story and discourse (including the narrator), that is, the implied author (Chatman, 1990: 29). This position echoes the intentionalist theory and removes the discussion beyond that of story-world, which is not the intention of this study. Chatman suggests that it is the viewer (not the film) who constructs the narrative synthesis, thus moving the focus in the direction of reception theory, a common position for many film theorists. The theory of narrator, in film studies, touches on many other approaches, depending on the purpose of analysis, in this case it is rooted in the text.

CONCLUSION

According to David Herman, 'narrative comprehension is a process of (re)constructing story-worlds on the basis of textual clues and the inferences they make possible' (Herman, 2002: 6). In any analysis of the film text, narrative structure is the first stage of investigation, because at its most basic it is the means of organising the material that becomes the story. David Bordwell has explored the differing levels of processing time depending on the complexity of the narrative while Edward Branigan has offered focalisation as a tool of analysis for exploring different depths of narrative. What all narratologists appear to agree on is that interpreters of stories draw on pre-stored knowledge representations, 'especially those involving stereotyped sequences of actions and events, to interpret action structures as narratively organised' (Ibid: 6). Furthermore, the amount of narrativity a story has, that is the degree to which it is amenable to being processed as a narrative, is directly related to how it relates to what Jerome Burner (1991) calls 'canonicity and breach'. It is the combination of expectation and surprise that mainstream and counter narrative relies on in reaching its audience or, in David Herman's words, stereotypic and nonstereotypic knowledge (Herman, 2002:7). Herman argues further that although many narratologists have accentuated narratives' temporal properties (Chatman, 1990) understanding narrative also requires spatializing or "cognitively mapping" the story-world it conveys (Ibid: 8).

Story analysts and spectators bring different evaluative criteria with them to the interpretation of these story-worlds depending on how they are positioned. Narratives containing messages embedded in form or content require additional evaluative criteria, for example, ironic narratives are predicated on a combination of some viewers 'getting it' while others are eluded, the ironic nature of John Crowley's film *Intermission* being a case in point as explored in Chapter 4.⁹⁷ Regardless of the intent or purpose of story, what narratives create are entities in themselves that are separate and distinct to the world beyond them, at one level. What bestows on narratives their strength is the immersiveness power they embody, the ability to transport the viewer into a place where they must go in order to comprehend the story-world.

Each chapter in this thesis sets out to explore the narrative strategies adopted in the selected films in an attempt to contribute to the ‘utility of theory’ that is a central concern of Kalos k’Agathos. A combination of the methodology outlined above with theoretical approaches to emotion that are both formalist and philosophical in construct will be appropriated to reveal what is at work within the story-world creation revealed through the screen text. *The Boy from Mercury* is examined as an expression of Alex Neill’s theory that film can act as an educator of the emotions, which Ari Hiltunen reinforces with his assessment of character, whereby the audience empathises from the safety of their arm-chair, at home or in the auditorium (Hiltunen, 2002). *Disco Pigs* and *Accelerator* facilitates a formalist reading that reveals the emotional depth to which an audience is plunged as a result of character construction, particularly when a distinction is made between characters that ‘say and do’ and characters that ‘see and hear’. Using Edward Branigan’s theory of focalisation, *About Adam*, *When Brendan met Trudy*, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* are analysed to reveal how these stories engage with the universally-understood themes of love, romance and sex thus shedding light on choices made in the construction of stories that engage at different emotional levels. Following the theme of love story, an analysis of *Nora* reveals how conventions of genre can be used to promote progressive, even subversive representations of the romance story. Finally, using *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Song for a Raggy Boy* this chapter assesses the potential for a classical form such as tragedy to occupy a space within modern and contemporary texts, that clearly has a culturally specific resonance.

In adopting this approach, this thesis seeks to illustrate different approaches to screen story design that in turn evoke particular emotional states or otherwise. In following the analysis along these lines, it is intended to contribute to a pedagogy of screenwriting that embraces dramaturgy and writing; narrative and drama; craft and creativity. The work of this thesis is intended to explore the structural and formalist approach to screenwriting as well as the visceral aspect of storytelling.

The main point of departure from existing narrative studies, for this study, is in theorising around story, character and plot. Heretofore the emphasis has been on plot, especially in the work of formalists and structuralists. Although character offers access to a deeper story, it has been relegated to the position of actant. In attempting

to theorise character and re-focus character as central to the narrative strategy of a given text, this study departs from other narratological approaches. Characters live in the world the writer creates and it is at the level of characterisation that the writer has the potential to imagine and create a new world. It is by analysing character in conjunction with other aspects of narrative that the potential lies in revealing what is at the heart of contemporary Irish cinema and how it relates universally.

It is what the characters 'see and hear' as opposed to what they 'say and do' that presents the most interesting aspect of narrative construction for this study. Great characters or story icons enter the annals of the collective memory of popular culture by impacting on the *narratee*, by moving or inspiring and consequently arousing the emotions of the audience.⁹⁸ While it is mainly through their actions that they bring this response, it is at the level of their creation that they are able to act in a given way. It is the depth of character that the writers and directors create that will reveal the level of craft of the writer and director and to what extent they exploit the full potential of the narrative form. Through the characterisation of Pig and Runt (*Disco Pigs*), Eamonn Manly (*The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*), Nora Barnacle (*Nora*), Franklin (*Song for a Raggy Boy*) and Harry (*The Boy from Mercury*) the story-worlds of these films resonate. This study, therefore, places the emphasis on character, while giving due attention to other narrative devices such as plot and narrator. In undertaking an analysis of the story-worlds of various Irish films, this thesis explores key features of contemporary Irish cinematic narratives and situates them beyond national parameters within an international framework, developing the solid foundation offered by the earlier frameworks shaping Irish national cinema discourse.

¹ Ruth Barton (2004) refers to this period as 'New Irish Cinema' while Martin McLoone's (2000) thematic analysis suggests a distinctive nature that separates this period from its predecessor.

² There are many strands to what is considered Irish film. There are those who work within an international arena (Jim Sheridan; Neil Jordan; Pat O'Connor) and those who work mainly in a European or British tradition (Damian O'Donnell, for example, whose 1st Irish feature, *Inside I'm Dancing* (2004) was his 3rd feature after *East is East* (1999) and *Heartlands* (2001)). There are those who make small-scale feature films outside of Bord Scannán na hÉireann - *The Nephew* (Eugene Brady, 1998), *Run of the Country* (Peter Yates, 1995) and *This is my Father* (Paul Quinn, 1998) - and those who make Irish and non Irish films (Mary McGuckian - *Words Upon the Window Pane* 1994; *This is the Sea* 1996; *Best* 2000; *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* 2003; *Rag Tale* 2005; Paddy Breathnach - *Ailsa* 1994; *I Went Down* 1997; *Blow Dry* 2003; *Man About Dog* 2004). There is also a category of foreign directors making films about Irish subject-matter, the most dominant historical category of Irish film that still exists today (*Veronica Guerin*, Joel Schumacher 2003). This study delineates its boundaries by restricting the focus to Bord Scannán na hÉireann-supported films, principally because these films form a body of work that gets as close to resembling an indigenous film culture given the international and global arena that film now operates in.

³ Luke Gibbons examines Irish film from a perspective of cultural nationalism while Kevin Rockett's approach is historical and John Hill explores mainstream US and British representations of Ireland and the Irish. Within this text are three interesting and diverse perspectives on Irish film which has left a legacy to the study still relevant today.

⁴ See Pettitt (2000: 14-24) for a concise synopsis of the cultural and historical debates, influencing Irish cinema discourses, in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁵ The history of Irish cinema reveals, by and large an erratic development. While there was a lot of activity in the early part of the twentieth century, between 1910 and 1914 in Co. Kerry with the arrival of the Kalem company (Sidney Olcott) and in the 1930s with Tom Cooper's production of *The Dawn* (1936), there was very little state support for film production until these recent times. Instead, successive Irish governments, through their idiosyncratic relationship with the Catholic Church, focussed their energies on 'protecting' Irish audiences through censorship. Representations of Ireland therefore largely came in the form of American and British productions. By the time the 1st Bord Scannán na hÉireann was launched in 1981, cinema had been in existence for almost one hundred years and the Irish film industry had a lot of catching up to do.

⁶ The 1st wave was part of a wider European and US avant-garde movement. Many of its directors had an art college training (Joe Comerford, Pat Murphy) and some had acquired their film training within underground art movements (Pat Murphy). Furthermore, they were informed politically by events in Ireland in the 1970s which saw a growth in trade unionism, feminism and political violence in Northern Ireland, all effecting Ireland's advance from tradition to modernity (Gibbons, 1987). They also were central to the activities in Ireland during the 1980s that saw a split between liberalism and conservatism, witnessed most tangibly through the events such as the abortion referendum in 1983 and the divorce referendum in 1986. The social and political context is important in shaping the film output of this era. In contrast, the social, political and economic back-drop to contemporary Irish film is more liberal, global and less national as a result of the combined forces of further European integration, the arrival of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy and an end to political violence in Northern Ireland.

⁷ The aims and objectives of Bord Scannán na hÉireann are detailed in each Review and Annual report since 1993. The Bord was established 'to promote the creative and commercial elements of Irish filmmaking and film culture for a home and international audience...to encourage the development and training of technical, artistic and production grades as a means of improving the overall skills proficiency within the industry; to assist in the promotion and marketing of Irish films within Ireland and abroad as a means of stimulating an interest in Ireland, Irish culture and Irish films' (sourced from *Review and Annual Report*, 1993).

⁸ Film Base was set up in 1987 after the shutting down of the first Bord Scannán na hÉireann. It lobbied continuously for the re-activation of the Bord as well as providing training courses for filmmakers and providing production facilities at a low cost. It still exists as an organisation, located near the Irish Film Institute in Temple Bar, Dublin.

⁹ For further discussion see McLoone (2000) and Pettitt (2000).

¹⁰ In Ruth Barton's recent book *Irish National Cinema* (2004), she notes that none of the small films of this era broke into the mainstream like the works of Jordan, O'Connor and Sheridan. She states that it is 'certainly disappointing that the foremost auteurs of Irish film culture still remain Neil Jordan, Jim Sheridan and, to a lesser extent, Pat O'Connor, whose reputations were made before 1993' (Barton,

2004: 179). While these three directors would not necessarily be reliant on Bord Scannán na hÉireann support as they already worked within an international (Hollywood) milieu, at the level of narrative structure and financial package, it is interesting to note that Pat O'Connor (*Dancing at Lughnasa*, 1998) and Jim Sheridan (*The Boxer*, 1998) received Film Board funding in the late nineties. While Neil Jordan's repertoire has moved easily between mainstream Hollywood blockbuster (*High Spirits*, 1988; *We're No Angels*, 1989; *Interview with the Vampire*, 1994) and European low budget art-house movie (*Mona Lisa*, 1986; *The Crying Game*, 1993) it is his international recognition through Academy Awards that led to the re-activation of the Bord.

¹¹ Although it should be noted that the 1st Irish Film Board (1982-1987) was operational at one of the worst economic times for Ireland in recent memory when unemployment and emigration reached all time high levels.

¹² The reason the Bord needed re-activation (as opposed to re-establishing) was that the Bord still existed. According to a report in *The Sunday Tribune* (7 March 1993), although it was no longer being funded, the Bord had been maintained as a legal entity to carry out 'bits and pieces' of unfinished business (such as gathering monies it had been owed) after its main function had disappeared in 1987 at the hands of Charles Haughey, Taoiseach at the time. The location of the Bord in Galway generated little opposition despite the majority of film production companies being located in Dublin and the infrastructure in Galway being quite limited. While it could be argued that a regional policy and decentralisation are good for developing the economy of Ireland and particularly the western seaboard, the decision to locate in Galway is more likely evidence of a trend in Irish politics of 'clientelism' or less formally referred to as 'parish pump' politics. Michael D. Higgins also set up Ireland's first Irish language television service TG4 (formerly known as Telefís na Gaeilge) in 1996, locating it in Galway; and while this service has been successful in generating audio-visual production in the west of Ireland, most film production is still centralised around the capital city. In a paper to the Killarney 250 Film Summer School 2004, Naoise Barry of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, whose responsibility is the promotion of Ireland as a film location, said that while they have 20,000 locations on a digital data base, competition is fierce for big budget productions such as *King Arthur* which was shot in Co. Wicklow and employed 1,500 people in 2003. While the production company considered Kerry as a location, it was decided that it was too far away (from Dublin and hence the infrastructure). Dublin, as the capital city, has dominated film production in Ireland over the past ten years alongside its border county Wicklow, which due to its varied landscape can accommodate many set-ups. However, the Bord is piloting a regional support fund for indigenous filmmaking to move away from the dominance of Dublin, through a network of regional film offices. Despite Michael D. Higgins' decision being tainted by the regressive practice of parish-pump politics, it could be argued that the decision was inspired and brave given that there is a tangible move now to develop the regions (through the recent launch of the Spatial Strategy in 2003) and through the Fianna Fail/PD government's controversial attempts to decentralise large parts of the Civil and Public Service. However, the urban / rural divide in Ireland remains as entrenched as ever given the opposition of the Civil and Public Service unions to the plans to decentralise and the fact that there has been little take up on an individual basis.

¹³ Born in Devon, Cornwall, he studied English literature at University before attending the National Film School in Britain to study film production. Before taking up the post at Bord Scannán na hÉireann, he had a career of twenty years within media organisations in the UK and as Commissioning Editor for independent film and video at Channel 4, where he was involved in many Irish-related productions.

¹⁴ Many of the 1st wave directors had their careers stymied by Charles Haughey's closure of the Film Board in 1987. Inevitably, they were waiting in the wings, and in some cases centre stage having been involved in the lobbying activities to re-activate the board, to re-launch their artistic careers.

¹⁵ The 1st Irish film board was blighted from the start when the first film to be funded, Neil Jordan's *Angel* (1981), received half of the budget allocated for that year. It was revealed that one of the Film Board members, John Boorman, was also a producer of the film, thus suggesting a conflict of interests. This generated such bad feeling among the Irish film community that there was a boycott of the premier of *Angel* when it was screened at the International Celtic Film and Television Festival in Wexford the following year (Gibbons et al., 1988: 118-119). It is also argued that it was not until the success of Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* in 1993 that Jordan was redeemed and given due recognition in the eyes of the Irish film community. The appointment of Rod Stoneman is all the more interesting in light of this earlier controversy.

¹⁶ In 2003 he resigned his position as CEO of the Bord and was appointed Director of the Huston Film School at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

¹⁷ Quoting Mao Zedong, Stoneman multiplies the original quote ten fold, from one hundred flowers to one thousand, possibly an indication of his ambitions for Irish cinema.

¹⁸ See *Film Ireland* 94, Sept./Oct. 2003.

¹⁹ Quoted in the Review and Annual Report of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, 1993.

²⁰ See "Nine Notes on Cinema and Television" by Rod Stoneman in *Bog Pictures, Small Screen: the Relations between Film & Television*, John Hill & Martin McLoone (ed.), for further enunciations by Stoneman on his personal views of film.

²¹ For example he commissioned a major work from Jean Luc Godard in the 1980s as part of a Godard season. Stoneman was keen to screen all of Godard's work which Channel 4 had bought as part of the 'Other Cinema' catalogue (McCabe, 2003: 291-292).

²² The term 'radical pluralism' while not bandied about in Channel 4 when Stoneman worked there was central to the activities as he saw them. In an interview (O'Connell, 2004: unpublished) Stoneman explains the term 'radical pluralism' as something that casts an extensive net to encompass wide ranging points of view and expression. He sees the activities of the Film Board as a 'stronger version of that, because Ireland is a small country and there are not many sources of funding, it is very important that no one tendency dominates and controls and limits the range of Irish film'. This contrasts, it could be argued, with the activities of the 1st Bord which appeared to favour political cinema.

²³ Some of the few art house productions that the Bord supported over the past ten years include *All Soul's Day* (Alan Gilson, 1997), *November Afternoon* (John Carney and Tom Hall, 1996) and *Ailsa* (Paddy Breathnach, 1994).

²⁴ Lelia Doolan was producer of *Reefer and the Model* (Joe Comerford, 1988) and active in film production as a practitioner and a lobbyist throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

²⁵ Review and Annual Report, Bord Scannán na hÉireann, 1993.

²⁶ In a public interview following the screening of his film *Love and Rage* at the Irish Film Centre (now Irish Film Institute) in 2002, Cathal Black detailed how he deliberately rejected a larger budget in favour of 'creative independence'.

²⁷ Rod Stoneman in an interview (O'Connell, 2004: unpublished) argues that neither the CEO nor the various Chairs of the Bord had a 'serious influence' on the decision-making process. He puts the scenario forward that all decisions were reached consensually. At first, the Bord would read everything and then discuss the scripts that were proposed for funding until an agreement was reached. No decision was put to a vote. Since c.1999/2000 the structure changed slightly whereby the development decisions were made by the development manager and overseen by the CEO, 'with a lightness of touch because the Development Manager read everything'. The production decisions were made by a panel including the Production Manager, the CEO, some 'apparatchiks', a Bord member and an external person. Stoneman recalls a Celtic Film Festival in the late 1980s whereby someone referred to the 'Board's filmmakers', 'which rang in [his] ears as a closed shop, a kind of coterie'. In criticising this approach, he is also careful to state that he was anxious for 1st wave directors to have a chance again to add to the work they had done. However, while Stoneman is anxious to counteract the view that he ran a 'tight ship', it runs contrary to his position as Executive Producer on every film that received funding from the Bord, however small, suggesting a contradiction between his theory and practice. There is a widely recognised practice in Ireland that resists criticising the Bord along the lines of 'not wanting to bite the hands that feeds it' so it is therefore difficult to get writers/directors to go on record with the criticism that there was an uncomfortable level of interference by the Bord. See "Anatomy of a Failed Project" by Martin Duffy in *Film Ireland* 89 Nov/Dec 2002 (36-39) as one of the few published criticisms of the Bord by a filmmaker followed by a response from the Bord. Duffy concludes the article with the following question – 'if the Board has subjective editorial control on the films made in Ireland, then what assurances are there for Irish filmmakers that its personal taste does not remain the controlling voice of film output for longer than a reasonable term?' The Bord's response states that radical pluralism is the principle stance and points out that its selection criteria is published on the Film Board website. In an interview (O'Connell, 2004: unpublished), Rebecca O'Flanagan, former development manager with the Bord, detailed the process involved in dealing with script applications. Although each script was sent out to two readers (often one Irish and one from the UK) it was the development manager who made recommendations to the Bord. While the CEO may agree or disagree with the recommendations, neither he nor any board member ever read the scripts. Consequently, the only person reading the scripts and having an input into funding decisions was the development manager, an operational detail which makes Duffy's question all the more pertinent.

²⁸ This contrasts with the Arts Council who have been criticised by the arts community for being too removed from artists' concerns. Notably the Arts Plan (2002-2006) was set aside in 2004 following the

appointment of a new council in 2003 and the enactment of a new Arts Act. It was felt that the Arts plan positioned the Arts Council in the role of a development agency and had come about without sufficient consultation with the arts community. The Arts Council took this controversial step (which led to the resignation of Patricia Quinn, the then Director of the Arts Council) as a consequence of perceptions that it was far removed from the constituency it was charged with serving.

²⁹ 18 February 2001

³⁰ Mark Woods was appointed to the Bord in 2003 as Chief Executive Officer following Stoneman's resignation. An Irishman living in Australia for more than ten years, he was involved in film journalism and then in the field of cinematic distribution.

³¹ It has been suggested that the real reason for dissolving the Bord is that the government of the day did not like public monies being used to make films that were interrogating of Irish society. However, this viewpoint is difficult to sustain given the relative inaccessibility of many 1st wave films. It is unlikely that many government officials saw these films, let alone interpreted their stories as a critique. Furthermore, descending the censorship path would have been a high-risk political strategy in 1980s Ireland. The economic argument is more likely. Lelia Doolan, in an interview with *Film Ireland*, August / September 1993, believed that the 'incarnation of the Board actually performed well. Given the amount of money they laid out, which was IR£2.5 million over the five years, IR £0.25 million and more has come back into the Board.' Whatever the reason for closing down the Bord, it is clear the cultural argument alone would not sustain the 2nd Bord.

³² According to Rod Stoneman this percentage ratio is calculated as the relation of cumulative capital spend on fiction feature film production to cumulative net income from those films. While it would be in the interest of the Bord to present the best possible returns for film production in Ireland, these figures may account for the sustainability of the Bord given the threats to it from time to time as government seeks to make savings in the central exchequer.

³³ *The Sunday Business Post*, 18 January 1998, Marion McKeone.

³⁴ *The Irish Times*, 16 March 1995, Michael Foley.

³⁵ In the budget of 2003 the tax relief scheme Section 481 was extended following a strong lobbying campaign on behalf of the Irish film industry. Interestingly all the arguments put forward for the retention of the scheme had an economic basis prompting Hugh Linehan, journalist with *The Irish Times*, intervening at the final hour with the 'cultural argument', suggesting what way the balance was tipping, clearly in the direction of economics.

³⁶ See Hill & Church-Gibson (1998: 478-485) for further discussion.

³⁷ Quoted in Review and Annual report, Bord Scannán na hÉireann, 1993.

³⁸ *Screen International*, 10-16 December, 1993. No. 937.

³⁹ Stoneman, Rod. "Under the Shadow of Hollywood: the industrial versus the artisanal" in *Kinema*, Spring 2000.

⁴⁰ French financed, shot in Paris with a French crew; set in Saigon in the thirties, it articulates a Vietnamese vision of that moment in history (Stoneman, 2000).

⁴¹ Possibly the hybrid version of artisanal production in an Irish context is the film *How Harry Became a Tree* (Goran Paskaljevic, 2002). Based on a Chinese fable transposed to post-civil war Ireland and directed by a Serbian director (Rockett, 2003: 52), this film represents a complexity of narrative that negates national affiliation and speaks universally, yet resonates culturally.

⁴² This also raises the question of career paths for filmmakers. One of the criticisms of the Bord is that it took up to four years, on average, to make a medium budget feature (IR£3 - IR£5 million). This meant that while many directors got the opportunity to make their first film, relatively few progressed to a 2nd or 3rd feature thus limiting the potential for nurturing and developing talent. For example, David Keating showed promise with *Last of the High Kings* (1995) yet didn't direct any more Film Board films.

⁴³ *Screen International*, 10-16 Dec. 1993. No. 937

⁴⁴ Most recently in 2002 when an 'Independent Review of Estimates Committee', locally known as the 'three wise men', recommended the abolition of the Bord because they believed there was sufficient tax relief in place for film production. This didn't happen but the BSÉ's budget was cut by 12.45%. *The Irish Times*, 20 December 2002, Ted Sheehy.

⁴⁵ "Irish film has cutting edge" by Marion McKeone in *The Sunday Business Post* 17 Dec. 1995.

⁴⁶ Some examples of films produced by those who were active in film in the 1980s include *High Boot Benny*, Joe Comerford 1993; *Korea*, Cathal Black 1995, *Snakes and Ladders*, Trish McAdam 1997; *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*, Geraldine Creed 1996. Aside from Black's *Korea* these films had limited critical and commercial success and an analysis of their story strategies reveals tensions between old ways and new – it will be argued later that these films' narratives suffer from the vacuum

⁵⁹ Around this time also, RTE had appointed Greg Dinner, an American script editor, to the position of Drama Development Officer, thus revealing a shift in the direction of drama production, filling a vacuum that had existed since the early 1980s and the emergence of the phenomenon of co-productions.

⁶⁰ Interview conducted with Rebecca O'Flanagan, former Development Manager at the Bord (13 Dec. 2004) by Dióg O'Connell (unpublished).

⁶¹ These films took in over IR£2.2 million at the Irish box office. Clarence Pictures, Buena Vista International and Abbey pictures accounted for the release of eight of the films funded by the Bord. Source - Bord Scannán na hÉireann newsletter, Issue 1, Dec. 2001. See Barton (2004: 191–192) for viewing figures, where available for Irish films of this period.

⁶² Ruth Barton includes viewing figures, where available, for Irish films with part or complete Irish financing (not all are Bord Scannán films) in the appendix of her book *Irish National Cinema* (2004: 191). While she is correct in pointing out that few films made any impact on the international stage, she is a little unjust when she says that 'their performance in the home market has also been in many instances unremarkable' (Barton, 2004: 179). Of 61 films listed 52 received a theatrical release and while some had very few viewers (*Ailsa* – 429; *Words Upon the Window Pane* – 693; *A Further Gesture* – 953), 20 received almost 100,000 viewers (*Last of the High Kings*; *Accelerator*) with some receiving 250,000 (*The Boxer*; *When Brendan met Trudy*; *Some Mother's Son*) and others around half a million (*The General*; *Angela's Ashes*; *Circle of Friends*). While this study is not undertaking a political-economic analysis of the period, it does argue that the key 'success' of this period is the relationship between the films and the local, domestic Irish audience whom, when given the opportunity, sought out these films in the cinema-houses. Furthermore, the failure in foreign markets of Irish films of this period may be explained by Rebecca O'Flanagan who states that once distributors had recouped their costs in Ireland, they were less inclined to embark on a costly marketing campaign in an unknown foreign territory where they were unsure of the success potential (O'Connell, 2004: unpublished). The films did not necessarily fail, rather they were not given the opportunity to succeed.

⁶³ http://www.taiwancinema.com/eng/article_031229.php (accessed on 26 May 2004).

⁶⁴ This is a key development that marks the end of the first decade. These films refer to productions with budgets under 1 million euro. The Bord will provide up to 60% of the budget. Features under this initiative should be creatively driven projects which are achievable on extremely low budgets and original and innovative in style and content. Although launched as an initiative under Rod Stoneman, it is Mark Woods' tenure that will reveal the impact narratively and industrially this scheme has on Irish film. Interview with Ossie Kilkenny, Chair of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, *The Sunday Independent*, 27 April 2003.

⁶⁵ Rod Stoneman states that 'looking at 2nd wave [films], while recognising a certain amount of continuity there is also a lot of difference, and that difference has to do with changes in Irish society and history, changes in wider cinema practices, and the fact people edit on a non-linear basis means that you are getting slightly different speeds of editing and things being thrown around and this was less encouraged on a Steinbeck' (O'Connell, D, 2004 (Unpublished)). What he is referring to here is a distinctly different visual style that has important consequences for story design and construction, a characteristic that distinguishes 2nd wave films.

⁶⁶ Martin McLoone raises the issue of encounter between the universal and particular in his analysis of the emergence of an Irish film culture (McLoone, 2000: 117–120) drawing on 'Robertson's formulation of Japanese 'hybridity' acknowledging that 'national' culture is far from a pure form.

⁶⁷ Des Bell in an article entitled "Practice makes perfect? Film and media studies and the challenge of creative practice" in *Media, Culture and Society* exploring the relationship of theory and practice in media and film education states that 'while the debate about text and context, meaning and social determination raged, another debate about the relation of critical theory and creative practice was largely absent during the early formative years of the new subject' (Bell, 2004: 739).

⁶⁸ Kalos k'Agathos / Theory for Practice is an international research project exploring the relationship of theory and practice in film schools world-wide.

⁶⁹ The work of McKee, Vogler, Propp, Thompson, Hiltunen and Campbell will contribute to this task.

⁷⁰ Presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, in Boston, Massachusetts from August 10–15, 1998. Available online at <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/papers/ActiHanl.htm>

⁷¹ Noel Burch, who was one of the first theorists to engage with the idea of *praxis* in his book *Theory of Film Practice / Praxis de Cinéma* (1969) appropriates the French term *découpage* to refer to the final form of script. While most film studies' approaches place the emphasis on the filmed version of the screen story, Burch suggests a direct relationship between shooting script which includes notes from the director on how the script is brought to screen. *Découpage* refers to the 'pre-breakdown of narrative

action into separate shots and sequences *before filming*' (Burch, 1969) suggesting that the relationship between script and screen is more intricate than generally assumed. The script therefore is more than just a theoretical document.

⁷² Recently, there have been rumblings from different fields about the inevitable implosion of Cultural Studies. Given that we are in a post post-modern era, there appears to be confusion as to where to go next. Interestingly, in some fields (graphic design, fine art, painting) there is a return to the analysis of craft in the art form. This is, arguably, as a result of the inevitable distance Cultural Studies places between the medium under scrutiny and the analysis taking place, given its reliance on inter-disciplinarity. The process of 'mitosis' will inevitably lead to a dilution of the analysis. See recent work of design theorist, Lorraine Wild, in particular.

⁷³ A survey of scriptwriting courses within universities and third level institutions in Europe and North America reveals an absence of a theoretical framework underpinning the rationale for most syllabi. Instead, where an 'academic' stream is offered, it usually appropriates from mainstream Film Studies either by exploring history and aesthetics or general narrative theory. These strands are often quite separate pedagogically from the more applied aspect of these programmes. Des Bell writing on the UK system says that due to a 'variety of institutional pressures, the gap between critical media theory and creative and professional media practice has become wider over the last few years. Film and media theorists increasingly talk to each other within a *research economy* while teachers of film and media practice are coming under increased pressure to adopt a vocational *skills-based* model of media teaching' (Bell, 2004: 738). The outcome is that production-based students are trained to industry standards and conventional norms and carry out little experimental work whereas the theoretical students have little empathy with the 'realities' of the practice. What this thesis is concerned with is testing models of application that bring theory and practice closer together, that develop the enquiring mind yet make the theory applicable in an applied way.

⁷⁴ There has been a growing interest in the theory/practice debate in Europe and has found a home for exploration in the conferences organised by CILECT (Centre International de Liason des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Television). CILECT is an international organisation of film schools which interestingly bridges the Atlantic divide finding a space whereby European and American film professionals and educators can find common ground for discursive practice. CILECT is the facilitator of 'Theory for Practice / Kalos K'Agathos', a research project which comprised four parts, each looking separately at a different part of the film production process. What is interesting about the approach adopted by the participants in this research project is that it offered a forum that brought together European and US approaches to the film form. Often pitted against each other along the lines of art (Europe) versus industry (Hollywood), this discussion offered a space whereby the exploration of the screenwriting process simultaneously embraced both approaches by refuting the alleged dichotomy. This was largely achieved by the personnel involved who comprised practitioners and theoreticians from Europe and the United States. This approach is particularly pertinent to the Irish situation given our schizophrenic approach to the influences from east and west of the Atlantic. Our status as an English-speaking nation makes us particularly susceptible to American influences yet we seem uneasy about this given the hierarchy attached to high art / popular culture and European art cinema / mainstream Hollywood. This study, from the outset, seeks to move beyond these polarisations and suggests that the aesthetic answers to contemporary Irish film lie in a place that negotiates the influences from both sides of the Atlantic. The work of Kalos k'Agathos, almost by default, goes some way in bridging this divide. However, it is more complicated than a simple Atlantic divide given that many coming from the United States are European ex-patriates, some of whom fled to avoid persecution during World War II. In this respect, the make-up of the conference participants mirrored the foundations of Hollywood, a film industry built on immigrant talent and creativity and targeted at an immigrant population. So while clearly embracing what is generally understood by Hollywood narrative, this project has a strong European influence from its American contributors. The project also involved many teachers and filmmakers from various parts of eastern and western Europe.

⁷⁵ The proceedings of the conference were transcribed into two unpublished documents, Blueprint 1 and Blueprint 2, which record the contribution made to the discussion from the practitioners, trainers and educators in the field of scriptwriting. It was largely structured around the memory of Frank Daniel, who was Dean of Scriptwriting at Columbia University, New York and the University of Southern California as well as a screenwriter of great renown. Ken Dancyger in his book *Global Scriptwriting* writes that 'many of the best known script teachers and gurus dwell in this [structuralist] space. Most enduring in my view is the work of Frank Daniel, first at Columbia and later in the writing area at the University of Southern California. His legacy, with its emphasis on structure, remains a critical foundation in contemporary pedagogy' (Dancyger, 2001: xiii).

⁷⁶ Recorded as an “informal talk” at Columbia University in 1986 when it was announced that Frank Daniel was resigning his post at the University. The transcript of the talk was published in the CILECT Newsletter, June 1989.

⁷⁷ The following is a selection of such manuals that this thesis draws on: Rush, J & Dancyger, K. *Alternative Scriptwriting*; Miller, W, *Screenwriting for Narrative Film & Television*; Vogler, C, *The Writer's Journey*; McKee, R, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*.

⁷⁸ Noel Burch backtracks from his original position in 1969, when he wrote the forward to the re-print of *Theory of Film Practice* in 1980 saying that what was lacking in the first edition was ‘the concepts of textuality, of polysemia, of the multiplicity and ambivalence of film-work, of cinema as institution. I wanted narrative film to have what I saw as the “purity” of opera. But of course that purity was just one more fantasy, woven by someone who was content to listen to or even watch opera with only the haziest knowledge of the libretto, who read Mallarmé and *Finnegan's Wake* aloud “for the sound”.’ (Burch, 1980). While he takes his share of the blame for this approach being adopted in his home country, the US, it could be suggested that Burch is overly influenced by the developments that took place within Film Studies in the 1970s, whereby ideological and psychoanalytic analysis took hold and hence he feels the need to make excuses for his earlier work. However, the tide appears to be turning and the call for *praxis* is being heard, particularly from those working within film schools. Burch's approach therefore, this study argues, is equally relevant today.

⁷⁹ It should be noted that many of these manuals concentrate on just one aspect of scriptwriting that deals with craft and skill or in Frank Daniel's words, dramaturgy. Scriptwriting like directing can be divided into two basic parts, writing and dramaturgy, both of which should be accommodated in a methodology. Scriptwriting training or education is more than a skills acquisition exercise, it includes such elusive phenomenon as creativity, imagination and talent.

⁸⁰ In Daniel's curriculum, the breach is overcome by combining writing classes with analysis classes. In the analysis classes dramaturgy or the ‘scientific’ part is explored, ‘the theoretical, the cerebral, the rational inquiry’ whereas the writing classes focus on the creative and is exercise based – the students follow through a process of activity that develops the creative. This approach, by placing a divide between theory and practice, leaves the space for some students to ‘opt out’ of theory by declaring it irrelevant, which is a difficulty identified by Bell for film courses attempting to integrate theory and practice.

⁸¹ Frank Daniel is quite discouraging of telling genre stories. He states in his 1986 address that ‘[i]f you start with the desire to write the genre story, you have eliminated part of your creativity, because you are actually giving up. You are putting yourself under a certain pressure.’ He says that those students who come with a genre story are usually trying to protect themselves, ‘believing that the genre formula will help them put together some acceptable plot...they aren't in their story, and they are not in the chosen genres. What they end up with are clichés, empty plots, flat characters and dull dialogue.’ This he terms as ‘plotting’.

⁸² It is worth listing some of Frank Daniel's approaches by way of example:

- Exposition – is it too long? ‘Looking at the story backwards’ is one way of assessing whether the exposition of the story is too long. This first step points to the importance of the development stage of the process, a stage that was highly developed under the studio system but only gained importance at Bord Scannán na hÉireann in the post-1998 period, a detail explored in Chapter 1.
- Monotony – Frank Daniel suggests that reason for monotony is that the scene can follow in the ‘forbidden pattern: and then, and then, and then’ which has the effect of achieving monotony. The pattern for connecting scenes should incorporate, in Daniel's words ‘and then, but, therefore, but’ suggesting obstacles being placed in the scene that create conflict and tension and therefore avoid monotony. The former pattern is akin to diaries and chronicles, i.e. narrative, whereas the latter succeeds in being dramatic. Monotony is avoided by creating contrast, ‘one scene is silent, the other can be ebullient, the other can be slow, the other can be fast. Staccato, legato, long smooth camera movement, short cuts, “chopped” scene etc. Anything that the scene suggests to help you awaken the audience's attention.’ (Daniel, 1986).
- Conflict – this is key to any film because it must be strong enough to keep the audience engaged for the duration of the film. How this is achieved is through anticipation – a device that positions the audience in an active, engaged emotional state of wishing, wanting, predicting. Story alone therefore cannot sustain the narrative. While the structuring of events is more easily accomplished by the screenwriter, far more difficult to acquire is that awareness of how the anticipation of the audience should be built and structured into the way the story is presented, according to Daniel, the difference between the narrative and the dramatic. ‘All the

techniques of suspense, surprise, mystery, irony etc. exist because of the viewer's anticipation. If there is no anticipation, there cannot be tension, there cannot be suspense.' (Daniel, 1986).

- Emotion – 'For real masters, stories are vehicles. They don't tell stories to tell stories. They tell stories to create emotions, and in our medium there is no other way to communicate emotionally except by evoking it, i.e. by using story material, human conflicts and human relationships, and situations that create sympathy, empathy, hope and fear. If you start dealing just with story, you are only doing half the job' (Daniel, 1986).
- Sub plots – a common flaw in screen stories is the lack of resolution of sub plots. 'To take care of this, you just need to do what a director does. You go through the story with each character separately – main characters, as well as sub plot characters. You examine their lines of action, their "spines", and make sure their stories are clear, that they have been completely told....The tension in the second act sometimes suffers from the fact that the relationships between characters are static' (Daniel, 1986).

These points will inform the narrative analysis of each film under scrutiny in this thesis.

⁸³ Of course, it has been argued that the meaning is created in the reading of a text, and arguably construction takes place at this point, not by the writer.

⁸⁴ Given that Hollywood 'classics' still provide a significant portion of television output in the western world is testimony to the 'timelessness' of many of these stories.

⁸⁵ Tangential to this study, although an important off-shoot, is what I call the pedagogy of scriptwriting. As a contributor to the writers' team (from 1998-2001) of *Glenroe*, an RTE soap opera, a teacher of scriptwriting (MIC, UL 1993-1999; IADT-DL 2000-to date) and a member of the National Film School Steering Committee, I am interested in the relationship of theory and practice and to contributing to the pedagogy of the scriptwriting. This study has a critical function in relation to contemporary Irish cinema but also a practical application in contributing to a more defined and theoretical underpinning of the teaching of scriptwriting.

⁸⁶ Some may argue that it is possible to evoke response on an intellectual level and this is equally valid. Eisenstein is the key proponent of intellectual response, as practiced in his form of intellectual montage (*October*, 1927). Jean Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967) is another example. While such approaches are short-lived in the history of fiction film their impact is profound, often having the effect of revitalising national cinemas to pursue narrative in new directions. What this study is primarily interested in is emotional response, which has been the key to fiction and film over time.

⁸⁷ This thesis will explore key film texts that achieve this level of engagement as a result of the work of the writer/director, in an attempt to delineate a corpus of contemporary Irish screenplays that reach the level of universal engagement with local resonance.

⁸⁸ In child development, empathy is usually developed by the age of three. See *What to Expect the Toddler Years* by Eisenberg, A; Murkoff, H & Hathaway, S. Simon & Schuster: London 1996

⁸⁹ These five summary headings are as follows: Plot / Mythos; Re-creation / Mimesis; Release / Catharsis; Wisdom / Phronesis; Ethics / Ethos

⁹⁰ As will be explored in Chapter 5, little analysis has occurred at a theoretical level on 'character'. Some theorists would argue that character does not exist at all, 'except in so far as they are part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and to discuss them as if they were real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature' (Rammon-Kenan, 1983: 31).

⁹¹ See Bakhtin's theory of chronotope for an elaboration on space and time, in Clark & Holquist, 1984.

⁹² The term Erotetic is used to describe relationships in the narrative. 'The basic narrative connective - the rhetorical bond between the two scenes - is the question/answer. The importance of this relation, which I call "erotetic", can be seen in films more complex than two-shot narratives.' (Carroll, 1988: 171).

⁹³ Although Carroll describes it as 'causally underdetermined by what precedes them' (ibid) while later scenes raise 'structured sets of possibilities' rather than act as effects of earlier causes.

⁹⁴ Terminology has always been contentious in Film Studies. For example, Christian Metz distinguishes between film which he views as a 'closed text' and cinema (as institution) which is defined by a wider set of influences (Metz, 1974).

⁹⁵ For example, society in social realism films or natural phenomenon in adventure films.

⁹⁶ Mieke Bal allows unidentified and undramatised narrators as well as characters to focalize events. For Bal, focalisation is the relationship between the 'vision', the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story and the content of the narrative text. (Bal, 1997:161). Seymour Chatman argues that a narrator cannot focalize at all because a narrator is outside the story, in a different time and place, and thus can only report, not see and hear events unfold.

⁹⁷ Cultural Studies has identified the huge influence of sub-cultures on the formation of different aspects of popular culture, whereby participation in the sub-culture is necessary to participation, and often understanding of, the particular field of popular culture.

⁹⁸ Some widely acclaimed ubiquitous characters include Oedipus, Othello, Scarface, Ethan Edwards, Shane, Jake Gittes, Thelma & Louise to name but a few.

CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATING EMOTIONALLY THROUGH UNIVERSAL STORYTELLING –

The Boy from Mercury

RECLAIMING THE NOTION OF STORY

Viewed from a certain distance, the great, simple outlines which define the storyteller stand out in him, or rather, they become visible in him, just as in a rock a human head or an animal's body may appear to an observer at the proper distance and angle of vision. – Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 1968.¹

Walter Benjamin eulogises the storyteller as a figure of critical importance in the human community and mourns the passing of 'lore [which] is being replaced by fact'. In 1968 he wrote about the decline of storytelling, that part of the process that 'gives counsel, disperses wisdom' observing that its wane was in direct proportion to the emergence and acceleration of a technical, global culture. Like many critics, such as Barthes and Baudrillard, who herald the demise of storytelling (Kearney, 2002), Benjamin believes that it is being replaced by information in the electronic age. These critics see civilisation as entering a space of 'depthless simulation inimical to the art of storytelling' (Kearney, 2002: 10) and suggest, at one level, that fiction is an art form of complexity that does not have a natural habitat in the information age, nor is there space given to it in the 'knowledge economies' where the value is placed on rationally acquired information. However, rather than facilitating the supplanting of stories for information, this study seeks to highlight the ever importance of myths, fables and stories to human existence and argues that cinema provides the space for such expression, in a public and private way. In this regard, cinema is different from other electronic media in that it functions in another realm. As Benjamin states 'storytelling does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again' (Benjamin, 1968).

Benjamin viewed storytelling as having died out with the rise of the novel, a medium which 'neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it', and which displaced public listening with private acts of reading. In contrast, Colin McCabe sees classic Hollywood, whose lynchpin is the very act of narrative, as being founded on the nineteenth century novelistic tradition. Such contradictions constantly emerge in the debate, which has been raging on and off since the middle of the last century, pronouncing the death of storytelling. The claim that the 'postmodern cult of parody and pastiche is, the pessimists conclude, fast replacing the poetic practices of narrative imagination' (Kearney, 2002: 10) is constantly challenged. Kearney does not see the end of story as Baudrillard did. While he acknowledges that old stories are giving way to new ones, 'more multi-plotted, multi-vocal and multi-media...truncated or parodied to the point of being called micro-narratives or post-narratives' (Ibid: 126), he signals that now more than ever the desire for imaginative expression in narrative form is a central preoccupation of the western world.

Indeed, one could even claim that the urge of certain literary obituarists to declare the end of the story is, ironically, a continuing sign of the *need* for traditional narrative closure (what Kermode calls the sense of an ending) (Ibid: 127).

Like Kearney, this study 'throws down the gauntlet and champions the irrepressible art of the story' (Ibid: 128). The modern art form of cinema and practice of cinema-going brings back that communal experience of sharing a story relayed to the audience by a *bard*. The question in Film Studies for almost forty years, initiated by the auteur theory, concerns who precisely is that bard. The auteur theory has traditionally placed the role of responsibility for storytelling clearly in the domain of the director, principally through the eulogising of Hollywood directors, while the rise of cultural studies and post-structuralism has sought to negate the notion of a sole creator in favour of a culturally and socially negotiated production. In this chapter, I explore the film *The Boy from Mercury* (1996, Martin Duffy)² as a filmic text telling an imaginative story as the first stage in the exploration of narrative that explores theory and practice through *praxis*. From this position, I locate my analysis at the level of structure by carrying out a formal investigation. In an attempt to re-appropriate cinema to the realm of storytelling, the structural analysis will reveal

firstly what is at work at a structural or formal level, secondly proffer a meaning and finally investigate symbolism of the universal experience in a local setting.

Benjamin alludes to the dialectical process, whereby the subject becomes one with the object, and how it pertains to the storyteller:

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into his own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later. (Benjamin, 1968)

The achievement of this dialectical process, or oneness between subject and object, has traditionally been the primary communicative aim of storytelling in cinema.³ It appears, as Benjamin suggests, that technological development and the globalisation of culture are making it more difficult to achieve. While homogeneity of culture in the global village, in theory, should render the universal more easily, it seems to have the opposite effect. As the world grows 'smaller', human experience does not reduce in complexity. What is being lost when speaking to a *perceived* homogenous group is this clear sense of unity between subject and object, possibly because the *storyteller* does not feel a rapport and affinity with the audience.⁴ What Benjamin's storytellers shared with their audience was wisdom, a rather old-fashioned word in the present climate of advancing technologies, global cultures and the information society. While this study is not placing the filmmaker alongside the sage of old, it could be argued that storytelling through the apparatus of cinema can convey directly from text to the audience, some shared aspect of the human experience.⁵

THE BOY FROM MERCURY – A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

This chapter reclaims *The Boy from Mercury* (1996) from academic oblivion and thus suggests it is a manifestation of this wisdom. Audience and critic alike largely ignored this film, arguably because it did not fit the contemporary paradigm of what makes a 'marketable' movie.⁶ Ruth Barton states that because 'Duffy's film fitted into no discernible category, functioning neither as children's film or otherwise, [it was] left...susceptible to a market more used to generic Hollywood fare' (Barton, 2004:

180). Despite receiving 'mixed or indifferent reviews' (Duffy, 1996), *The Boy from Mercury* successfully obtained a theatrical release in Dublin, Galway and Cork. However, it took the paltry sum of IR£6, 457 at the box office, screening to a total audience of 2,348. This compares unfavorably in market terms with a similar film, small budget Irish feature, *The Last of the High Kings* (David Keating, 1996), which was screened around the same time and took IR£240, 000 at the box office.⁷ On the other hand, when *The Boy from Mercury* was screened on television 468,000 viewers - or 45% of the audience share - watched it at the time of screening. This compares favorably with an 'economic success' of the previous year, *Circle of Friends* (Pat O'Connor, 1995), which received 49% of the audience share (Barton, 2000, unpublished), a film that had the benefit of Hollywood backing.⁸

What this type of data reveals is that *The Boy from Mercury* did not make an impact commercially or critically when it was first released in the mid-nineties, yet as time moves on it appears to be receiving more positive appraisal (Barton, 2004: 179-180). More interestingly from a cinema analysis point of view is that figures issued by distributors and television companies only give part of the picture: the 'success' of a film is far more complex than audience percentage and market share and its measurement is often complex and controversial. Suffice to say that while the film 'dropped dead in Ireland' (Duffy, 1996) at the box office, it had a successful television screening and has since been released on video and is widely available. The criteria appropriated here for assessing the film will not focus on audience ratings: the accumulation of such data is generally crude principally because it fails to account for political and economic aspects of distribution and exhibition. Where relevant the market reception of a particular film will be highlighted, but the analytical focus is on narrative.

As mentioned already, this film has received little comment or attention in academic discourse or conference proceedings.⁹ The only citing of this film in contemporary academic writing, aside from Barton already mentioned, is by Martin McLoone when he refers to *The Boy from Mercury* in a long list under the heading 'Oedipal Conflicts and Maternal Narratives' (McLoone, 2000: 174). While McLoone sees Harry's incomplete family as central to the film's theme echoing the trope of absent father he already identifies, I will argue that this is the premise that facilitates the exploration of

the film's theme, grief and loss as a childhood experience. In McLoone's assessment, the film is posited along side *I Went Down* (Paddy Breathnach, 1997), *This is My Father* (Paul Quinn, 1998), *Angela's Ashes* (Alan Parker, 1999), *Last of the High Kings* (David Keating, 1995), *The Miracle* (Neil Jordan, 1991), *Hush-a-bye baby* (Margo Harkin, 1989) and *December Bride* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1990) - the narratives of these films are linked through the absence of a father-figure. McLoone argues that 'the crisis of paternity noted in recent Irish cinema has its roots deep in Irish social history and can be located, not in the structures of ancient peasant society, but in the nineteenth century in a process of Catholic modernization' (McLoone, 2000: 177). Such analysis contributes to the discourse of national identity and is central to key current academic debates. However, this study attempts to move away from this preoccupation by concentrating on formalism, to yield insights into the scriptwriting process and story-world creation, a separate and distinct project.

In Kevin Rockett's book marking ten years of new Irish cinema, *Ten years after: The Irish Film Board 1993-2003*, he locates *The Boy from Mercury* alongside other films exploring childhood (*All Things Bright and Beautiful*, Barry Devlin 1994; *My Friend Joe*, Chris Bould 1996; *Sweetie Barrett*, Stephen Bradley 1999; *Country*, Kevin Liddy 2000; *The Crooked Mile*, Stephen Kane 2001). The key point of intersection for these films as a group is that they use the representation of children to explore some other aspect outside of childhood. For example, the common tropes of running away, the circus and disappearing innocence dominate these films but not in a way that could shed light on 'childhood experience'. While *The Boy from Mercury* explores a trauma within the childhood experience of the main character Harry Cronin (James Hickey), these other films mentioned explore a trauma outside of the main characters, a trauma of society or family or the nation. Colin Graham¹⁰ argues that in literature the story of childhood is a story of the nation and poses the question if Francie in *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997) is a real rebel, what does this say about the nation-state? This analytical direction has been predominant in Irish cinema and is apposite when analysing texts that are preoccupied with national issues.

However, this thesis seeks to direct the discourse away from a preoccupation with the 'national' and will argue that there is an emerging trend in Irish cinema that selects stories that seek to shed light on some aspect of the wider human experience while

locating the story within a local milieu. Because *The Boy from Mercury* explores an aspect of childhood experience that has a wider cultural and geographical resonance, it does so by mastering narrative structure in a more accomplished way. The other films that Rockett categorises under the heading 'Childhood' say little about any aspect of the universal experience of 'childhood'. Instead, they act as a commentary on the state of the nation and lost innocence (*All Things Bright and Beautiful*) or explore the concept of alienation (*Sweetie Barrett*, *Country*, *The Crooked Mile*). In other films produced around this time children are used symbolically to express the dual position of hope and regret while also being portrayed as innocent victims of Ireland's past (*Nothing Personal*, Thaddeus O'Sullivan 1995; *Broken Harvest*, Maurice O'Callaghan 1994). In representing the nation-state, children are often positioned as detached, remote and impassive to the world around them.

What distinguishes *The Boy from Mercury* is what arguably hinders the other films. Most of these films deal with trauma that is outside of and detached from the main protagonists whereas *The Boy from Mercury* explores an internal trauma particular to its main character. *The Boy from Mercury* tells a story from a child's point of view while the other films use children as a comment on the 'state of the nation' or as a space to provide a safe haven from realities of life, historical and contemporary. Interesting and illuminating for that purpose, this chapter focuses on a story that seeks to shed light on the humanistic expression of being a child. Because *The Boy from Mercury* tells its story in a different way, the framework for analysis digresses from the dominant discourse of Irish national identity to accommodate the dialectic between the universal and the local. For example, in Greek culture the virtue of courage was told through the story of Achilles or Iphigenia and the meaning of vice was told through the story of Circe or the Cyclops (Kearney, 2002:62), thus combining the local and the universal in storytelling as a way of reaching the audience. This chapter presents *The Boy from Mercury* as an exploration of a universal theme (an approach to storytelling rooted in history as far back as the ancient Greek world) that deals with the subjects of loss, grief and identity. The film explores the themes of guilt and friendship, central to a child's life and often misunderstood by adults. It is a form of storytelling that unifies object and subject through the exploration of the universal.

UNIVERSAL STORYTELLING

To ignore certain Irish films released in the 1990s because they fail to fit a paradigm defined by traditional discourses of national identity is to ignore what is at the very heart of the cinematic experience. Overlooking storytelling is merely a convenient academic confirmation of Walter Benjamin's thesis that the art of storytelling has died out. Yet throughout human history, our stories have been concerned with universal themes enacted at the level of the symbolic and the emotional rather than the literal or intellectual. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, for instance, is concerned with fidelity, truth, and morality, themes dramatised in a story about what makes a good king great. The tensions between free will and fate taking place on the macro level are explored on the micro level against the background of the local, namely the 'history' of the city of Thebes. Similarly in Irish mythology, the story of Deirdre of the Sorrows explores themes of love, loyalty and betrayal against the backdrop of half-remembered political events in the remote and now mythic history of Ulster and Scotland, while *The Children of Lir* elucidates the complex nature of family and the visceral nature of maternal and paternal roles. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* deals with consequences of overriding ambition whereas *Hamlet* thinks too much, to the detriment of instinct. The Western genre in 1950s Hollywood was concerned with playing out of opposites to construct conflict, great universal themes such as the individual within a community and the need to settle down. 1930s Hollywood was preoccupied with the 'American dream' and the immigrants' experience expressed in stories about the hero's drive for success.¹¹ The list goes on. Such stories have endured by combining the specific details of the local with the broad themes of the universal. Passed on very much in their original forms, they have withstood the test of time, as cultural and/or universal myths. Myths and fables continue to be repeated as often as they are recycled and revised, reimagined in new forms and retold with different emphasis, consequently reemerging in the modern art form, cinema.

The reason for ignoring the universal aspect of cinematic stories in discourse on Irish cinema is its inability to sit comfortably with the debate on national identity in cinema. Since the publication of *Cinema and Ireland* (1987), the key concerns of academic commentators have been how film explores issues around national identity and representation in general. The universal aspect of storytelling has been criticised,

particularly in relation to stories about Ireland's political past. John Hill highlights a number of key films (*Odd Man Out*, Carol Reed 1947; *Shake Hands with the Devil*, Michael Anderson 1959) that fail to highlight the social or political backdrop of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, principally because they are embedded within a classical narrative structure (Hill, 1987: 147-193).¹² What these films succeed in doing, therefore, is promoting the myth of atavism. While it is difficult to argue with Hill on this point, his position is dependant on negating the emotional impact of the film as it relates to relations between humans and instead seeks a political analysis in a medium that, it can be argued does not function in that way. When concentrating on the local (or national) at the expense of the global (or universal), key issues of cinema fail to foreground.

Another reason for failing to address Irish cinema at the level of the universal is, arguably, the uncomfortable position we hold in relation to American popular culture. While the films that have been most debated within academic circles clearly reject much of what is mainstream American popular culture (*Maeve*, Pat Murphy 1981; *Anne Devlin*, Pat Murphy 1984; *High Boot Benny*, Joe Comerford 1993; *Korea*, Cathal Black 1996), many more films have been produced either appropriating, rejecting or paying homage in some way to mainstream Hollywood cinema.¹³ There appears to be an assumption that to talk about universality is to talk about Hollywood and accordingly to make a film in what is broadly deemed 'Hollywood structure' is to fail in some way to address key issues of cultural or national significance (Linehan, 1999: 46-8) or to encounter the accusation of promoting a patriarchal bourgeois ideology.¹⁴

Consequently discourse on Irish cinema has traditionally concentrated on ideological and local readings at the expense of an engagement with 'universalism'. When a 'universal' story is addressed, it is pitted against the local, and viewed as negating the emergence of an indigenous, inward-directed voice that can give legitimate expression to aspects of Irish cultural identity. Furthermore, the concept of universality is viewed as anathema to the notion of a 'national' identity, suggesting that mere storytelling prevents the 'national' voice from asserting itself. While this analytical approach has proved illuminating with regard to certain aspects of the 1st and 2nd waves of Irish cinema¹⁵ and the conflicts and tensions between the struggling indigenous cinema and

the dominant international representation of Ireland on screen, it has shed little light on film as a storytelling medium in Ireland since 1993. This chapter will attempt to place the universal as central to discussing Irish cinema, in an attempt to place Irish film in a wider context.

In this thesis I argue that the universal theme explored against the backdrop of a local setting determines a particular structure: this is not necessarily a Hollywood structure. It is a structure that Hollywood appropriated from the universal storytelling of Greek tragedy, Norse folk-tales, European oral culture and Shakespearean drama. It was developed and molded into classical narrative between 1903 and 1917 when the primitive mode of representation developed into the institutional mode of representation (Burch, 1979) and through the 1920s until the coming of sound. It was at its peak in Hollywood between the 1930s and 1950s and has gone through many evolutionary and revolutionary changes since, in a post-classical and contemporary way. Some critics have gone as far as arguing that the best-structured storytelling emerged in the studio system era and has not been captured since (Towne, 1997: x) although this is a broad generalisation and clearly not the case (Thompson, 1999). While Hollywood fine-tuned narrative structure during the studio system, many other national cinemas were exploring ways of telling universal stories against local backdrops and have left legacies to world cinema that owe little to Hollywood but clearly draw on a tradition that spans thousands of years.¹⁶

So ignoring many Irish films produced in the last decade because they fail to fit a paradigm defined by the discourse of 'Cinema and National Identity' is to ignore what is at the very heart of the cinematic experience, that is story.¹⁷ To ignore storytelling as a theme for discussion is to confirm Benjamin's thesis that 'the art of storytelling has been dying out for a long time.' However, I prefer to take a more optimistic view. As Bordwell said in *Film Art: An Introduction*, narrative is everywhere, with stories being a dominant form of narrative. By looking at storytelling as a point of examination, the contribution of Irish filmmakers to their field in the last decade can be reassessed in a new way and placed in a wider cultural domain of universality. This is what narratologists such as David Bordwell and Edward Branigan have been contributing to Film Studies and while post-structuralism and post-modernism have succeeded in pushing formalism to the sidelines, the latter appears to be reasserting

itself more recently as a current and viable discourse. The relationship of theory and practice, which is a central preoccupation of this thesis and highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, is of concern to those in film education. Phil Parker (2000) attempts to introduce an applied approach to the study of narrative through his 'Creative Matrix' and combines the more theoretical approaches of Bordwell and Branigan with what he terms the 'new structuralists', McKee, Vogler and Field. Parker states that '[t]hese aspects of the narrative – act structure, active questions, and engagement – provide the means by which the writer can create dramatic and engaging plots across a number of different forms, genres and styles. However, unlike story and theme, where the familiar is being emphasized, these aspects of the Matrix are all about the uniqueness of each narrative' (Parker, 2000: 72), thus supporting the premise of this thesis - and consequently this chapter - that an applied approach to narrative analysis can reveal at a deeper level what is at work within the story.

As pointed out by Derek O'Connor in his review of *The Boy from Mercury* (*Film Ireland*, Issue 48), 'European cinema has produced many great films about childhood experience...but it's the Irishness of the film that gives it a unique quality, a feeling of seeing something never shown before on our screens, a small part of our own lives.' What Hollywood has been doing for over a hundred years, many other national cinemas have been doing also, telling the universal story against a local setting. This is the great achievement of *The Boy from Mercury* and signals at an early stage within the 2nd wave the evolutionary and developmental aspect of recent Irish cinema. Narrative is both a process and a medium for universal themes and as Benjamin pointed out, there is a need for the storyteller to establish common ground between himself and the audience. In narrative, it is at the level of process that the writer and audience can establish a rapport or affinity and it is through the medium that the story is delivered.

NARRATIVE COHERENCE

When forced to work within a strict framework, the imagination is taxed to its utmost and will produce its richest ideas. Given total freedom the work is likely to sprawl. (TS Eliot, 1999)¹⁸

This section proposes to analyse the basic structural outline of *The Boy from Mercury* in an attempt to assess it within the context of storytelling as craft in cinema.

Narrative theory has traditionally been a pivotal tool of analysis when deconstructing structure in film (Bordwell 1990; Carroll 1988; Branigan 1998). Kristin Thompson in her recent book *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (1999) questions why little use has been made of screenwriting manuals in assessing the craft of storytelling. Such manuals date back to the 1910s and have enjoyed a resurgence since the 1970s when freelance scriptwriting became the norm after the demise of the studio system. While many of these manuals tend to repeat what others have said, they are useful in pointing out the basic technique in classical storytelling (Thompson, 1999).

Thompson pointing out that ‘historians and analysts of music or painting or architecture routinely draw upon practitioners’ manuals’ suggests that there is no reason for film to be any different (Thompson, 1999: 11). This thesis, through its methodology, seeks to combine the narrative theory developed within film studies with an applied approach to scriptwriting, an approach that Phil Parker attempts in his ‘Creative Matrix’. Rather than slavishly adopting one model, this section will appropriate some techniques from such manuals (McKee 1999; Thompson 1999; Vogler 1999; Voytilla 1999) in order to conduct a structural analysis of *The Boy from Mercury* appropriate to the theoretical analysis of this study, and reveal what is at work within the narrative in constructing the story.

Like Thompson, my principal analysis will avoid a thematic interpretation that is dominant in contemporary Irish film criticism. While engaging as a discourse in and of itself, such analysis is not specifically relevant here as it does not inform on storytelling technique, skill and craft in Irish cinema. What this chapter is interested in is a ‘coherent whole’ and how subject matter is shaped and developed in such a way that engages audiences through the narrative process and medium (Thompson, 1999: 335). Thompson challenges the notion of a “‘post-classical cinema” of rupture, fragmentation, and postmodern incoherence’ (Ibid: 336); instead she bases her analysis on a narrative tradition that has flourished for over eighty years and shows every sign of continuing, albeit in a developing and evolving way. It is against this background that this discussion takes place, not necessarily embracing wholeheartedly mainstream Hollywood narrative structure but accepting that there is a tradition of storytelling that has been around for a long time and shows no sign of disappearing.

Contemporary narrative forms, in their multiple guises, are evolutions of an earlier form rather than a radical departure from the dominant paradigm. Mastering and triumphing in this tradition, whether the purpose is to consolidate or reinvent, is the challenge that faces every scriptwriter that seeks to tell a story for broad appeal.¹⁹ Analysing how and when this is achieved in recent Irish cinema is the work of this thesis.

The first step towards a well-told story is to create a 'small knowable world' that works simultaneously at the level of the indigenous and the universal; this is called the 'story design.' A good starting point in analysing story design is Kristin Thompson's structural breakdown, which she devised having studied a wide range of films from the 1920s to the 1990s, 'from Keaton's *Our Hospitality* to *Cassablanca* to *Terminator*' (Thompson, 1999).²⁰ In devising her schema, Thompson challenges the dominance of Syd Field's three act structure primarily because she sees the second act as too long (half the length of a feature film going on the 30:60:30 ratio) and instead proposes a structure as follows, based on four large parts: set up; complicating action; development; climax. A short epilogue usually follows the climax (Thompson, 1999: 28). Having studied many scenario manuals 'from the silent era to the latest guides', Thompson notes that while all scenario manuals refer to action rising and falling at intervals, none refer to fixed proportions or timings of these parts (Thompson, 1999: 21). The purpose of segments within narrative, she surmises, is to give the spectator a sense of direction in which the action will proceed, thus facilitating comprehension of the story (Ibid: 21-22). While her argument for equitable length of sections is to prevent one section going on too long and thus 'boring' the audience, it could be argued that it is the ability to keep the scenario moving in a forward direction within sections rather than between sections that creates narrative flow and movement, proffering a more complex explanation for narrative engagement than Syd Field's 'Plot Point 1' and 'Plot Point 2'.

While no method ought to be used prescriptively, Thompson's model acts as a good starting point for breaking down the overall structure, revealing the different sections and assessing whether the text fits the paradigm. Appropriating a predefined schema is a contentious exercise, principally because the interpreter potentially *squeezes* the selected form into the defined structure, simply to prove a point. However, the

benefits of the formalist approach is that it allows the structural investigation emerge to the forefront without succumbing to a simplistic thematic analysis that does not account for the relationship of form to content. According to Thompson's paradigm therefore, an application and interpretation of *The Boy from Mercury* would read as follows:

Set up – (0 – 14 minutes)

Harry communicates with planet Mercury / his father is dead / he visits his father's grave / he goes to a Christian Brothers' school / there is a bully in his class called Mucker Maguire

Complicating action – (15 – 34 minutes)

Harry meets his new friend Sean / his brother Paul does not take good care of him / Harry shoots Sean and makes him bleed / Harry runs away / Paul brings Harry home / Harry goes to the graveyard but won't tell his father he is good / Uncle Tony takes Harry out for the day

Development – (35 – 60 minutes)

Harry sees Sean again / Harry learns that he didn't hurt Sean / Harry confides in Sean about being from planet Mercury / Harry takes on Mucker Maguire with his special powers / Harry visits Sean's family in Walkinstown / Harry sends a note to Mucker Maguire / Harry brings Sean to his father's grave

Climax – (60 - 90 minutes)

Harry takes on Mucker Maguire / Paul takes on Mucker Maguire / Paul reassures Harry

Epilogue

Harry makes Paul look good in Sarah's eyes

Figure 1: Structural breakdown of *The Boy from Mercury*

What this structural analysis facilitates is the breaking down of the plot into sections that follow on from each other, illustrating clear structural progression from one section to another in terms of action. However, the sections are not immediately apparent as one views the film because the narrative requires seamlessness to ensure suspension of disbelief. Breaking down the narrative into sections reveals that the story is composed of a series of actions and not themes. In attempting a structural analysis, the first stage requires identifying these actions. Because a film's narrative is the sum of its parts, breaking down the plot into action sequences facilitates a reading

of the narrative in progressive form. Simply discussing the theme of a film reveals little about the way the story was constructed and assembled.

A plot inevitably can be divided into an infinite number of units or sections and the above diagram is simply one interpretation of Thompson's paradigm. She puts forward the proposition that a section changes when a protagonist shifts his/her goal as one means of defining sectional breaks and thus provides a structure that suggests the parts are almost symmetrical. She draws on practitioners to support this approach when they talk about 'shifting gears' to indicate section changes. It could be argued further that in order to maintain narrative momentum, each phase occupies equal amounts of diegetic space. Thus while *The Boy from Mercury* fits the paradigm, broadly speaking, not all recent Irish films do (*I Went Down*, Paddy Breathnach 1997; *Agnes Brown*, Anjelica Huston 1999; *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*, Geraldine Creed 1996). In highlighting potential structural flaws along these lines, the analyst can explain, for example, why the character motivation in *I Went Down*²¹ is so unclear or why there is little emotional empathy between the main character and the audience in *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*.²² While not wanting to cast value judgements on these films, what this initial stage in a structural analysis facilitates is the identification of narrative flaws that may go some way in explaining some of the tensions within story design. If a film is the sum of its parts, the impact on the audience at the end of the film should be one of wholeness or completeness, narrative coherence. While some films can sustain narrative flaws such as the 'sagging middle' (Thompson, 1999; Daniel, 1986) if they achieve overall narrative coherence as a result of clear character motivation executed through action sequences, in the absence of these narrative fundamentals such narrative coherence is often eluded. This basic structural detail reveals the problematic nature of many early story designs of this period (*Gold in the Streets*, Liz Gill 1996; *Snakes and Ladders*, Trish McAdam 1997)²³, whereby character motivation is unclear and plot development is unfocussed.²⁴

How many of these films differ further from *The Boy from Mercury* is in the absence of what Christopher Vogler in *The Writer's Journey* (1999) calls the 'ordinary world' or Thompson's 'set-up'. Vogler argues that most stories take the hero out of the ordinary, mundane world they are used to inhabiting and into a special world, new

and alien.²⁵ Vogler's method requires the ordinary world to be shown first in order to illustrate a contrast with the special world, either depicted or inferred. A pattern emerging in many Irish films is the absence of this ordinary world. In such absences the viewer does not know from where the main character came, it is not depicted and there are no narrative details that infer it; nor does it come to light as the narrative progresses, thus leaving an element of confusion throughout the story development (*I Went Down; The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*). The consequences of such an approach is to negate one of the fundamentals of the cinematic experience, character identification²⁶

The Boy from Mercury conforms to this schema from the outset, thus positioning the spectator at a point of identification. When Harry is first introduced to the audience he occupies the 'special world' as a consequence of the premise of the film – the death of his father - and in the narrative detail that follows he pursues a journey that will bring him back to the ordinary world. According to Mackey-Kallis, many myths and stories are based on the 'circular path taken by protagonists as they journey home and back...[t]he protagonists of these films share an overriding desire to find their way "home" on a journey that involves either a glimpse or an attainment of a transcendent way of knowing and being in the world and a chance to offer that vision to the culture at large' (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 1-2). Such myth-criticism²⁷ has close links with Jungian thought which is premised on the belief that humanity travels through stages from pre-ego to collective unconscious to individuation. According to Mackey-Kallis to 'truly reach individuation, as individuals and as a culture, we must go "home" fully prepared to face our collective Shadow and to fashion a new home in the Universe' (Ibid: 4).

Like many screen heroes, Harry refuses the first 'Call to Adventure'. Dancyger and Rush (1991: 21) call this the 'false solution' whereby a possible ending is introduced before the end of Act 1. Needless to say, the protagonist refuses this false solution (or the film would be over) thus propelling the action onto Act 2. In classical Hollywood this 'false solution' was more pronounced creating the conflict within the viewer that simultaneously wanted the 'false solution' to be accepted and denied. In *The Verdict* (Sidney Lumet, 1982) for example, the main character Frank Galvin is offered the financial settlement by the Catholic Church to resolve the case out of court as a 'false

solution'. On the one hand the viewer wants him to take it because he has little hope of winning the case and therefore the tension will be resolved; on the other hand we know he cannot take it or he will not rise to the narrative challenge and, more technically, it would signal narrative closure and consequently a very short film. Uncle Tony, as the only available 'father figure', is presented as the 'false solution' in *The Boy from Mercury*. If Harry accepts him as his confidante, as his mother hopes, there is no need for the rest of the film. Not only does rejecting the 'false solution' establish a gap of understanding between the adult's and child's world which is necessary to the subsequent narrative development, it also creates the space for Harry to work things out for himself within his own childhood world. It is not until he meets with the 'Mentor', in the form of his new friend Sean, that Harry embarks on the journey that will ultimately change him or allow him to grow.

Modern heroes may not be going into caves and labyrinths to fight mythical beasts, but they do enter a Special World and an Inmost Cave by venturing into space, to the bottom of the sea, into the depths of a modern city, or into their own hearts. (Vogler, 1999: 27).

This attempt at applying a structural analysis is not to suggest a closed text but rather to facilitate a reading of the narrative design that will reveal a range of potential deeper meanings. While Roland Barthes clearly argued against one definition of meaning for a work despite the 'illusion of completeness' from a tightly plotted work (Lesage, 1976/77), he still presented five codes for analysis. In presenting a methodology for analysing structure, this thesis is not proposing to close off interpretations, rather to nudge the discussion in a new direction. While mainstream narrative structure dominates contemporary Irish film, and the Hollywood model appears to be most influential, this approach is not monolithic. For example, Vogler points out that in most Western stories, heroes generally return to the ordinary world; it is the circular tale that brings closure, familiar to Hollywood audiences. However, in stories emerging from Asia and Australia the hero while returning to the ordinary world, sometimes does so with unanswered questions, ambiguities and unresolved conflicts, thus creating a more open ending. In some cases this may lead to the omission of a denouement, the failure to untie or unknot, yet still reach resolution (and redemption). In contrast to the Hollywood model which relies on a high degree

of closure, this feature of open-ended narratives has also been a feature of much European art cinema.

What gives *The Boy from Mercury* narrative coherence is its adherence to a structure with which audiences have become familiar over a long period and that Hollywood has embraced for the best part of one hundred years. While this film's structure conforms to the Vogler / Thompson paradigm, it is the overall progression through the stages that will reveal its impact in dramatic terms. Robert McKee in *Story* (1999) defines structure as a 'selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life' (McKee, 1999: 33). Similarly Joseph Campbell describes the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero as a 'magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return' (Campbell, 1949: 28). Both structuralists in their own right, these definitions are useful in assessing a character's progression through their narrative journey, thus echoing Vogler's progression from Ordinary World to Special World and back again to Ordinary World.

While Branigan's complicating action appears to come much later than Todorov's, both models broadly draw on a similar structure. Branigan points out that one of the most important, yet least appreciated, facts about narrative is that perceivers tend to remember a story in terms of categories of information stated as propositions, interpretations and summaries rather than remembering how the story is actually represented or its surface features (Branigan, 1998: 14-15). According to Bordwell, the act of film engagement 'encourages us to extrapolate and then chides us for going too far, parades a host of positive instances before trotting out the single and crucial exception, holds back basic data while 'prattling' (Barthes' term) about irrelevancies' (Bordwell, 1990), all making us think that we are in control. In fact, it could be argued that a good story controls us. In short, the spectator must succumb to the narrative structure in order to experience the sense of coherence in the story world, in Branigan's words, 'search, compare, test, discriminate, remember and speculate within many realms and imagined contexts' (Branigan, 1998:46). The critical nature of structure, therefore, cannot be overstated.

While the paradigms or schemas suggested by Branigan, Thompson, Vogler and McKee are variations on a theme, what they have in common is a general structure that can be appropriated to analyse the story world of film. Although no paradigm should be embraced prescriptively as this suggests a determinism anathema to film studies, each lends itself as a tool of interpretation. What these methods of analysis suggest and reveal is the similarities between texts, mainly the need to create a coherent whole, which is the sum of the parts. In this way structural analysis facilitates a reading according to accepted norms and values yet suggests that an appreciation of uniqueness and difference may require different tools, a point that will be explored later in the chapter. Structural analysis of *The Boy from Mercury* reveals that this film tells a universal story in a local way by exploring its theme in an evolutionary way. Conventionally it structures the story along the lines of beginning, middle and end with a set up, complication, development and climax. The writer Martin Duffy creates common ground between the audience and the film by creating a coherent world that is bound by the rules of structure.

APPLYING NEW STRUCTURALISM

Central to the work of Kalos k'Agathos and a key interest of this study is the pedagogy of scriptwriting. Straddling the dual purpose of skills acquisition with creative endeavour is the challenge of any curriculum involved in filmmaking and scriptwriting in particular. Ian MacDonald (2000) in his article in the *Journal of Media Practice* entitled "The assessment of creative screenwriting in Higher Education" seeks to tease out questions about how to teach, what to assess and who to assess in the field of scriptwriting. In an attempt to make theory relevant to practice, the application of these methodologies to the analysis of screen stories, in part, tests a possible pedagogical tool. This thesis argues that narratology has its role to play, by combining with applied studies, in developing the pedagogy of scriptwriting.

MacDonald states that in 'the teaching of creative writing as an industrial practice, we draw on well documented craft skills and practices which direct and, to an extent, dictate form' (MacDonald, 2000: 71), which includes writers like Field and McKee. While it has not been the norm to have a theoretical underpinning of scriptwriting courses in Europe or North America, the work of Kalos k'Agathos suggests a move in this direction. While the application of the methodological approach devised here

performs a discursive role, it also facilitates the testing of models that could apply in the classroom or workshop. In this section, therefore, I wish to appropriate a combination of the 'new structuralists' with theoretical narratology to reveal the basic structure of *The Boy from Mercury* as a way of revealing the story design and how the story world is created.

In a conventional way, the set up of *The Boy from Mercury* as defined by Thompson introduces Harry, the main character, a nine-year boy who believes he is from the planet Mercury. This imaginative activity of inventing another world is universal to childhood - psychologically normative children often believe fanciful realities that are misunderstood or not understood by the adult world. Far from being dysfunctional as such, it is just part of the living out of childhood. Duffy uses this world symbolically to play out the universal themes underlying Harry's story, in particular his psychological state following the death of his father. Harry believes that he has been sent to earth on a special mission to live with an earth family and study their routines and rituals. One day, he maintains, he will be called back to his real home, Mercury. His earth home is part of a working-class urban environment situated in the recently created suburb of Walkinstown, Dublin in the 1960s. Here he lives with his 'earth mother' (Rita Tushingham) and brother Paul (Hugh O'Connor) where his time is spent, when not at school, at the cinema watching episodes of the science-fiction series *Flash Gordon*. Through story information revealed, the audience learns that his father died five years earlier. When he visits the grave, which he does regularly with his mother and brother, he has to tell his father if he has been 'good or bold', a burden placed on him by the adult world.

The presence of another world is always to the forefront of Harry's experience. In the first visit to the graveyard, Harry sees a black claw emerge from a partly opened grave. The second time he visits the grave, his mother tells Harry to tell his father that he has been a good boy, which is the signal for the grave to explode and for Harry to run away. The presence and absence of his father is a constant throughout the set up of the film. The third visit to the cemetery is with his new friend, Sean. 'He couldn't really be my father, my father lives on Mercury and I'll meet him when I finish my special mission.' Harry is attempting to off-load the burden placed on him by the adult world. His father and all that he symbolises is presented to Harry as a grave, a place

that does not relate to his childhood world other than as a scary place that houses the unknown, thus signaling the need for Harry to reconfigure his father in his imagination.

The complicating action is played out among a series of episodes involving the presence of a bully, Mucker Maguire; when Harry meets a new friend, Sean; and Harry's attempts to communicate with planet Mercury. Harry is constantly alienated from his immediate environment and looks for signals from Mercury for his return, with his dog Agent Maximillian, to the planet. When he is at the matinee showing of *Flash Gordon*, the audience (which is composed mainly of boys around the same age as Harry) are jeering and laughing whereas Harry takes it more seriously, watching the events on screen with growing astonishment and concern. After the film, Harry meets his new friend Sean. In discussing the film, Harry shares his concern for Flash Gordon. Sean, who simply scoffs at his anxiety, explains that Flash Gordon cannot be shot as he has to come back for the episode next week. As this does not tally with Harry's version of reality, he refuses to accept it. The narrative thus plays out two worlds, the world of Harry's imagination and the 'real world' everybody else seemingly inhabits. Harry, who has retreated very much into the world of his imagination, will not accept Sean's explanation. The discussion develops into an argument about the merits of *Flash Gordon* until Harry takes out his laser gun and shoots Sean, 'By the power of Mercury, dar, dar!' causing Sean to fall to the ground and injure himself. Harry is so frightened having injured Sean that he runs away with Max.

Harry's earth mother becomes increasingly concerned with Harry's behaviour and makes various attempts to find out what is wrong with him. This forms part of Thompson's development phase. However, neither Paul nor Uncle Tony (Tom Courtenay) present as credible archetypes in the form of 'Mentor'. According to Vogler archetypes are ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race and are part of the universal language of storytelling (Vogler, 1999), echoing a Jungian stance. Archetypes are not rigid character roles, but functions performed temporarily by characters to achieve certain effects in a story.²⁸ The dramatic function of the Mentor is teaching or gift-giving (Propp's donor) and he/she also motivates the hero and helps him overcome fear. One of the obstacles to Harry

overcoming fear is Uncle Tony being proposed as Mentor, an adult imposition on a child's world that clearly will not work.

Mucker Maguire represents a 'Threshold Guardian' for Harry, a menacing face to the hero, who must be over-come, bypassed or even turned into an ally. Sean is clearly a Herald (as well as holding the Mentor position), one who issues a challenge and calls for change. Sean is a year older than Harry and that bit more mature. By questioning Harry's descension from Mercury, he is nudging him in a direction away from childhood imagination. Vogler's archetypes can be useful in assessing what role different characters play in the story. Not all archetypes will appear in all stories and not all archetypes have to take the form of a character. In *The Boy from Mercury*, there are clearly defined characters, some of whom assume roles within Harry's life that will help or hinder his journey but ultimately guide him through the special world until he returns with the 'Elixir'.

The Boy from Mercury complies to a large degree with Vogler's mythic structure. Although initially a 'reluctant hero' Harry embraces the challenge when he meets with his Mentors, Sean and Paul. He encounters the 'test, allies and enemies' in the form of Mucker Maguire and faces the 'Ordeal' with courage (and some help from his Mentors, Sean and Paul). He seizes the 'Sword', in this case experience and maturity, and heads for the 'Road Back' and 'Resurrection'. He advances from his childish belief that he was sent from planet Mercury but he holds on to one key prize (Elixir), his imagination. He is accompanied on his journey by many of the archetypes: the mentor; the threshold guardian (his dead father); heralds (his need to over-come grief) and the shapeshifter (Mucker Maguire).

Vogler further characterises the Hero's journey in twelve stages. Already mentioned is the Ordinary World, Call to Adventure and Return with the Elixir. Another key stage is what Vogler calls the Ordeal. Heroes must die so that they can be reborn, phoenix-like. According to Vogler, the dramatic movement that audiences enjoy more than any other is death and rebirth. In some way, in every story, heroes face death or something like it. These can take the form of a fear, the failure of a relationship or the 'death of an old personality'. Most of the time they survive this death and are literally or symbolically reborn: 'to reap the consequences of having cheated death' (Vogler,

1999). They pass the main test and fulfill the criteria of a hero. The ordeal is usually the central events of the story, otherwise called the crisis.²⁹ This point arises in *The Boy from Mercury* when Harry shoots Sean and runs away, thus facing a crisis that takes him out of his earlier preoccupations. The climax is when Harry and Mucker Maguire get involved in the school yard fight.

After the Ordeal, the hero 'has survived death, overcome his greatest fear, slain the dragon, or weathered the Crisis of the Heart, and now earns the Reward that he sought.' (Voytilla, 1999: 11). The hero must return with the reward but first overcome further obstacles. The final return (Thompson's climax) is accompanied by an Elixir, 'wisdom, experience, money, love, fame, or the thrill of a lifetime' (Ibid: 235). A good story leaves the hero with an Elixir that changes him, makes him more alive, more human and more whole. According to Vogler, this is what makes the hero's journey complete. In *The Boy from Mercury*, the Elixir is Harry's imagination but also appears in character form through Paul, Harry's brother who finally becomes his protector. In the absence of a father figure, Harry is alone. He has no guiding force or someone to look out for him. Uncle Tony attempts to assume this role but is clearly unsuitable from Harry's perspective. Paul becomes suitable only when he has proved himself. The last task of the film is for Paul to assume hero status in Sarah's eyes to make him a suitable protector for Harry.

[T]he key is that moviemaking can be considered the contemporary form of mythmaking, reflecting our response to ourselves and the mysteries and wonders of our existence....The Stages and Archetypes of the Hero's Journey provide a flexible, analytical tool to understand why *any* movie's story works or fails. But most important, the paradigm guides us to an understanding of why a story resonates on a universal level by answering our deepest mysteries (Voytilla, 1999: 1).

Having discussed *The Boy from Mercury* in structural terms³⁰ and revealed how various paradigms can be appropriated to reveal the universality of the story and the coherency of the story world created, it remains to discuss what deeper structural meaning is at work within the film. It will be necessary to look beyond the structural manuals to theory of art and emotion in order to get a glimpse of the symbolic world the writer creates.

EDUCATING THE EMOTIONS THROUGH STORYTELLING

It is movies that theorists are really interested in and not the apparatus of cinema. (Neill, 1996)

[I]t is a mistake to suppose that fictions, cinematic and other, create an illusion of reality. Fictions...appeal not to belief, but to the faculty of imagination. (Currie, 1995: 141)

According to Alex Neill³¹ the *value* of fiction lies largely in what it can contribute to the education of emotions and that 'empathetic responses have more than a marginal place in our affective engagement with fiction'. In *Poetica*, Aristotle argues that the pleasure we take in mimetic works is a pleasure that comes from learning. Our pleasure in Tragedy is derived from the arousal and subsequent catharsis of pity and fear, thus linking pleasure in Tragedy to learning and to emotional response (Neill, 1996: 179). It is an interesting take on cinema, therefore, to suggest that it can serve a function for humans in emotional learning. The analytical philosophy of art, therefore, is a useful starting point to tease out this idea, whose purpose is to explore the concepts that make creating and thinking about art possible. These concepts can include 'the very concept of art itself as well as the concepts of representation, expression, artistic form and aesthetics' (Carroll, 1999). Central to this theory is the exploration of aesthetics: aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties or qualities. The aesthetic theorist holds that the audience uses artworks to seek out aesthetic experiences and given that artists seek out audiences; they intend their artworks to be sources of aesthetic experience and to give aesthetic expression (Carroll, 1999).

What the national identity debate achieved was to reveal how cinema can give expression in aesthetic terms to issues of national consciousness (Gibbons, Hill & Rockett, 1987; McLoone, 2000) thus revealing the relationship between filmmaker and society.³² In a similar but different way, this thesis seeks to explore how film can give aesthetic expression to human experience and thus explain how the audience deals with aspects of the human experience in an emotional and cognitive way. The aesthetic experience can be content-oriented and/or affect-oriented, the former being the experience of the aesthetic properties of a work; the latter is concerned with 'attention and contemplation' (Carroll, 1999) of any object. The significance of this approach to art is that it allows for the piece of art to be the focus of attention, rather

than focusing on the piece of art in a wider context, a radical shift from post-structuralism to formalism. At the same time, it does not isolate the piece of art from wider human influence and involvement. Thus this section of the chapter will focus on key questions raised by Noel Carroll, Susan Feagin and Alex Neill in an exploration of the story in *The Boy from Mercury*. Neill notes that '[a]ncient questions as to how and why it is that we respond emotionally to characters and events which we know to be fictional, and whether it is rational to do so, have in recent years resurfaced and been at the heart of a debate as lively as any in contemporary aesthetics' (Neill, 1996: 175). It is the notion of fiction contributing to the education of the emotions that interests these theorists and will be central to this discussion.³³

For Neill, one of the key ways of achieving new emotional experience is through empathetic responses. He argues that in responding to others whose outlook and experience differs from our own, we may learn something new in emotional terms. One way of experiencing and achieving this new state is through works of fiction. For Susan Feagin, the way we experience empathetic responses is through the connection of two mental states by way of belief. Empathy is a cognitive state; it is essentially a matter of holding second order beliefs about one's beliefs (Neill, 1996: 182). However, this position is problematic when we consider that in some instances in fiction, a character may not hold the beliefs that prompt the audience to hold second order beliefs. In a useful way Neill distinguishes between empathy and sympathy, stating that 'with sympathetic response, in feeling *for* another, one's response need not reflect what the other is feeling...[whereas]...in responding empathetically to another I come to *share* his feelings, to feel with him...' (Neill, 1996: 175 original italics), in Feagin's words, through second order beliefs. Writing on philosophy and cognitive science Gregory Currie argues that it 'is when we are able, in imagination, to feel as the character feels that fictions of characters take hold of us'. The process of empathetic reenactment of the character's situation is what he calls secondary imaginings (Currie, 1995: 153).

Empathy therefore is a useful explanation for the emotional connection between character and spectator principally because as Noel Carroll states, 'the emotional state of the audience does not replicate the state of the characters' (Neill, 1996: 176), the audience does not experience the emotion but feels the effect of the emotional state. In

The Boy from Mercury, Harry clearly does not hold the beliefs that would correspond to the audience's second order beliefs, because he does not have the life-experience behind him to do so, whereas the audience can *share* Harry's feelings, a more involved state than simply feeling *for* Harry, thus suggesting merit in Plato's charge 'that poetry waters the passions, to the detriment of reason' (Neill, 1996: 178). The film explores key emotional states that children go through such as fear, guilt and abandonment but it is only in adulthood that these emotional states are understood as such through interpretation, understanding or normalisation. Feagin argues, therefore, that this is where imagination rather than belief would come into play, a position that Neill finds 'results in a distorted conception of empathy'. Feagin, however, analyses what it is 'to empathize with the emotions of a fictional character in terms of the variety of mental acts which constitute imagining having an emotion', such as imagining being afraid or remorseful (Feagin, 1988: 486-7). This she calls art emotions.

Having imaginal and emotional responses is part of appreciating an artwork, and an important part of what we appreciate about art in general is that it breaks us out of ordinary patterns of thoughts and feelings. Fiction trades on what we already know and how we can usually be expected to respond, but it shouldn't do only that. Art can expand experience by leading us to engage in imaginings whose overall patterns are identified after the fact, but not where beliefs and desires can be appealed to in order to explain why we engaged in the particular (set of) imaginings we did. (Feagin, 1988: 500).

Thus, Feagin's thesis argues that to appreciate fiction is partly to get value out of it and to get value out of it is to be affected or emotionally moved by it. While this is a very general position to take, and as Neill points out not all fiction is about reading with emotion, it is useful for an analysis of *The Boy from Mercury* as a first stage in the development of my thesis argument.

So what sort of imaginative activity is involved in empathy? Noel Carroll argues that imagination is about assimilating the characters' situation. This, he suggests, involves having a sense of the characters' internal understanding of the situation, understanding how the character sees their situation or having access to what makes the characters' 'assessment intelligible' (Neill, 1996: 185). For Carroll this is about having 'internal understanding', which for Neill requires imagining the world or the

situation that the character is in, from his or her point of view. The character becomes 'the "protagonist" of an imaginative project, a project in which I represent to myself her thoughts, beliefs, desires, feelings, and so on *as though they were my own.*' (Ibid, original italics).³⁴

Where Carroll, Feagin and Neill concur is by centering the imagination as playing a part in empathetic responses towards fiction, which allows for the audience to become involved in the emotional life of the character without having held the specific emotions themselves.³⁵ As Neill states, the less substantial the knowledge the audience holds about the character, the more difficult it will be to imagine things from his or her point of view, thus suggesting why the audience achieves greater emotional involvement with some films, and less with others. This could also suggest the varying degrees of skill and craft of the writer, whereby some writers achieve greater involvement in their film by an audience than others.³⁶ It also points to the different approaches to screenwriting: plot-driven narratives versus character-driven narratives and to the different types of characters that writers create; characters that 'say and do' versus those that 'see and hear' (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990), a theme which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

So in engaging with the characters of film fiction we are in a position much closer to the position we are in when we engage with actual persons than we are when we read about characters of literary fiction[...]And it is partly this[...]that gives film fiction its value: it gives us practice, so to speak, in a mode of engagement and response that is often crucial in our attempts to engage with and understand our fellow human beings. (Neill, 1996: 188-9).

This suggests the cultural importance and universal sense of cinema, not just in the way it can contribute to the national identity debate, but rather by allowing us to 'see *our* world and *our* possibilities anew' (Neill, 1996: 192). Part of the value of fiction, therefore, is the broadening of our perspectives through empathy and imagining. It is at this level that the narrative in Martin Duffy's *The Boy from Mercury* resonates and where many Irish films do not.³⁷

How *The Boy from Mercury* works on this level is by exploring key childhood emotions and feelings in a way that the audience identifies with. It does so by directing the audience to use their imaginations in exploring these basic yet

fundamental emotions. This is called, to borrow Robert McKee's term, 'aesthetic emotion'. It can be argued that whereas life separates meaning from emotion, art unites them. Such expressions through story are, therefore, instruments whereby this unity takes place. Story is the experience of aesthetic emotion, the simultaneous encounter of thought and feeling.

In short, a story well told gives you the very thing you cannot get from life: meaningful emotional experience. In life, experiences become meaningful with *reflection in time*. In art they are meaningful *now, at the instant they happen*. (McKee, 1999: 111, original italics).

In this sense, story is non-intellectual. The idea is expressed directly from artist to audience through the senses, perception, intuition and emotion (McKee, 1999). It requires no interpretation or explanation. To achieve this is the mark of a great storyteller; the development and evolution of this in recent Irish cinema can be traced as the decade between 1993 and 2003 advances. As Walter Benjamin (1968) asserts a story ought to function only within the dynamics of the events it portrays through its narrative structure and not through interpretation by a mediator, and in this way it is different to information or a report. To achieve this is to reach a wide audience because what is at stake is not knowledge but human feeling and response.

UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE IN A LOCAL SETTING

[There is just] Elliott (Henry Thomas), his big brother and his spunky little sister (Drew Barrymore) in this narrative. Their single-mother features but Dad is absent and movingly recollected by the smell of Old Spice on an old shirt of his the children find in the garage. In other words, the men have gone – replaced by a finer spirit in Elliott and the little alien. In fact, the “hero” of this narrative is the Other, and now there are two Others: E.T. and Elliott himself, both “aliens” marginalized at the edge of the larger suburban and “troublesome adult world” (Hauke, 2001: 165).

According to Jung complex emotional reactions form the basis of our identity with ourselves, the unconscious acts as an author 'or at least a very compelling muse' (Hollwitz in Hauke & Alister, 2001: 83-84) and psychological development takes place from the combined forces of creativity and a moderating, rational, conscious influence. Thus, film (which combines the rational with the creative) lends itself effortlessly to the exploration of emotional states. *The Boy from Mercury* tells the story about a young boy, Harry, who experiences the loss of a parent at a young age.

The film explores what is specific to this particular situation – abandonment, absence of a protector, and what is general to the experiences of childhood, fear and guilt. It is a personal story, a memoir of the writer-director, Martin Duffy. The film calls on the audience to combine their imagination and experience to empathise with the main character, as some of the emotions explored are of a universal nature and some are specific to individual experience. According to Frank Daniel's definition of story, 'stories are vehicles. [Screenwriters] don't tell stories to tell stories. They tell stories to create emotions, and in our medium there is no other way to communicate emotionally except by evoking it, i.e. by using story material, human conflicts and human relationships, and situations that create sympathy, empathy, hope and fear. If you start dealing just with story, you are only doing half the job' (Daniel, 1989). Appropriating this explanation of story for analytical purposes suggests that the approach to narrative ought to be two-pronged – incorporating structural analysis and symbolic exploration. The structural examination facilitates reading the text along accepted norms, similarities and trends whereas the symbolic reading reveals uniqueness and difference, thus tapping into Phil Parker's 'Creative Matrix' of 'familiar' story and theme and 'unique' engagement, act structure and active questions (Parker, 2000: 72).

A consistent motif running throughout *The Boy from Mercury* is the pressure brought to bear on children by the adult world. According to a Jungian interpretation, the audience is invited to identify 'not with the heroism of a conscious struggle against the Other, but with the Other itself' (Hauke, 2001: 165). As in *E.T.* suburbia and rational science are signs of the dominant consciousness, in *The Boy from Mercury* it is the journey of the unconscious, the hidden and repressed that Duffy seeks to validate. For many children in particular³⁸, the only space for retreat from this pressure is their imagination. Harry is brought to his father's grave on a regular basis, dressed formally in a suit with his hair greased over to the side, and must confess to his father whether he has been a good boy. The first visit to the grave-yard is followed by a scene in the Christian Brothers' school, which is clearly, through its visual depiction, not a child-friendly place. The only escape or place of retreat for Harry is his imagination and the cinema (two areas already established as inextricably linked) where he can be a child without the pressures of the adult world being brought to bear. However, his imagination is not always a place of refuge and in many instances it

brings further pressure on him. In the scene where he thinks he has injured his new friend Sean by shooting him with his toy gun, he returns home to gather his belongings and runs away. His brother Paul retrieves him from his hide-out and drags him home. As he enters what ought to be his sanctuary - his home, instead of feeling secure he imagines two Gardaí peering out from his sitting-room window. He sticks his hands in the air and walks into his house only to find that there are no Gardaí in his front room.

Harry's visits to his father's grave become an increasing source of anxiety for him. On his second visit, he witnesses a claw emerging from a part-opened grave. Refusing to tell his father that he has been a good boy (because he believes he hasn't), the grave explodes open compelling Harry to blurt out that he has been a good boy, out of a sense of guilt and shame. His anxiety continues when he is tucked up in bed: rather than feeling safe and secure he sees a hand at the window and shadows across the room. What these sequences achieve in the film is the exploration of the gulf of understanding between the adult and child world and the private anxiety that many children experience, a common theme explored in a unique way, in Irish film.

The gulf that exists between the worlds of adults and children is explored as a subplot throughout the narrative thread, particularly through the comic character of Uncle Tony. Harry's mother drafts him in to talk to Harry in the absence of any other suitable male role model, 'man to man'. However Uncle Tony fails miserably, instead communicates in stock phrases that he has perfected over time, 'God bless all beer', 'the job is oxo', 'O-D-Kay'. While his function in the script is comic relief, it also relates the gulf that exists between Harry and the rest of his family and the absence of anyone who empathises with him.³⁹

The key theme of *The Boy from Mercury* is the coming to terms with grief on the death of a parent, against the backdrop of a misunderstanding adult world. Harry's coming to terms with death starts when he meets his friend Sean. Where Uncle Tony fails, Sean succeeds, not in an active way, but rather by simply being part of the same world that Harry occupies. Harry confesses his guilt to Sean in a way that he couldn't to an adult. 'I shot you!' he tells Sean, thus putting words on his emotional state. This is the start of his journey to recovery and return to the 'Ordinary World'. As

mentioned earlier Uncle Tony issues the 'Call to Adventure' but Harry refuses it. It is only when he meets the Mentor (Sean) that he 'Crosses the Threshold' (Vogler, 1999) and then begins to face his challenge. He gives his laser gun to Sean, symbolising a moving away from his escape or fantasy world to face the challenge head on.

Another key emotion explored in this film is fear experienced in childhood, an emotional state which can be read as universal and/or cultural. Childhood fear and guilt are prevalent throughout human nature. What child hasn't felt guilty for something they have not done and harbored this guilt privately and separately to the adult world? Different cultures allow this guilt manifest itself in different ways. In Irish society of the 1960s the Catholic Church still held enormous influence and people's lives were very much governed by the doctrine of Catholicism, much of which is based on fear. In a childish irrational yet very real way, Harry believes he will die at the hands of the bully Mucker Maguire if he goes to school. In the teaching and guiding of how to live one's life, Catholic instruction links fear and guilt suggesting that they eventually manifest in death, particularly in instances of sexual morality. This phenomenon of Catholicism was closely entwined with, if not fundamental to, Irish identity in the 1960s and thus exerted significant influence over the thought processes and emotions of those who fell captive to it. What *The Boy from Mercury* achieves, through combining similarities and uniqueness is the exploration of the universal emotions of fear and guilt in a local setting, by drawing on the audience's imagination.

As many writers on story argue (McKee; Thompson; Vogler; Voytilla) the structure of narrative is based on a journey whereby the main character goes through change as they advance along their destined path. The *Boy from Mercury* skillfully achieves this by exploring Harry's personal journey along the lines of him overcoming his fear and guilt as he deals with grief and loss. It is only when he meets Sean that this change can come about, because of the gulf between the adult and child's world. But Sean acts as the bridge between the adult and child's world, albeit from a child's perspective. These two worlds meet when Harry finally trusts adults to help, by Sean telling Paul about Mucker Maguire. 'You stuck up for me', says Harry, 'Of course I did. You're a Cronin aren't ya. Your're me little brother'. Harry looks up at him with great admiration. Paul bends down to him and rests an arm around his neck. 'I'd

always stick up for ya. Right. Always. That's what Cronins do. Now. Are ya finished with this dying malarkey?" Harry nods yes, Paul rubs the back of his neck thus assuming the role of 'Protector', the gap in Harry's life since the death of his father.⁴⁰ By filling this gap he overcomes his grief and loss and has someone from the adult world to look up to. One task remains for Harry, to make Paul a hero in Sarah's eyes. As he says in voice-over,

The Mercurians had it all planned. They knew what was going to happen, and I just had to wait to find out what it was....You see they wanted Paul to be the hero so that Sarah would fall in love with him and make him not go to England like me other brothers. (*The Boy from Mercury*, unpublished script, 1996).

This completes Harry's journey. He overcomes his grief and loss; he confronts his fear and guilt and he moves a little step forward in the direction of maturity.

You see, the Mercurians want me to grow up on this planet, so they can't just keep coming down anytime something goes wrong. So now they know Paul will come to the rescue and now I can stay here and make friends, and learn loads of things about earthlings, and when the Mercurians land, I'll be able to tell them everything. (Ibid.)

He returns to the 'Ordinary World' where he can still enjoy living in his imagination without the burden of the now resolved emotional state.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

Storytelling is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story's events structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea...without explanation. (McKee, 1999: 113).

The Boy from Mercury captures what McKee calls aesthetic emotion and what Neill, Feagin and Carroll argue is the function of fiction, to educate the emotions, through empathy and imagination. This film expresses its idea and explores its emotional aesthetic through its characters and actions. It 'authenticates its ideas solely within the dynamics of its events' (McKee, 1999: 114). It doesn't require 'clever language' or intellectual explanation to carry its meaning. Its 'controlling idea' is clear and consistent throughout the story. As a story, *The Boy from Mercury* clearly obeys its

own internal laws of probability and creates internal coherence. What Martin Duffy successfully does is create a 'small, knowable world'.⁴²

According to Feagin, 'the capacity of a work of fictional literature to elicit (some) emotional responses is part of what is valuable about it, and having (relevant) emotional responses is part of appreciating it' (Feagin, 1988: 485). However, this is no guarantee for the success or otherwise, in critical or commercial terms, of a film or story. As a tool of analysis, the work of Feagin, Carroll and Neill is useful in presenting a measuring device for film that can leave a more tangible impact and contribute to a debate that gets to the heart of what is cinema, the art of storytelling.

Benjamin pointed out that 'each sphere of life has produced its own tribe of storytellers' (Benjamin, 1968). The nature of every real story is to contain, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may be a moral, a maxim or some practical advice. It is up to the audience to decide what this will be. It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation.

The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Ibid)

It can be said that *The Boy from Mercury* achieves this amplitude, at a universal and local level, through accomplished craft in the form of screen storytelling, an accomplishment it could be argued few Irish films achieved in the early part of the decade under scrutiny. *The Boy from Mercury* can act as an 'educator of the emotions'; it can give an insight to adults of a child's world; it can enlighten the unconscious. As Frank Daniel says on the art of scriptwriting when he is talking to students

once in a while I'll see a movie and I'll like it very much in the beginning and even in the middle, and then when it gets to the end I sort of feel let down... Sometimes it is a problem with the final effect of the story itself. The reason why the story has been told is not clear: every writer is obliged to ask himself what will the audience leave the movie theatre with? They'll think what they want, but feeling is something that's in your hands. (Daniel, 1989)

The Boy from Mercury is a significant Irish film in that it refuses to ask the audience to *think* about some aspect of Irish identity or culture,⁴³ but rather it sends the audience on an emotional journey, which the 'new structuralists' suggest is the purpose of film and this thesis takes as its premise. Consequently the narrative of *The Boy from Mercury* fulfills Daniel's criteria as illustrated above: this interpretation suggests that the audience is sent from the auditorium *feeling* rather than *thinking*. Continuing this approach to film analysis and developing the central thesis further, the next chapter explores how the structure created by the writer and director in creating characters and plots, key aspects of narrative, can determine the emotional depths to which the spectators are plunged.

¹ Quote from *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin – Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, New York, 1968.

² Duffy has also made *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* (2000) and *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (1999).

³ Although more recently, approaches that seek to distance and fragment the relationship between subject and object appear to be emerging in the fore. These approaches will be explored more closely in Chapter 4.

⁴ The ‘storyteller’ being a ‘director for hire’ of a multi-national conglomerate that produces films alongside other goods.

⁵ In recent times, the death of storytelling has been heralded, particularly in post-modern discourse. However, in even more recent times, writers and critics, in Ireland and elsewhere, appear to be championing the story (Foster, 2001), (Kearney, 2002). Richard Kearney states in *On Stories* that he wishes to retrieve and rethink ‘those enduring functions of storytelling in the light of contemporary hermeneutic readings. So doing, I shall endeavor to bring the most ancient theories into critical dialogue with their most cutting-edge counterparts today’ (Kearney, 2002:128). This thesis is arguing for the story, re-examining Irish cinema from the perspective of story, to look at Irish cinema in a new light and replace it in the universal domain of storytelling.

⁶ In his personal diary of the making of *The Boy from Mercury*, Martin Duffy describes the experience of viewing the film to cast and crew that, naturally, gave it a resounding thumbs up. However, after the film, Brendan McCaul of Buena Vista said that while on the whole the film was a credit to Martin Duffy (writer and director), it was unmarketable because it wasn’t aimed at a young or old audience. At the Berlin Film Festival he was told repeatedly by distributors that ‘it was a lovely film but it wasn’t big enough to market.’

⁷ What is interesting about *The Last of the High Kings* is that while the film critics in the national press received it ‘luke-warmly’, the audience figures suggest that it was one of the more popular films at the time. This highlights two important points of 2nd wave films. Firstly, many of the Irish films supported by An Bord Scannán na hÉireann between 1993 and 2003 were successful at a domestic level, either theatrically or on television, yet very few made an impact internationally. *Intermission* (2003, John Crowley) was the first film of this period called 2nd wave to make an impact internationally. Secondly, the critics and the audience often do not concur on the definition of a ‘successful’ film. Many films that receive a good reception at the box office are often not favourably reviewed in the press, for example *Last of the High Kings*. As Ruth Barton states, ‘[n]one of the small films made in Ireland during the 1990s broke into the mainstream...By and large their core audience has been Irish, with few of the productions achieving notable success in overseas markets’ (Barton, 2004: 179).

⁸ There is a view held in the industry circuit of Irish film that Irish society cannot sustain a ‘film industry’ as such and that these films should be produced on small to medium budgets with a ‘direct to TV’ distribution. Such figures quoted would appear to support this view.

⁹ An abridged version of this chapter appears in *Keeping it Real: Irish Film and Television*, ed. Ruth Barton & Harvey O’Brien (2004: 121-133), following a paper delivered at the ‘Keeping it Real’ conference at UCD, April 2002.

¹⁰ In a lecture entitled ‘Narrative and *The Butcher Boy*’ delivered at the Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dún Laoghaire April 2001 (unpublished).

¹¹ See *The Cinema Book* by Pam Cook (BFI, 1990) for further discussion on Hollywood genre.

¹² Similar criticism dominates the reception of Oliver Stone’s films on Vietnam (*Platoon* 1986; *Born on the Fourth of July* 1989) when it is argued that he negates the historical context in favour of a character study. See “Historical Memory, Film and the Vietnam Era” by Michael Kellin in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (Rutgers University Press: 1991) & *The Cinema of Oliver Stone* by Norman Kiagan (Continuum International Publishing Group: 2000).

¹³ More than eighty feature films were produced with the support of Bord Scannán na hÉireann in Ireland between 1993 and 2003, the majority of which have drawn little commentary from academics in the field.

¹⁴ This position dominates *Screen* studies since the 1970s, the influential film journal that initiated and established many of the debates within the discourse.

¹⁵ The first wave refers to the work of directors such as Pat Murphy, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black and Thaddeus O’Sullivan and spans the period 1981 – 1987. The works produced under this wave are

generally described as politically experimental at the level of form and content. The second wave (since 1993) is regarded as conservative in comparison to its predecessor (Linehan, 1999; McLoone, 2000)

¹⁶ Italian Neo-realism and French New Wave are good examples in support of this. Both were movements that reacted to their local environment and responded to the dominance of Hollywood cinema. Both were relatively short-lived yet left significant impact on their own national cinemas, European cinemas and world cinemas. Both also influenced the way Hollywood films were made, notably at the level of style

¹⁷ Recent technological changes such as digital media have changed the narrative style but not the overarching narrative framework. While there are always shifts in focus as the art form is organic and responsive, recent films that employ the new technology, although deviating at the level of style, still echo key aspects of narrative structure (*Dead Bodies*, Robert Quinn 2003; *Adam & Paul*, Leni Abrahamson 2004; *Goldfish Memory*, Liz Gill 2003).

¹⁸ Much academic discourse fails to lay down strict criteria for analysis (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). Just like the artist is trained in his or her craft using rules and methods, presenting an analysis requires tools of structure. This thesis will appropriate the tools of writing as set down by Vogler, McKee, Thompson et al., and as presented in Chapter 2 *Theorising the Story world*, to form the basis of analysis. TS Eliot concurs that to work within a structure is to achieve the 'richest ideas', without structure, work sprawls.

¹⁹ A notable difference between 1st and 2nd wave directors is their approach to the audience. While Cathal Black talks primarily about the creative process in a public interview following a screening of his film *Love and Rage*, Pat Murphy, in an interview with Gerardine Meaney about her film *Nora* states that the filmmaker is always thinking about the audience and is making the film for the audience, the audience is the filmmakers' primary concern (Meaney, 2004). 2nd wave directors mention the audience to a greater degree (in published interviews) than their 1st wave counterparts. In Chapter 6 it will be argued that Pat Murphy is particularly important as a director than spans the two waves, she reflects the ideas expressed within the context of her work, whether it is 1st wave or 2nd wave. Her work has evolved and changed as the context changed.

²⁰ While it could be argued that these are not the types of films that Irish writers and directors are attempting to produce (in some cases aiming at a smaller scale narrative), it is safe to assume that they form the repertoire of influence that Irish filmmakers draw on.

²¹ One of the key problems with *I Went Down*, revealed through character analysis, is the absence of a 'controlling idea' (McKee, 2000). The 'controlling idea' is the story's ultimate meaning expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax. The aesthetic emotion is the unity of meaning and emotion. A 'controlling idea' may be expressed, according to McKee, in a single sentence describing how and why life undergoes change from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end. In *I Went Down*, neither the character of Git nor Bunny moved, changed, reversed or discovered within the story-world. They end as they began. There is no sense of character progression, no sense of something lost or won. This is a fundamental flaw in the script. If the function of structure is to 'provide progressively building pressures that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must make more and more difficult risk-taking choices and actions gradually revealing their true natures' (McKee, 1999), *I Went Down* fails at the level of structure. The strength of *I Went Down* as a screen story is in the dialogue. Conor McPherson, the writer, is a contemporary Irish play-write (*The Good Thief*, 1994). The dialogue in *I Went Down* works on a number of levels. The episodic nature of the script allows for the skill of the writer to be exercised through exchanges between characters. At the same time, the skill in dialogue hinders the script in advancing the story using other dramatic devices. In many scenes dialogue is used to explain events. Git asks Frank what he was doing in Cork. Frank explains, 'My family's from Cork. I got a lot of connections with the place. I was meeting French's missus down there....' and so it goes on. Many of the scenes are reliant on dialogue, in a way more common to theatre than film. While the dialogue presents the audience with many memorable and comic lines, it dominates other aspects of advancing the plot, revealing an inherent weakness in the script. The dialogue-laden aspect of many of the scenes, particularly in what can loosely be called the second act, is clearly at the expense of dramatic impact. The scene where Frank changes from his pajamas into some clothes Bunny gives him is also reminiscent of the theatre. 'He emerges, holding his pajamas in a ball. He is wearing a pair of brown pants easily too small for him, a blue/green Hawaiian shirt, and a cheap raincoat'. Bunny takes out a pair of boots but instead of giving these to Frank he gives him the white shoes that Bunny has been wearing. The purpose of the scene is simply to provide humour, and this it does, but again at the expense of creating and refining a *hermetically sealed* story-world that is the task of the screenwriter. Many scripts fail, according to Frank Daniel, by finding themselves in a situation where they must take a moment to explain the plot to

the audience (a device acceptable in theatre but not in film). Theatre, bound by the Proscenium Arch, is constrained in a way that film isn't. Spatial – temporal relations as achieved through continuity editing allow for film to go places that theatre can't. For these reasons, there should be no need to use dialogue as a means of explanation in film. To explain also defies the maxim all scriptwriters aim to honour, 'Show, Don't Tell'. When a scriptwriter finds that he has to use dialogue to explain, it can usually be put down to a flawed structure. It often reveals a failure to create a story-world within the bounds of the medium. In *I Went Down*, towards the end of the film, Frank explains the forgery link, which much of the crime in the film is hinging on, at last the pieces fall into place. But in weaving a story from the components of character and plot, there should be no need for such explanations. Likewise with flashback. A device commonly used in Film Noir when the opening is simultaneously the ending, this device is taken out as a matter of convenience to wrap up key plot details in *I Went Down*. In order to explain the roles played by Sonny, Frank and Tom before the film ends, a flash-back is used, and therefore ties up the loose ends before the film enters the penultimate scene, illustrating further a flaw in the script. This critique represents a sample of the methodological approach adopted here and informing the pedagogy of scriptwriting being developed by Kalos k'Agathos. This film is further relevant when the tensions between domestic success and international failure is considered as a characteristic of 2nd wave films, this is a film that succeeds with the local audience (evidenced through box office receipts and film reviews) because of its idiosyncratic 'local' humour, identifiable local actors and recognisable locations, features that work locally but fail to travel.

²² Like many Irish films of this time, *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars* is beautifully shot making the most of its locations in aesthetic terms. However, the film is ideologically – laden and didactic and consequently prevents emotional identification with the audience either through empathy or sympathy. Furthermore, it is unclear where the audience identification should take place, either with the mother-figure or the daughter-figure. The confusion results in no connection between subject and object.

²³ *Gold in the Streets* is an interesting film as it anticipates a common structural development that becomes dominant later in the decade – that is the multi-character narrative. This approach to film will be explored in more detail in the next chapter when comparisons are drawn with 1990s American 'smart film'. However, *Gold in the Streets* is hindered by the multi-character plot that lacks sufficient action to drive it. Again this points to an evolutionary and developmental detail of this decade. It could be argued that this film is an early version of the structure appropriated more successfully in *Intermission*. *Snakes and Ladders* is a film that reveals the absence of clear script development in the production process. As will be revealed later, script development did not form a significant part of Bord Scannán na hÉireann's operation pre-1997. The convoluted plot structure of *Snakes and Ladders*, which hinders a film full of potential, suggests that script development is a fundamental part of the screen process.

²⁴ A case could be made that this approach simply illustrates that many Irish films are simply negating the dominant narrative styles. Whether this is by accident or design is something this thesis seeks to explore.

²⁵ A universal theme that has remained appealing across the ages.

²⁶ This story device is used uniquely in *Disco Pigs* (2001) by turning it on its head to effect. The 'ordinary world' of Pig and Runt is an extraordinary world to everyone else which is the cause of narrative strength or dynamic in this film. While in many Irish films the absence of the 'ordinary world' is a flaw, in *Disco Pigs*, it is part of the story design that is used to its strength. This point will be teased out in a later chapter

²⁷ She sees the spectrum of myth-criticism ranging from 'myth as ideological/false consciousness and myth as liberating/enlightened consciousness' (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 3) and locates her analysis somewhere in the middle.

²⁸ Ties in with Propp's thesis, see *Morphology of the Folktale*.

²⁹ Not to be confused with the climax, which happens towards the end of the story.

³⁰ In many respects this film conforms to the paradigms outlined by the 'new structuralists' which begs the question why was the film not more commercially successful? As mentioned above, the film met with a variety of success (on TV) and failure (at the box office). From an industrial perspective its greatest hindrance was its 'marketability'. While there is not the scope in this thesis to explore the post-production side of the process that involves distribution and exhibition, suffice to say that the industrial expectations can be limiting in offering the audience a chance to make up their own minds.

³¹ Alex Neill, (formerly of St. Andrew's University, Scotland), lectures at the University of Surrey mainly in aesthetics and philosophy of the mind.

³² Luke Gibbons' writings are particularly interesting when he explores the work of directors like Margo Harkin and Pat Murphy in the 1980s and how their films gave aesthetic expression to the national feelings and moral turmoil of 1980s Ireland, for example (McLoone, 2000: 177).

³³ Central to much academic discourse on representational art is the notion of truth. In recent times the discourse around Testimony has called on the notion of truth to be revisited. What this study seeks to explore in relation to notions of truth and storytelling is the notion of 'emotional truth'. While a text may not be factually true in all its representations due to the nature of the medium, one area that it can achieve a level of truth is 'emotional truth', which is central to the work of Alex Neill (2002) and Richard Kearney (2002). See also 'Trauma and Screen Studies: opening the debate' by Susannah Radstone in *Screen* 42:2 Summer 2001.

³⁴ Here he draws on Richard Wollheim's discussion on empathy in *On Art and the Mind*, Chapter 3.

³⁵ For further discussion on this theme as it applies to horror film see "On a Paradox of the Heart" by Alex Neill in *Philosophical Studies*, 1992.

³⁶ From 1993 to 1997, many of the films supported by Bord Scannán na hÉireann failed to receive critical acclaim. Hugh Linehan half way through the ten year period is quite scathing of the films produced arguing that none of them 'has stirred up much controversy...the films themselves have a certain blandness about them' (Linehan, 1999: 48). Unlike most commentators on Irish film in recent times (Linehan, Ging, McLoone) who maintain the weakness at this time in Irish film was due to a lack of ideological drive similar to 1st wave films, this thesis argues that many films lacked impact due to narrative flaws which resulted in an absence of the script development process as central to the Bord's activities. When Script Development became better funded, better resourced in the post-1997 period, there is a notable development in narrative style, accounting arguably for more favourable audience reception. This point will be returned to later in the thesis.

³⁷ Some of the films of the early part of the decade that failed to impact narratively include *Snakes & Ladders*, Trish MacAdam 1995; *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*, Geraldine Creed 1996; *This is the Sea*, Mary McGuckian 1996; *Gold in the Streets*, Liz Gill 1996. All of these films showed potential in embracing a classical narrative and telling a contemporary story that was promising in its attempt to express a local story that had universal resonance. It could be said, however, that the scripts were not sufficiently developed by the time of going into production and consequently what emerged in the final screen version was either a lack of clear character motivation (*Gold in the Streets*, *Snakes & Ladders*) or a confused plot (*The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*). This appraisal would be borne out by the reception of the films. Frank Daniel's measuring devices can be applied to these films to reveal structural flaws. *Gold in the Street* is afflicted by monotony, the 'forbidden pattern: and then, and then and then'. According to Daniel the pattern for connecting scenes should incorporate 'and then, but, therefore, but', a pattern missing in these films.

³⁸ And in many instances, also for adults.

³⁹ This gulf between the adult and child world is also explored in *The Butcher Boy* and *Disco Pigs*. See later for discussion.

⁴⁰ Source for these quotes is the shooting script of *The Boy from Mercury* (Unpublished, 1996).

⁴¹ Critics of the rites of passage narratives suggest that there is a preoccupation with sentimentality in these types of films and indeed, this accusation could be waged against *The Boy from Mercury*. The visual style of the film that portrays the new, urban working class estates of Dublin in an unproblematic and sometimes romantic way could be problematic to some readings particularly those rooted in political ideology. However, this chapter has sought to shift the discussion beyond these preoccupations by examining the functioning of the film at another level.

⁴² *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan 1997) is another Irish film that concerns the emotional state of a child but as it was not supported by Bord Scannán na hÉireann it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, its importance within the canon of Irish film warrants a note on it. Martin McLoone's reading of the film is probably the most interesting analysis. McLoone chooses to read the film in a political way while acknowledging that the film works as an exploration of humanist themes about 'childhood neglect leading to psychosis' rather than as a 'state of the nation' piece on contemporary Ireland (McLoone, 2000: 216). Through this approach McLoone suggests that 'Francie Brady is the epitome of the abused child of Irish history, suffering through no fault of his own the degradations and neglect, abuse and exploitation that are the result of processes over which he has no control' (Ibid: 220). With such a statement he introduces the key tension within Irish cinema discourse, the absence of any discussion about the merits of storytelling technique in contemporary Irish film. If the character has no control over his own actions, what is the function of the inner voice as executed through voice-over, which McLoone suggests 'privileges the individual psychology of the disturbed mind above the socio-cultural context that produces it' (Ibid: 216)? It is at this point that the importance of storytelling

analysis comes into relief. Without it, the discussion falters and stops. McLoone's explanation is to argue that Francie is a thoroughly Irish creation, 'born of a cultural imagining that suppressed human warmth and blighted youthful optimism with the dead hand of Catholic conformity' (Ibid: 222). Indeed *The Butcher Boy* lends itself to a cultural analysis but also resonates at a universal level.

⁴³ Although this can be a by-product of the film whereby the discourse can ponder aspects of Irish history, identity and family values.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERS THAT “SAY” AND “DO” VERSUS CHARACTERS THAT “SEE” AND “HEAR” – *ACCELERATOR* AND *DISCO PIGS*

INTRODUCTION

Engagement is achieved differently in different genre, but is determined by the use of a number of plot devices. These include, the development of thematic concerns, framing devices (e.g. a character's story or a musical score), point-of-view, dramatic conflict, curiosity, and raw emotion (e.g. surprise, suspense or shock) (Parker, 2000: 71).

Further developing the approach introduced in Chapter 3, this section seeks to explore the narratological style adopted in two Irish films of the 2nd wave that concern themselves with representations of some aspect of youth culture, *Accelerator* (Vinny Murphy, 1999) and *Disco Pigs* (Kirsten Sheridan, 2001), and is an exercise in formal analysis in an attempt to reveal how characters in films function at different levels. When compared with two later films, *Intermission* (John Crowley, 2003) and *Adam & Paul* (Lenny Abrahamson, 2004), the evolutionary and developmental nature of recent Irish film is revealed. By closely examining, at the level of structure, what is at work within these narratives, further light can be shed on other aspects of the story, notably the points of address and how this is executed through story and plot. Formal analysis displays the potential to uncover aspects of style and craft that indicate the type of story-world created but has been an area of neglect within the field of Film Studies. By attempting such “structural” analysis, a term that can be reinvented for a ‘new wave’, I propose to appropriate a methodological device from the field of film narratology, and the writings of David Bordwell (1990) and Edward Branigan (1998) in particular. Cognisant of the well documented shortcomings of the formalist approach¹, this method still has the potential to offer a starting point for the re-

analysis, in filmic terms, of story and in turn reveal what is achieved by telling stories in particular ways.

The films under scrutiny in this chapter, *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs*, represent a trend within recent Irish film to concentrate on the experience of the disaffected, urban male youth figure. Before investigating the composition of *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs*, it is a useful contextualising exercise to look at the first stage of Bordwell's *Historical Poetics*, namely pre-compositional factors. In Bordwell's words these factors embody 'prior knowledge and experience': that is when watching a representational film (as opposed to information or reportage) the audience draws on experiences derived from their everyday world, with other artworks and with other films. This constructivist account views film as a dynamic psychological process which entails manipulating a number of factors, not just the presentation on the screen before the audience. Pre-compositional factors therefore include 'sources, influences and received forms' (Buckland, 1998: 167) that guide and influence the viewing experience of the audience.² Examining pre-compositional factors activated by *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* involves two stages. Firstly, it is important to assess what type of films, in terms of narrative structure and visual style the audience has been exposed to in general – whether mainstream or art-house for example. Secondly, it is useful to establish what types of Irish films, in terms of theme and style, the audience may be familiar with. Appropriating Buckland's simple distinction between what he calls New Hollywood and Old Hollywood as one of spectacle versus narrative complexity (Buckland, 1998: 167) (contrasting with Thompson's new "classicism"), it could be argued that it is style (spectacle) that dominates and is therefore what cinema-goers across the multiplexes of Europe and America are primarily exposed to, particularly in recent years.³ The cinematic fare available to Irish audiences is no different⁴ and may account, in some way, for the different receptions *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* received.⁵

In exploring what Irish films were emerging at the time of *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs*, it is interesting to note that *Accelerator* is surrounded by a series of Irish films with similar reference points: youth oriented subject-matter (*How to Cheat in the Leaving Cert*, Graham Jones 1997); road movie genre (*I Went Down*, Paddy Breathnach 1996; *Drinking Crude*, Owen McPolin 1997); thematic exploration of

social issues (*Flick*, Fintan Connolly 2000) and set in a specific urban milieu (*Crushproof*, Paul Tickell 1997; *The Last Bus Home*, Johnny Gogan 1997). Furthermore, *Accelerator* displays narrative links to many 'New Lad' films emerging in Britain and America in recent times (Ging, 2004: 122-123) which must account in some way for the production setting of the film. On the other hand, *Disco Pigs*' reference points, it could be suggested, are more universal in cinematic and literary terms,⁶ making this film stand out as quite distinctive in terms of 2nd wave film.⁷ In an Irish context *Disco Pigs* clearly has its roots in Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997), a film that impacted on the international stage, to both critical and commercial acclaim. While not a love story, *The Butcher Boy* - like *Disco Pigs* - explores the dysfunctionality of family life and the effects on the childhood experience of its central character.⁸

Debbie Ging in her study of masculinities in recent Irish film, while noting that an 'astounding number of youth-oriented features made in the past five years are variants of the gangster/thriller/crime genre, all action-driven narratives in which the protagonists are male and the women play peripheral roles' (Ging, 2004: 124), states that it is difficult to see whether these films are a critique of current masculine identities or a celebration of New Laddism.⁹ While this is not necessarily a concern of this thesis, it is salient to note that many new Irish films are constructed in a *referential* and sometimes *reverential* way towards recent trends in Britain and America and that they target a particular sector of the cinema-going population as a consequence. Thus what pre-compositional factors point to is a production and reception setting that was welcoming of a film like *Accelerator*¹⁰ which could almost pre-empt a particular audience-response regardless of style and structure, whereas *Disco Pigs* was emerging from a less specific yet more universal production setting that requires more 'processing time' and hence, it is argued here, presents a more challenging text.

RE-APPROPRIATING FORMALISM

Although Irish film has rarely been examined in a formalist way, I argue that it is timely to revisit and appropriate this approach, *re-advanced* by Bordwell et al in 1985. Far from being an outdated approach to the study of film, the focus on story which

was explored in some detail in the last chapter appears to be re-emerging since the dawn of the new millennium, in the field of Film Studies (Buckland, 2000; Thompson, 1999) and in Irish Studies (Foster, 2001; Kearney, 2002). Given that the debate around national identity is contributing less to an understanding of contemporary Irish cinema than it did to its predecessor the 1st wave, the discourse of narratology offers the potential for new insights. The 1st wave has been documented and categorised as experimental at the level of form and content and investigative and interrogative at the level of the cultural, social and political and has provided ample material for discourse within the field of Irish cinema (Gibbons, Hill & Rockett 1987; McLoone 2000; Pettitt 2000; Barton 2004; O'Brien 2004). These readings and analyses have presented stimulating and pertinent accounts of film, the medium and how it relates to culture and society, historically and contemporaneously. However, the converse of the stylistic and thematic approach which interrogates aspects of the national psyche within the narrative is often to ignore the 'universal' in storytelling, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Although not a popular disposition since the emergence of post-structuralism, the notion that stories can cross borders and speak to the 'human condition' is what contributed to the dominance of Hollywood in Europe and America since the development of the Studio System. While the concept of cultural imperialism as a negative offshoot of this phenomenon is not to be ignored, the positive impact of Hollywood on world cinema has largely been neglected as an area of enquiry. The potential, therefore, for theoretical analysis of the 2nd wave lies not within the national identity debate alone, as stated earlier, but in a discourse that embraces the global aspect within the concept of national cinemas.¹¹

Bordwell's controversial assertion that a film does not position anyone but rather cues the spectator to execute a definable variety of positions (Bordwell, 1985: 30) is more befitting of a post-national world.¹² In supporting this claim, he describes normalized principles of composition, which can be listed as stages of plot development that progress from introducing the setting and characters to exploring and resolving the conflict. Compositional factors therefore refer to normalised principles of composition. In comprehending a film, one schema in particular guides our hypothesis, the one that represents the canonical story format. In Bordwell's assertion that 'nearly all story-comprehension researchers agree that the most common template structure can be articulated as a 'canonical' story format, something like this:

introduction of setting and characters – explanation of a state of affairs – complicating action – ensuing events – outcome – ending’ (Bordwell, 1985: 35) he is echoing what Kristin Thompson outlined in her schema and what the ‘new structuralists’ are proffering in theirs. Figure 1 suggests an expanded version of Thompson’s paradigm which was appropriated in Chapter 3 to understand the structure of *The Boy from Mercury*.

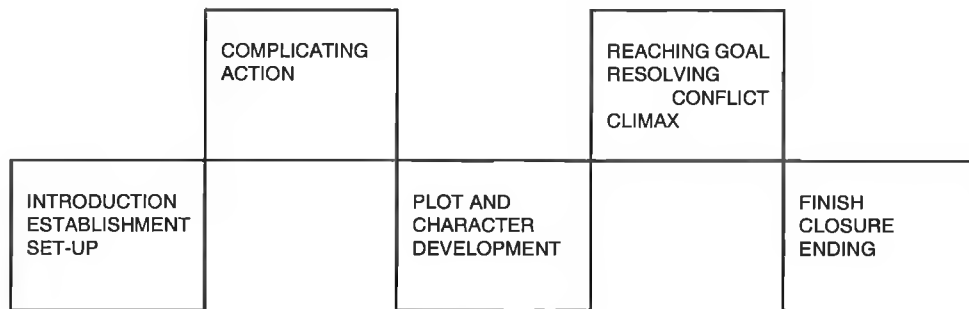


Figure 1: A ‘Staggered’ Linear Interpretation of Bordwell’s Canonical Story Format

This approach interprets narrative as a progression, not necessarily along linear lines as Bordwell suggests, nor as one that keeps building but rather as a movement that ‘builds and focuses’ by consolidating at regular intervals the events that strive to create a structure whose ultimate goal is to achieve ‘coherent whole’. Figure 2 suggests that this approach to narrative can be less linear, more circular yet not totally closed, omega-like.

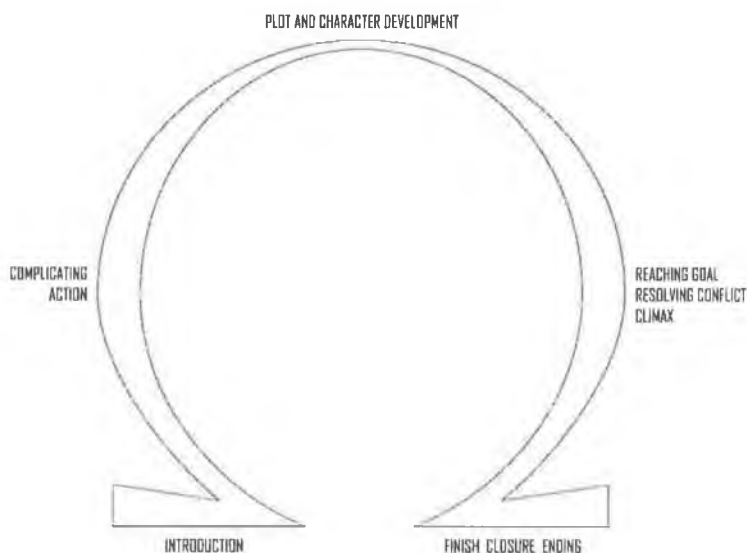


Figure 2: ‘Coherent Whole’ of Narrative Structure

More recently Warren Buckland adopted this position through his analysis of comprehensibility, that is seeing how a story can be comprehended on the basic level of story structure and in terms of how the film's narration conveys the story to its spectators. The importance of this methodological approach according to Bordwell is that if the film does not correspond to the canonic story, 'the spectator must adjust his or her expectations and posit, however tentatively, new explanations for what is presented' (Bordwell, 1985: 36). The first step, therefore, in this type of analysis is to examine 'the set of formal correspondences between fabula and syuzhet' (Bordwell, 1985: 56) in an attempt to reveal to what extent the unfolding fabula correspond to the logical, temporal, and spatial nature of the syuzhet constructed. The syuzhet is defined in terms of events that unfold in cause – effect relationship and is seen as the raw material that makes up the story. The fabula is the artistic organization of these events, the reshaping into a story and story-world (Bordwell, 1985: 275). In comprehending a film, this schema (which represents the canonical story format according to Bordwell) in particular guides the spectators' hypothesis.

One of the intriguing aspects of narrative structure is that even though it follows convention, whether it is mainstream, art-house or avant-garde, its purpose can be simple or complex in terms of function as it relates to the audience across the spectrum. Furthermore, regardless of style film functions in similar ways: by engaging the audience at various emotional depths, by encouraging diverse emotional responses through structure and representation and by eliciting empathetic responses. According to Elsaesser and Buckland (2002), this engagement happens at the level of 'knowledgeability', closely aligned to the notion of the familiar. Knowledgeability functions at more than one level whereby the character may only be given access to syuzhet or plot events, called restricted narration, or whereby the audience is given access to details beyond those of character knowledgeability, called omniscient narration. While knowledgeability as defined here works at one level, 'story breath', it also works at the level of 'story depth'. This can range from deep knowledge, which delves into the character's mental life, or knowledge which remains on the surface, simply showing the character's behaviour (Elsaesser & Buckland, 2002: 172). What this type of breakdown suggests is that characters function on different narrative levels, some characters "say and do" while other characters "see and hear".

We might see shots taken from a character's optical standpoint (the **point-of-view shot**) or hear sounds as the character would hear them ... This would offer a greater degree of subjectivity, one we might call *perceptual subjectivity*. There is the possibility of still greater depth if the plot plunges into the character's mind. We might hear an internal commentary reporting the character's thoughts, or we might see the character's "inner images", representing memory, fantasy, dreams, or hallucinations. This can be called *mental subjectivity*. In short, narrative films can present story information at various depths of the characters' psychological life (Bordwell, 1990: 66).

This approach to narrative clearly has implications for the type of story-world created, not just at the level of form, but also content. Whether the film is intended to resonate at a deep psychological level or is a spectacle of plot-driven narrative confined largely to the surface, it is executed through the narrative structure. This methodological approach, combined with Edward Branigan's theory of focalisation (Branigan, 1998: 100-110), offers the potential for deeper penetration of narrative understanding. By using a formalist approach to narrative study, this chapter will delineate the different approaches to narrative and character that distinguish *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs*.

PLOT / CHARACTER DIVIDE

Plot and character in film narrative, while largely a concern of writers and critics as a framing device and explored in screenwriting manuals (Ballon, 1995; Dancyger & Rush, 1990; Dancyger, 2002; Miller 1991) as a methodology for structure, has received little theoretical attention within Film Studies. The dramatic fabric of plot and character has been defined in a particular way from as far back as Aristotle's approach to mimetic art. For Aristotle, character was not as important as plot. Plot is the lifeline of drama and character takes second place, a position reinforced by Bordwell and Thompson (1990) in their analysis of narrative. Plot is defined as 'everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us' and the story is the sum total of all the events in the narrative (Bordwell, 1990: 57). The difference between story and plot can be summarised as follows: story is created in the minds of the spectators on the basis of cues in the plot and is hence a combination of events depicted and inferred (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990: 57) whereas plot refers to those events explicitly presented on screen before the viewer *and* 'added nondiegetic material' (which include the musical score and credits).

Ironically, plot appears to be privileged over character by those writing on structure from Aristotle to Bordwell. For Bordwell, character is simply an agent of cause and effect, serving the narrative rather than controlling it and operating as an indicator of the range of story information (Bordwell, 1990: 64-65). However, underpinning classical narrative from the 1930s through to the 1960s and beyond are character-driven narratives. The action is hinged on what the characters say and do, see and hear and how they interact on screen with each other.¹³ The reluctance to analyse character in structural terms is difficult to explain but this study sees it as key to assessing film at the level of story construction. How the character relates to the plot, at a micro level within a shot, scene or sequence, and at a macro level within the narrative will shed light not only on form but also on content and hence theme and style. According to Ken Dancyger in *Global Scriptwriting*, in the past ten years ‘voice has become more personal and more assertive, overwhelming our relationship with character and story. In the past, voice was more subtle, more subdued’ (Dancyger, 2002: 14). Undoubtedly there have been narrative shifts since the 1990s in relation to character and plot, at a micro and macro level, a historical detail that may shed light on narrative strategies in recent Irish cinema.

While Bordwell and Thompson clearly privilege plot over character, their writings provide a starting point for character analysis in their discussion of what they call ‘depth of story information’. Stating that a film’s narration not only manipulates degrees of knowledge, but also the depth of our knowledge (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990: 66), a distinction is made between objective and subjective narrative. According to their analysis, a plot that confines us to what the characters “say and do”, their external behavior, is objective, whereas *perceptual subjectivity* is where the plot plunges us deeper into the psychological state of the character by showing us what they “see and hear” (Ibid: 66).

The purpose of this chapter therefore is to differentiate between the functions of plot and character in determining and driving the narrative, as a way of assessing what types of story-worlds are created. While it is tempting to see plot and character as inextricably linked when a narrative is viewed simply as action executed by agents called characters, distinguishing the functions and roles can elucidate what is behind

the underpinning structure. It is a widely accepted definition of narrative structure that the viewers connect events by means of cause and effect - that is, the characters' action. However, this study is concerned with revealing to what extent the audience is plunged to the psychological depths of the characters through empathetic response as a result of structure. In doing so, it is necessary to establish character as an entity in the narrative with a clear and distinctive role that is separate from plot.

At any moment in a film we can ask, "How deeply do I know the characters' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts?" The answer will point directly to how the narration is presenting or withholding story information in order to achieve a formal function or a specific effect on the viewer (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990: 67).

While it can be established that *Disco Pigs* and *Accelerator* in terms of narrative structure adhere to Bordwell's canonical story format, they do so in very different ways. In the spectrum of narrative construction, the structure of each film sits at either side of the plot / character range. While *Accelerator* is a multi-protagonist, episodic narrative that casts the agents as drivers of action, *Disco Pigs* confines its narrative to the more traditional two-hander of protagonist and antagonist, as the characters strive for their goals within the confines of classical narrative. The most noteworthy distinction between the structural approaches to these narratives is at the level of objective and subjective narrative, the point whereby the central differences in story construction and design emerge. Key to analysis of subjective and objective narrative is focalisation. Focalisation is the means whereby the analyst isolates where a character actually experiences something through "seeing and hearing". According to Edward Branigan, focalisation 'involves a character neither speaking (narrating, reporting, communicating) not acting (focusing, focused by), but rather actually *experiencing* something through seeing or hearing it' (Branigan, 1998: 101). It can extend to the character that thinks, remembers, fears or wonders. It is the character that plunges to greater emotional depths of experience through desire, belief or thought that "sees and hears".

Branigan goes on to distinguish two types of focalisation, each representing a different level of a character's experience. External focalisation is the character's "visual and aural awareness of narrative events" and internal focalisation is the representation of the character's private and subjective experiences, ranging from

simple perception (optical vantagepoint) to deeper thoughts (dreams, hallucinations, memories) (Branigan, 1998: 103). While Bordwell's approach facilitates a linear reading, Branigan's methodology develops a horizontal and vertical reading, which can be used to reveal the complexity of an individual shot or scene (Branigan, 1998: 193). What makes this approach significant at this juncture in Irish cinema studies is the potential it provides for reclaiming the 'story' as a focus of analysis and facilitating an assessment of craft within scriptwriting. While it is not proposed to use narratology prescriptively or to be reductive in the analysis of Irish screen narratives, narratology offers a flexible tool that can reveal what is at work within contemporary Irish screen stories. It not only provides for a structural reading but also leads to an analysis of content through form which can shed some light on recent Irish cinema and what sets it apart from its predecessor.

ACCELERATOR

Accelerator opens in the wasteland of an urban ghetto where 'joy-riding' is considered a way of life. Johnny T (Stuart Sinclair Blyth), the main protagonist, is on the run from paramilitary vigilantes because of his 'anti-social behavior'. As Bordwell says, the film's beginning is crucial because the spectator's hypothesis needs to be established. If the process of reading a narrative involves anticipating, guessing, predicting and accepting story information from events depicted and inferred, the set-up or opening sequence is crucial. It positions the spectator to pick up the information and detect the clues in a way that establishes the subsequent reading of the narrative as it advances. From the outset Johnny T is introduced as a character on the cusp of change. Having stood up before his community admitting he was a joyrider before going on yet another spree, he needs to escape from his community, heading to Barcelona, stopping off in Dublin en route. It is here that he meets Whacker (Gavin Kelty), his antagonist, who challenges him to a race, from Belfast to the Papal Cross in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, a distance of about one hundred miles. The prize of the 'girl', in the form of Louise (Aisling O'Neill), Whacker's girlfriend, and the £1200 prize money (each car in the race contributing £200) convinces him after his initial reluctance to rise to this challenge before finally hanging up his 'hot-wires' for the last time.

On the surface *Accelerator* displays a propensity to continue on the path of the 1st wave films that clearly positions the story within an ideological framework (despite the apparent intentions of the director¹⁴) while at the same time echoing and anticipating many of the characteristic features of the 2nd wave. The ideological approach to filmmaking seeks to contextualise film in its wider societal environment. Rather than confining extra-textual relations to the world of cinema, *Accelerator*, like many 1st wave films (*Maeve*, Pat Murphy 1981; *Pigs*, Cathal Black 1984; *December Bride*, Thaddeus O'Sullivan 1990) uses its narrative beyond the function of story-world creation to comment on a wider context in ideological (in this case, social realism) terms. Ging acknowledges that this film along with *Crushproof* and *Last Days in Dublin* (Lance Daly, 2000) tells the 'other side of the official Celtic Tiger narrative' and consequently is hugely important, yet she questions to what extent the 'rejection of middle-class values signals a politicized critique of bourgeois ideology, a statement about young men's exclusion from the patriarchal dividend or simply an (ironic) excuse to revel in laddish pleasures' (Ging, 2004: 125). A formalist analysis can go some way in addressing Ging's concern, by examining the structure and how it functions.

The structure of *Accelerator* which uses a multi-protagonist, episodic approach was unusual in Irish film when this film was produced but it anticipates a trend that becomes more pronounced later on (*About Adam*, Gerry Stembridge 2000; *Intermission*, John Crowley 2003; *Goldfish Memory*, Liz Gill 2003). What characterises the episodic nature of the narrative (a trend established in independent American cinema with the launch of *Slacker* (Richard Linklater, 1991) and which continued throughout the 1990s) is what permits a whole range of characters to be introduced, established and explored at an *objective* level, simply by taking the focus and emphasis off the central main characters. What the narrative of *Accelerator* achieves through this approach is similar to the 'smart' movies of the 1990s (Sconce, 2002) albeit without the trope of irony. Consequently what *Accelerator* combines is a generic road movie structure with a 'social-commentary' that speaks specifically of a time and place through its plot, characterisation and *mise-en-scene*. Although episodic narratives are not necessarily predetermined to explore characterisation at the level of 'restricted narrative', in *Accelerator* the generic device of the race (journey) is what takes priority over internally focalised characters. When the audience's

knowledge of story details is restricted to what the characters on screen know, the term 'restricted narrative' applies. This can be used to good effect particularly in creating suspense in film that involves mystery, by keeping the viewer guessing alongside the agents of the film. However, the reason for 'restricted narration' in *Accelerator* is unclear as the film does not rely on suspense as a tool of emotional engagement. These aspects of narrative is what this chapter seeks to tease out as a way of revealing what is at work within the story-world of *Accelerator*.

Johnny T as the main protagonist in *Accelerator* is positioned objectively in relation to the narrative. The opening sequence is structured around what he "says and does". Through the phone call he makes to his cousin Crunchy (Mark Dunne) in Dublin (objective point of view), the audience learns of his desire to go to Barcelona to escape his fate. His encounter with Whacker, his antagonist, is direct and head on, "objective narrative" or in Branigan's words "external focalisation". The spectator sees what the character sees, but not from the character's position in the narrative. External focalisation allows for the spectator to share the understanding or attention of the character but not their experience. In terms of "plunging into the psychological state of the character", external focalisation or objective narrative is confined largely to the surface, thus structuring the narrative of *Accelerator*. As a consequence of the restricted points of view given to the viewer, insight into how Johnny T is feeling and thinking is largely absent. Whacker's character is affirmed by what others say about him rather than revealed through his own agency: his mother is absent and his father is in prison, details the audience learns from others. This approach to narrative, whereby information is divulged through dialogue is contrary to the Hollywood maxim of "show, don't tell", the first rule generally imparted to students in scriptwriting courses. The principle is based on the ability of narrative structure to convey stories in the present tense and in spatial-temporal relations. Telling rather than showing fails to exploit the full potential of this visual medium. As regards the other characters in the film, who have a more central role than mainstream secondary characters generally have, due to the episodic nature of the plot the audience learns little about their motivational factors as they embark on the joyride race. What is suggested early on in the film is that the characters are united through the absence of any parental guidance. Whacker's 'ma' kicked him out of his 'gaff' which is why he has nowhere to stay while Sharon's parents are always in the pub, it doesn't matter if

she gets in trouble – referring to her father Sharon (Mary Murray) says ‘sure he’s always killing me anyway, what’s the difference’. The gang steps into the breach where the family fails and is the centre of the narrative’s action, not an uncommon trope in youth-oriented films. *Accelerator* gives access to syuzhet events (restricted narration) and is therefore primarily action-driven.

The distinction between internal and external focalisation is useful in representing the different levels of character experience and engagement. External focalisation is what distinguishes the approach in *Accelerator* and is common to ‘high concept’ films that characterise much of Hollywood’s output since the 1980s. Similarly, films that position the character as motivated by external factors, such as race, gender, nationality or socio-economic position, often remain externally focalised at the level of narrative construction principally because their motivation is attributed to something beyond their agency. In this film, the narrative presents the events to the audience through what the characters “say and do”, externally focalised. The interiority of character and deeper thoughts are largely absent from the story and plot.¹⁵ The audience, by the end of the film, has neither been presented with (through the plot) nor has gleaned (from the story) the deeper thoughts or motivations of the character.

Unlike the narrative of *Disco Pigs*, Whacker is presented as a victim of circumstance rather than fate. He is the way he is because of the card dealt to him in life. He restores himself at the end by refusing the ‘blood money’ but there is no character redemption and therefore he must die. Both characters, Whacker and Johnny T acting as protagonist and antagonist, it can be argued are cyphers. Their role is at the level of social justification to drive or validate the narrative. Cast in the generic mould of road movie, this film adopts the Aristotelian / Proppian structure whereby plot is paramount. While the characters are ‘consistent and life-like’, they serve as cyphers or ‘agents of action’, simply pushing the plot forward. As cyphers, they represent something outside of themselves, acting as social commentary and thus positioning the film in a world beyond its function as storyteller in its broadest sense, a function of film that more recent Irish productions appear to be rejecting (*Dead Bodies*, Robert Quinn 2003; *Intermission*).¹⁶

While *Accelerator* lends itself to analysis along the lines of national identity because the narrative is speaking of a time and a place that relates extra-textually to a wider societal context, later 2nd wave films negate such an analysis. More recent films such as *Dead Bodies*, *Intermission*, *Goldfish Memory* and *Timbuktu* (Alan Gilson, 2004) appear to emerge from a cinematic context and use these 'worlds' rather than the 'nation-state' as their reference points. *Dead Bodies* plays with structure by employing many of the conventions of the 'thriller' genre while *Intermission* functions as a 'themed' film that explores a concept, in this case 'love', common to an array of characters. This narratorial device reflects what has been happening in America during the 1990s, a type of film that Jeffrey Sconce calls 'smart' film, 'an American school of filmmaking that survives (and at times thrives) at the symbolic and material intersection of 'Hollywood', the 'indie' scene and the vestiges of what cinephiles used to call 'art' films' (Sconce, 2002). It is difficult to situate either *Dead Bodies* or *Intermission*, or *Timbuktu* for that matter, within the 'national identity' debate, thus marking a distinction between 1st and 2nd wave films and suggesting that these filmmakers are engaged elsewhere in their dialectics.

Because the episodic exploration of the other characters in *Accelerator* and their relationships and what happens to them is connected to the main narrative thread but without clear cause or motivation, what is absent from this narrative is Bordwell's 'hermetically sealed world', that is a design that adheres to the rules of construction whereby the removal of one element would cause the structure to collapse. For example, the characters Ripley (Mary Ellen McCartan) and Spock (Philip Richie) serve no narrative function other than as cast members and stylistic device; if they were removed from the plot there would be no adverse reaction. Crunchy and Sharon are equally redundant. While the latter two provide a Bakhtinian scenario of 'boy meets girl', their wider narrative link is tenuous. Furthermore, this approach is in danger of falling into some of Frank Daniel's 'traps', that of monotony (as mentioned in Chapter 2) which negates the dramatic by recounting episodes, chronicle-like. Although the approach to film involving the construction of a 'hermetically sealed world', devised by Hollywood in the early part of the twentieth century has been criticised, particularly by *Screen* theorists for serving to mask any points of tension or rupture, it is useful in assessing narrative structure and shedding light on the story constructed. Consequently, this approach can reveal, in a film like *Accelerator*, an

absence of a deep emotional experience for the audience because of the absence of differing levels of focalisation. While the film can present alternative pleasures, such as entertainment and spectacle and/or the dissemination of an ideological message that comments on the disenfranchisement of the urban, male youth, *Accelerator* points to a common problem in contemporary Irish film and one that has been identified by many writers and critics (Linehan, 1999: 46-50): the absence of characters that present us with a depth of perception, feeling and thought, even at the level of irony.

A key scene in this film is when the two cars (occupied by Johnny T and Whacker) encounter the British army border checkpoint. Analysing this scene along the lines of subjective and objective narrative reveals core narrative tensions. The audience is presented with two subjective positions, firstly when the checkpoint is revealed from Johnny T's point of view and secondly when the soldiers are seen from Whacker's point of view. When Whacker shoots at the soldiers, the camera shots are presented in an objective way as Whacker utters the words "Shoot to Kill Mother Fuckers". Continuing the trend of fatalism attached to characters in films about Northern Ireland, the explanation for Whacker's actions appear to remain outside of the story. It doesn't fit the narrative set-up either as a sociological statement or a way of progressing the character and plot. Whacker has no political or social motivation as displayed through narrative devices. Understanding the impetus for this scene is purely speculative as the clues are not revealed through character or plot.

Furthermore, this type of scene reveals generic tensions within the film. Influenced by the ubiquitous American road movie through its notions of rootlessness and aimlessness and its exploration of male existential angst, this film simultaneously evokes and defies the generic traits. While the road movie is seen as a simplification of all of life, it generally has a restive and recuperative function. According to Baudrillard the thrill of travelling to different places does not lie in the experience of learning about other places or discovering local customs but in realising that the place one is travelling in is immortal. Travelling, by freeing the character from the social, puts him/her on a different plane and thus evokes a spiritual dimension. Whether by accident or design this aspect of the road movie story process is absent in *Accelerator*.

The narrative approach, therefore, suggested by the relationship of syuzhet to fabula would advocate that in the absence of a 'deep emotional experience' the audience would be compensated by being elevated to a different plain. This could take the form of a political or sociological statement or insight. While the visual style through *mise-en-scene* in *Accelerator* suggests such a course at the opening of the film, particularly through the representation of the urban environment, the romantic closure (which is genre-defying), both narratively and aesthetically, disavows any political reading and negates an emotional experience. The syuzhet events ought to shed light on the fabula: that is the plot reveals story detail and information. The key plot element in this narrative, the race from Belfast to the Papal cross, one expects functions to reveal the significance of the story-world, as Bordwell argues 'the plot goes beyond the story-world by presenting nondiegetic images and sounds which may affect our understanding of story' (Bordwell, 1990: 57). As mentioned already, the journey is a very common trope within film and consequently a successful device that acts as an allegory for something else, change, growth, insight etc., while also engaging the audience through anticipation, a key technique in creating conflict (Daniel, 1986). For the reasons mentioned above, principally around restricted narration, this opportunity in the narrative of *Accelerator* is missed.

A key obstruction to a seamless narrative in *Accelerator* is thus revealed through a formalist analysis. Johnny T does not grow or develop as a character or change as a consequence of insight, as is expected in conventional narrative structures. Unusually, he has already done so before the film has started, by giving up joyriding and deciding to go to Barcelona, thus weakening the potential narrative conflict or tension from the outset. Instead, the central focus of the story is one last joyride and therein lies the drama. Establishing the character in this way is akin to the hero of the Western genre – before the western hero hangs up his gun he has one last battle to fight. However unlike Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) who gains in 'insight and humanity' by the end of the film, Johnny T has not changed in physical or emotional disposition as a consequence of the process.¹⁷ This narrative detail has the effect of negating the expectation of the audience which is created at the start of the film when the hypothesis is established. The narrative trajectory of the journey in the road movie has a certain symbolism that evokes expectations in the audience, which are not met in this film.

It is difficult, therefore, to conclude at this point what the narrative function of the hero in this story is, particularly when he is disconnected from the other characters in the second act, through the multi-protagonist, episodic style of the narrative structure. Phil Parker's assertion about narrative that 'the driving force of plot is the establishment of a complex set of 'active questions' – questions that structure the narrative from moment to moment, from the beginning to the end of the narrative. Such questions are created by the narrative in the audience's mind, which intrigues and holds them while an answer is sought' (Parker, 2000: 71) may reveal some of the narrative flaws in *Accelerator* and why there is little suspense in this plot-driven road movie. On the other hand extra-textual references to wider cinema practices in Britain, US and Ireland may reveal what is peculiar to this style and consequently the significance of this film within contemporary Irish film. This will be explored later in the chapter.

DISCO PIGS

The main obstacle to the analysis of contemporary Irish cinematic storytelling is the monolithic predisposition towards mainstream Hollywood narrative structure. When 'Hollywood' as a tool of categorisation is mentioned, it is commonly assumed to embrace one clearly defined structure. When *Disco Pigs* is described as 'simply another variant on the age-old "couple on the run" formula',¹⁸ Harvey O'Brien is echoing a widely held antipathy to what is deemed 'Hollywood cinema'. However, the success of Hollywood cinema is due not just to its universal appeal that crosses cultural borders quite readily, but its ability to reinvent and change. Hollywood in the silent era used pictures to tell stories to a multi-cultural and multi-lingual audience of immigrants in the growing urban centres of the United States thus constructing a narrative that targeted a universal and consequently a global audience, prior to the coming of sound. In *Alternative Scriptwriting*, Ken Dancyger & Jeff Rush explore restorative three-act structure and its features but also look to alternatives, which have emerged from what is broadly deemed Hollywood¹⁹ and more recently, *Global Scriptwriting* (Dancyger, 2001) charts the narratological changes and developments of the last decade. What becomes evident from these scriptwriting manuals is the fluidity of mainstream narrative and the blurring of boundaries between 'mainstream' and

‘alternative’ cinema in more recent times. While the parameters for analysis of the 1st wave were more demarcated with the polarisation of mainstream and avant-garde or Third Cinema, it is less so now.

While nobody can deny that society and culture has been affected by the world-wide phenomenon of globalisation, it could be argued that the effects on narrative are less pronounced than on other cultural forms, and in some instances over-stated. Ari Hiltunen in *Aristotle in Hollywood* (2002) refers to Dr. Rolf Jensen of The Copenhagen Institute for Further Studies who states that ‘the global market is becoming emotionally driven’ (Hiltunen, 2002: xviii). People will become more interested in stories that express emotions than material goods as a shared common language. Cinema has always been a global medium since its emergence at the end of the nineteenth century, simultaneously in France (through the work of the Lumiere brothers and George Melies) and the United States (Thomas Edison and Edwin S. Porter) so it is not surprising that if Jensen is correct and storytelling becomes a dominant commodity, that cinema is already strategically placed. Stating this however is not to negate the national and cultural elements of different cinemas, but simply raises an apparent contradiction.²⁰ The key to accommodating this contradiction, as suggested by the probing of contemporary Irish cinema thus far, is by defining and envisioning the narrative frameworks and styles in a flexible and open way. Conceptualising categories and conventions of narrative as fluid is particularly pertinent now in accounting for developments in cinema since the 1980s. Within a global medium distinctive manifestations emerge thus commanding that the tools of analysis used to assess this remain flexible. The narrative landscape is less monolithic than generally assumed. It is within this context that an analysis of the canonic story of *Disco Pigs* takes place.

Disco Pigs opens at the moment of birth, when Pig and Runt are born on the same day and in the same hospital. They are placed side by side in the nursery and reach out, moments old, to hold hands, a literary motif that will recur in the narrative.²¹ The events advance forward to age sixteen, Pig and Runt are inseparable, living next door to each other, excluding the outside world from their imaginary one. They envisage themselves as king and queen and co-exist in their imaginations. The ‘explanation of the state of affairs’ is the playing out of the unique friendship that these two characters

have with each other, which is at odds with the conventions of their outside world. A sequence of scenes demonstrates the dysfunctionality of this friendship incorporating real time and flashback. The scene in the off-license when Pig and Runt bully the boy behind the counter and the scene in the disco where Pig and Runt play out a game of seduction and attack are examples of this disturbing world they have created and inhabit. The ‘complicating action’ is Pig’s growing sexual awakening towards Runt, first signaled in the key scene in Shandon church tower and further reinforced when he tries to kiss her. The ‘ensuing events’ explore Pig’s growing violence and Runt’s attempts to move away when she begins to be attracted to Markey. The growing gap is further ‘plotted’ when Runt is sent away to a reform school. Bordwell’s ‘outcome’ is the sequence when the relationship finally breaks down on Pig and Runt’s seventeenth birthdays and the ‘ending’ is the death scene, when Runt kills Pig and Pig allows Runt to kill him. In reading the structure along general canonic lines, *Disco Pigs* appears quite conventional in form. Kristin Thompson’s methodology of breaking the narrative into four parts (set-up, complicating action, development and resolution) is equally applicable. What these approaches illustrate, therefore, is an appropriation, at face value, of a conventional narrative structure along the lines of ‘classical narrative’ (See Figure 3).

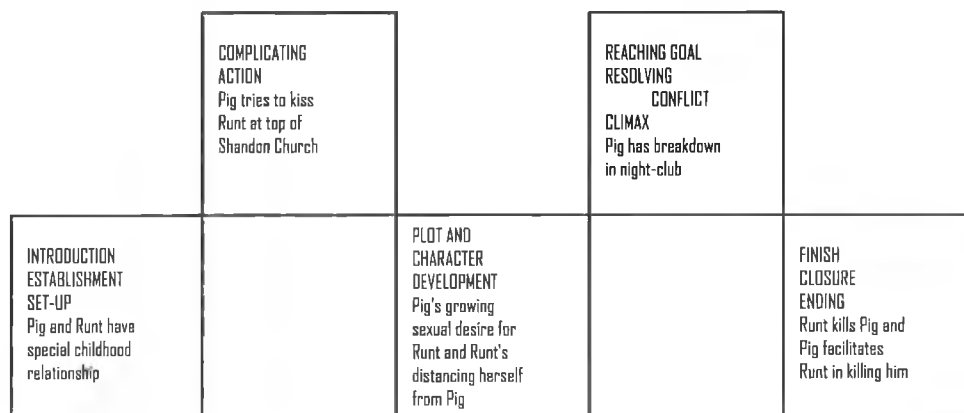


Figure 3: A Linear Interpretation of Bordwell’s Canonical Story Format applied to *Disco Pigs*

However, attempting to apply the ‘New Structuralist’ position in the form of Christopher Vogler’s mythic structure to *Disco Pigs* in a linear fashion is problematic. Rather than being a redundant exercise, therefore, it is useful in revealing the

complexity involved in the narrative. As Vogler points out, the mythic structure is a 'skeletal framework that should be fleshed out with the details and surprises of the individual story' (Vogler, 1999: 26). Despite the conventional charge against the formalist approach, this methodology is not a prescriptive formula and applying any structural analysis is interpretative rather than reductive. In fact, where it works best is when it is taken as inductive, as a method of revealing what is at work rather than attempting to explain some aspect of narrative in a conclusive way. Thus, what is revealed early on is the key to this narrative structure: it is not a story embodying a 'call to adventure' that will bring the hero to a higher plain as a consequence of personal insight and growth. It is his inability to respond in a restorative way that fulfills Pig's fate.²² Like Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Pig sows the seeds of his own destruction, as a result of the combined forces of free will and fate. For Pig this happens by following his 'heart's desire' in a purely irrational way. The moment he kisses Runt is the start of the end; the spell of childhood friendship that bonded them has been broken: they are no longer following the same trajectory.

As Vogler points out, any element of the 'hero's journey' can appear at any point in the story, thus avoiding the reductive formula that would negate the creative and imaginative aspect of story. When Pig kisses Runt for the first time, placing their platonic friendship in a sexual domain, he is not issuing a 'call to adventure' that she refuses; rather he is going down a road from where there is no return. As his sexual awakening intensifies, he 'crosses the threshold' which has the consequence of bringing him further down his fateful path. Pig and Runt spend their birthday together, the last joint act together before they face the 'ordeal'. The 'ordeal' in this case corresponds to Bordwell's 'outcome'. When Pig experiences his breakdown in the toilets of the Palace night-club on his seventeenth birthday followed by the violent attack on Markey and his further attempts to kiss Runt, the audience experiences 'the black moment' of the narrative, 'the hero, like Jonah, is "in the belly of the beast"' (Vogler, 1999: 21).

Whereas in restorative structure the audience can expect the hero to 'seize the sword' and head for the road back before 'resurrection', in *Disco Pigs* this structure is rejected. While these stages are easily identifiable in *Accelerator*, thus suggesting a more conventional film, they are clearly thwarted in the structure of *Disco Pigs*. The

usefulness of the mythic structure in a comparative analysis of these two films is therefore limited. While it points to the differences in terms of convention, it fails to shed light on deeper aspects of story design. In peeling back the layers and revealing what is at work in these films, narrative theory as defined by Bordwell and Branigan will prove more useful.

When the narrative style of *Disco Pigs* is scrutinised further, it is revealed from the opening sequence that the audience is plunged to the 'subjective levels' of characterisation in narrative terms. This contrasts with the narrative of *Accelerator* which focuses its exploration in an 'objective' or 'externally focalised' way. The device central to the approach in *Disco Pigs* is the use of voiceover. In analysing the use of voiceover, narrative theory has its part to play. Although early narrative theory proclaimed the 'autonomy of narrative structure' (Chatman, 1999), more recently the field of narratology has recognised that fiction film demonstrates how the medium can have a complicating effect on the narrative text. Examining voiceover in particular, Seymour Chatman argues that film, in theory, could offer a means of expression that is much more complex and narratively rich than commercial cinema often exploits (Chatman, 1999: 315). While the voiceover is a device developed in Hollywood, in *film noir* of the 1940s in particular, European cinema is credited with its more complex use. In an Irish context, Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997) employs the voiceover to articulate the older Francie's words and as Martin McLoone states, 'the visuals and voiceover...works as a parallel discourse to what we see, opening out a complex world of fevered imagination laced with humorously inappropriate speculation and exploration' (McLoone 2000: 215).²³

In *Disco Pigs*, the voiceover along with the visuals provides an entry point to the world of Pig and Runt where they reign as King and Queen in their imagined kingdom. In the opening sequence, the homodiegetic voiceover of Runt is internally focalised, 'Once upon a time before there was blue', over visuals of the baby Runt just before and during the moment of birth. Conveying her inner thoughts and feelings from birth, she says in voiceover 'I want for something different and that's when I hear him...at that moment we become one and we need no one else. Nobody'. This sequence establishes the subjective narrative style, one that will explore 'simple perception' and 'deeper thoughts' as it works through the inner turmoil of its

characters, and articulated through image and voice. From the outset the poetic, allegorical style is in contrast to the socio-realistic style adopted by *Accelerator*.

Disco Pigs uses a wide range of narratological devices in contrast with the restricted focus of *Accelerator*, thus creating narrative layers that demand more processing by the audience. This is not to place a hierarchical order on these two films; rather the terms of narratology as defined by Bordwell and Branigan delineate a schema, stating that the more complicated the schema to be hypothesised, the more processing time required by the audience. Thus, dealing with the interiority of characters through the medium of film requires the use of different narratological devices. *Disco Pigs* achieves this through point of view shots. A key illustrative scene occurs as Pig surveys Cork city from the top of Shandon church. Runt calls Pig to come and look at the skirt she made. From the top of the church, the camera cuts to a long shot of Runt, 'what do you think?' as she holds out her skirt. In an externally focalised shot, the camera cuts to Pig and zooms in, the spectator shares the character's attention, rather than his experience (Branigan, 1998). The camera then cuts to Runt from Pig's point of view (internally focalised). A series of soft-focused, close up shots follow as Pig describes how Runt looks, 'like some model you see off the telly'. The audience now shares the character's experience, rather than attention. Runt breaks this internal focalisation and the two head off. This sequence is characteristic of the style of the film. Much of the narrative is internally focalised, either from Pig or Runt's point of view. While this film clearly appropriates mainstream cinematic devices, it is less conventional in its narrative structure than *Accelerator*. It can be argued that in being less conventional, it is more complex in story terms, by embracing the depths of narrative that cinema allows and thus tells a story that is more multi-layered. Furthermore, its absence from Debbie Ging's article "The Lad from New Ireland: Marginalised, Disaffected and Criminal Masculinities in Contemporary Irish Cinema" is noteworthy: while it displays similarities to many of the films mentioned in Ging's study, its narrative complexity makes it difficult to categorise so readily. Pig is not presented as a marginalised character in unproblematic terms (Ging, 2004: 124) but rather as a character whose motivation cannot be easily written off as sociological.²⁴ As Bordwell would suggest from the narrative structure constructed, this film demands more processing time.

The internal focalisation or subjective narrative is repeated throughout the film. After Pig kisses Runt, through his voiceover he verbalizes his fantasy. In story design terms, once he starts on this trajectory, he is heading in one direction, towards his downfall. When Runt goes to Donegal the presence of Pig is felt throughout even though he is not with her on screen. Adopting a catatonic state, spatially the two are held together in the narrative. Runt senses his approach when she says, 'He's close', while Pig jumps off the bus as it passes the big austere building that is the reform school.

Focalisation is a tool which reveals the potential of the cinematic narrative form and the extent to which the writer and director exploit it in telling a particular story. Not all stories attempt to evoke an emotional experience but all function to arouse some kind of state, for example, spectacle, comedic, ironic, thus positioning the audience. Focalisation, in this case, reveals the limitations of the narrative of *Accelerator* which neither evokes a deep emotional experience nor engages in an ironic way. What it does instead, which may account for its popularity among certain audiences,²⁵ is to invoke the genre of road movie, mainly through its iconography and dramatised milieu. On the other hand, it is unclear what its ultimate aim in invoking the genre is. It neither challenges the status quo nor reinforces it but instead manages to fatalistically and romantically present a solution and narrative closure (contra-generic) for its protagonist and antagonist. Debbie Ging appears to concur when she writes that 'although the appeal of these male figures derives largely from their marginalization from or subversion of the societies they inhabit, it is rarely made explicit what exactly they are rebelling against or why' (Ging, 2004: 127).

The narrative structure of *Disco Pig*, on the other hand, is much more complex. Whereas the trajectory of *Accelerator* is linear *Disco Pigs* is circular, a common structure of films that employ voice-over as a key means of focalisation. In classical narrative when the voice-over was combined with flash-back, the narrative would often achieve a state of memory loss in the audience: the viewer is drawn into the secondary world through suspension of disbelief and thus 'forgets' that another world exists until such a time as the narrative returns to the primary world. Although this does not happen in *Disco Pigs* as distinctly as it did in classical narrative (*Mildred Pierce*, Michael Curtiz 1945) possibly because the narrative is not told in flash-back, it still has a similar circular effect. Before the moment of birth, through the use of

voice-over Runt says ‘the noisy world outside....that was the time when silence was some sort of friend. A time before he arrived...before I hear the Pig’, indicating Runt’s existence prior to meeting Pig. The opening scene functions as introducing and establishing the story-world. Interestingly, it is told from Runt’s point of view, the function of which only becomes clear when the narrative comes full circle by the end of the film. After Pig’s suffocation Runt returns to the theme of silence which is delivered once again in voice over, from Runt’s point of view –

And so it’s all over then, Pig and Runt they leave and Runt all alone it seems. It’s like I do really want for something else. Something different. That silence again and though I know that he too is silent and safe...the sun, it really is a big beautiful shining thing. Where to? eh, pal where to?²⁶

Figure 4 illustrates how the structure of this film offers a narrative coherence that brings the viewer full circle from the opening sequence to narrative closure and creates an emotional dynamic that is unified. While in some respects, it could be argued that both *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* end in the classical way, on a note of hope, *Accelerator*’s absence of narrative coherence is a consequence of the ruptured relationship of fabula to syuzhet. Although both films reach a similar ending, they do so by quite distinctive trajectories.

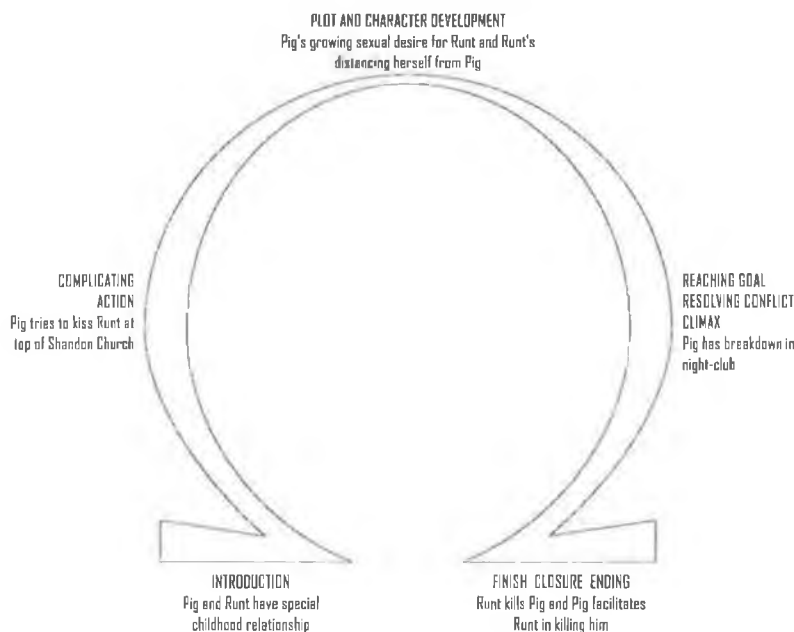


Figure 4: Narrative of *Disco Pigs* as ‘Coherent Whole

Unlike *Accelerator*, much of what is happening in the story in *Disco Pigs* happens at a different narrative level, in the thoughts of the characters. Although not obviously appropriating the genre, *Disco Pigs* hinges on many themes that are seen as characteristically 'road movie' or 'buddy movie'. The rebellion, insecurity, alienation and general angst of the typical road movie character is reflected in *Disco Pigs* and the road movie as a rite of passage for Oedipally-driven young males could explain what is happening to Pig. Yet while *Disco Pigs* appropriates some of the conventions of the road movie, interestingly it does by turning them on their head. Through internal focalisation, the narrative plunges the audience towards the interior struggle of the character thus pointing out a key narrative difference between both texts. While *Disco Pigs* constantly plunges the audience to greater character depth through internal focalisation and subjective narrative, *Accelerator* hardly ever does. In terms of drama and emotional engagement, *Disco Pigs* allows for the spectator to engage emotionally whereas in *Accelerator*, the audience is kept at arms length. However, *Accelerator*'s purpose is not one of Brechtian distanciation but signals a trend emerging in contemporary Irish film, one that it can be said has its basis in American independent film of the 1990s. Focalisation, therefore reveals the relationship and distinction between syuzhet/plot and fabula/story in both films, pointing out the narratological tools used to tell quite different stories. It is through formal analysis that such differences are revealed.

WHITHER 2ND WAVE?

The existential hero asks: "Should I exist?" The ironic hero just "exists", in quotes. When everything is deconstructed and referenced, a lot of fun and excitement has come out of it. But in the end, I don't know how nourishing it is – (Quote from scriptwriter Paul Schrader) ²⁷

Two later films draw parallels with *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* and shed light on the evolutionary and developmental nature of the 2nd wave. It could be argued that *Intermission* and *Adam and Paul* display a more evolved form of narrative than those adopted in the earlier films, while still functioning as contrasting narratives between characters that "say and do" and characters that "see and hear". On close examination the parallels between *Accelerator* and *Intermission* are quite pronounced. Both films are episodic in form, a narrative style that relies on the audience identifying with an

array of characters as multi-protagonists, contrasting with the more conventional approach of protagonist and antagonist. Whereas the unity between content and form is more blurred in *Accelerator*, it could be argued that *Intermission* is cast in the mould of American 'smart' film identified as a trend in the US 'indie' film scene of the 1990s. Jeffrey Sconce (2002) appropriates Bordwell's narratological analysis of classical Hollywood and European art cinema to delineate what he sees as characteristic of American 'smart' films which made notable impact on American cinema in the 1990s.

Perhaps the most significant change in narrative causality involves the increasing prevalence of multi-protagonist stories and episodic story structure. Although certainly not true of all contemporary smart cinema, many of these films (especially the 'dramas') do favour a rotating series of interlocking episodes, centring not on a central unifying character's dynamic action (as in classical Hollywood cinema) nor on relatively passive observations (as in previous art cinema), but rather on a series of seemingly random events befalling a loosely related set of characters (Sconce, 2002: 362).

This formal shift away from both classical Hollywood and European art cinema, Sconce argues, suggests a postmodern exploration of the *condition humaine*. When he defines the favoured narrative structure of these films as one which embodies 'a range of characters subjected to increasing despair and/or humiliation captured in a rotating series of interlocking scenes in which some endure while others are crushed' (Sconce, 2002: 362) he could quite easily be referring to *Accelerator* and to a lesser degree *Disco Pigs*.²⁸ A more developed example of this structure is put to more effective use in *Intermission*. While John (Cillian Murphy) could be regarded as the protagonist and Oscar (David Wilmot) the antagonist, they do not dominate the story-world in a classical way. Lehiff the crook (Colin Farrell) is clearly a central character in executing the unifying plot while Sam, the bank manager, the detective Jerry Lynch (Colm Meaney), Mick the bus driver (Brian F. O'Byrne), Ben the filmmaker (Tomás Ó Súilleabhán) and the teacher all play central roles within the narrative.²⁹ As Phil Parker writes in his article *Reconstructing Narrative*, 'when selecting stories to combine within a narrative, a common theme between the stories will provide the narrative with a larger emotional dynamic and coherence' (Parker, 2000: 69).

In a similar way to 'smart' film as defined by Sconce, *Intermission* does not rely on cause and effect as a motivational narrative device. In many respects, what happens is a consequence of chance. The bus driver, for example is linked to Deirdre and John because he carries passenger from Tallaght, notably Deirdre's mother and her sister Sally. The bus overturning is not a consequence of cause and effect but is a scene of chance serving to link Sally with the filmmaking, consequently becoming her *catharsis* when she sees herself on television and realises that she does indeed have a moustache. In the narrative, a number of distinct and separate stories are being told (comparable to *Accelerator*) all unified by a common theme, the search for love, although in this case executed with an ironic tone. Consequently, this film could be regarded as a more evolved form of the narrative structure adopted in *Accelerator*.

The theme of love pervades the narrative of *Accelerator* albeit in a less gestated way. The characters that survive, or at least escape serious injury or death, are those who find 'true love', Johnny T and Louise, and Sharon and Crunchy. The suggestion that there is a dearth of parental love or guidance in these characters' lives, portrayed early in the film, is reinforced when Whacker cradles Boo (Sorcha Gleadhill) in the back of the car after she has been hit by a stray bullet. Rubbing her head, he says 'feels good doesn't it, my Ma used to do it when I was sick, would make me feel better'. Soon afterwards he drives straight into an army ambush, facing death head on. While this film seeks to tell an episodic tale, it fails to unite the individual stories other than through their common plot goal, the joyride. While the film should not be condemned for this, its narrative potential is unfortunately not realised, suggesting that it is a less evolved form narratively than *Intermission*. The ending of the film, by failing to draw the strands together, cheats the audience of the unifying effect of *Intermission*. While both films negate emotional involvement, the latter does this by deliberately keeping the audience at arms length through ironic distancing.

Irony is a defining characteristic of American 'smart' film as identified by Jeffrey Sconce and is useful in assessing the narrative styles of *Accelerator* and *Intermission*. It is through this trope that *Intermission* links to this narrative development and *Accelerator* does not. Irony as a device is interesting in that it relies on some of the audience-members 'getting it' while accepting that many others won't or don't. Hence, the opening sequence of *Intermission* whereby Lehiff violently attacks and

robs the girl in the shop after holding a conversation with her about love (reminiscent of the off-licence scene in *Disco Pigs*) can be interpreted as ironic by those who 'get it' or misogynistic and perverse by those who don't.

This use of irony, while an interesting tool of engagement, has further consequences for the study of narrative. At first glance it would appear to challenge the very notion of universality. Classical narrative system was constructed in such a way as to include a wide-ranging audience while genre separated the audience into different interest-groups – the Western, the melodrama etc. Because American 'smart' film is dependent on an ironic base, it could be argued that it functions in a similar way to art-house films or the avant-garde – speaking exclusively to an omniscient *élite*. However, the proliferation of films such as *The Unbelievable Truth* (Hal Hartley, 1990); *Trust* (Hal Hartley, 1991); *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999); *Storytelling* (Todd Solondz, 2001); *The Royal Tenebaums* (Wes Anderson, 2001) to name but a few suggests that these films are more widespread and more accessible than previous art-house films and movements. So far from challenging the notion of universality, these films link audiences, not through national identity or ideological affiliation but through the language of irony as understood through popular culture, across Europe and America.

No doubt there is a new sensibility at work in certain corners of North American cinema and culture over the past decade, one that manifests a predilection for irony, black humour fatalism, relativism and...even nihilism (Sconce, 2002: 350)

What is interesting about *Accelerator* and *Intermission* is that while they apparently pay homage to this movement they clearly reject key aspects of it. The absence of any ironic tone in *Accelerator* may indeed be a narrative flaw or missed opportunity but more likely a stage in narrative development as new Irish cinema puts distance between itself and previous ideologically-driven trends.³⁰ On the other hand, *Intermission* explores its theme, the search for true love and how this is different to sex, with a serious yet ironic tone.³¹ However, whereas the American 'smart films' identified by Sconce favour a nihilistic outcome rather than one of hope or redemption, *Intermission* adopts a classical approach to closure. With John re-united with Deirdre and Sally hooked up with Oscar, the narrative clearly sees resolution in finding "true love" – as Oscar says 'looking for love, it's tough...has potential for

heart-break but you persevere'. This film thus endorses the classical narrative 'happy' ending of closure as does *Accelerator* when those who find love are also saved. In a spirit of *homage*, it could be argued, *Intermission* 'has for the most part re-embraced classical narrative strategies [and experiments] with *tone* as a means of critiquing 'bourgeois' taste and culture' (Sconce, 2002: 352) and is thus the culmination of ten years of narrative experimentation, primarily influenced by what is happening in American 'indie' film.³²

Before concluding it is worth alluding to another film (that does not fall within the chronological demarcation of this study) but is important nonetheless. *Adam and Paul*, it could be argued, is a triumph of focalisation.³³ Telling the story of two junkies trying to score a heroin fix,³⁴ it follows them on their journey over one day. Reading like a fly-on-the-wall documentary, this film is unusual in many ways and a significant contrast to *Disco Pigs*. Eschewing the potential of character identification, the audience does not learn who is Adam and who is Paul until the credits roll at the end of the film. Instead, what is presented through the story-world is the portrayal of a problem through the agency of two characters rather than two individual characters pursuing some goal: identification takes place at the level of Adam (Mark O'Halloran) and Paul (Tom Murphy) *as one*. Yet this film is not an exercise in social realism. Its similarities to *Disco Pigs* principally lie within the construction of characterisation. In one respect these characters are not shown as 'victims' of an unjust society. While Adam and Paul's social environment is depicted, the absence of a contrasting depiction eludes the sociological statement that these are society's 'fall guys'. Consequently the characterisation of Adam and Paul suggests that their lot in life is a combination of free will and fate. They are not let totally off the hook by being fated through social or economic circumstances, a simplistic device which can be overly exploited in social-realism films for ideological impact. Yet like the characters in *Disco Pigs*, there is a fatalistic element to their story, that fatalism is their own doing – a combination of free will and fate. As the viewer follows them over the course of one day, the world is not presented externally focalised but rather the story-world constructed is purely internal, the obsessional need of Adam and Paul to score heroin. The narrational motivation occurs at the level of characterisation (rather than plot) throughout the film yet the audience rarely gets a glimpse of the

world 'outside' from the characters' point of view, or the reverse. This approach has the effect of facilitating emotional involvement without voyeuristic gratification.

Where *Disco Pigs* and *Adam and Paul* diverge, however, is at the level of style. While *Disco Pigs* uses violence to display the hopelessness of Pig's situation, *Adam and Paul* adopts a visually more subtle approach. The robbery in the off-license at the start of *Disco Pigs* is in stark contrast to Adam and Paul leading a down-syndrome boy down a lane in order to steal from him: the latter more under-stated and subtle yet displaying the desperation more forcefully. This robbery scene appalls in a more effective way than the overt violence of similar scenes in *Disco Pigs* and *Intermission*. While the audience is repulsed by Adam and Paul's actions, the narrative allows the spectator to triumph with the characters, when the 'heroin falls from the sky', in purely emotional terms as a filmic gesture in humanity.

Furthermore, the similarity between the closing scenes of both films is worth comparing whereby one of the main characters dies while the other lives. As Kerstin Kettelman observes in her article "Cinematic Images of Irish Male Brutality and the Semiotics of Landscape in *The Field* and *Hear My Song*" the 'Irish landscape is significantly used to facilitate violence, particularly in the use of cliffs and deep wells, as signs of abyss' (quoted in Mac Killop 1999: 154). In this case, it is the less dramatic coastal aspect of the Irish landscape that is aestheticised. Whereas in *Disco Pigs* the reason for Pig dying is metaphorical, to allow Runt live and thus serves the purpose of narrative closure, albeit in a fatalistic way, the fatalism of *Adam and Paul* is much more real in a social way. Adam dies of a heroin over-dose and Paul, not able to care for him or about him, leaves him at a similar coastal location to Pig. However whereas *Disco Pigs* evokes a peaceful, almost serene aesthetic, in *Adam and Paul* it is more wind swept and desolate, suggesting *scenic* wasteland. Whereas there is hope for Runt in the events subsequent to the film, there is little hope for Paul. The convoluted nature of characterisation in *Adam and Paul*, whereby both characters are entwined, suggests that the same fate awaits Paul: if Pig and Runt can be read as one, so too can Adam and Paul. While the aesthetic appropriation in both films is similar to the use of landscape in many 1st wave films (Gibbons, 1987: 194-220) and appears to reinforce Kettelman's statement, in *Disco Pigs* and *Adam and Paul* the choice of location serves different aesthetic purposes. Ironically very similar locations, the

narratives contrastingly articulate a discourse of hope and fatalism, an oppositional romantic and tragic end.

Finally, it could be argued, that *Intermission* illustrates the narrative evolution in new Irish cinema when compared with *Accelerator*, *Adam and Paul* finds a sophisticated narrative structure to tell a modern urban story that resonates at a level that remains with the audience and unlike many of its 2nd wave counterparts is far from instantly forgettable (*Crushproof; Flick; Headrush*, Shimmy Marcus 2003). By embodying the contrasts of good and evil, without positing them as extremes in polar terms, this film elicits a humanitarian response in the audience. In this way, it is useful to view the first decade of new Irish film as evolutionary and developmental in a new direction rather than as an adjunct to the 1st wave.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it remains to restate the case for the formalist approach as one step in defining a new discourse that will facilitate some clearer understanding of recent Irish film. As mentioned earlier, the formalist approach has not been widely received as an end in itself within the *academy*, in particular since the emergence of post-structuralism. Consequently, this position has prohibited any significant advance in the study of the craft of scriptwriting, storytelling, narrative and filmmaking, a deficiency now being addressed by Kalos k'Agathos in particular. In other art forms such as music and architecture the art of practice is an integral part in the study of the discipline, whether the student is engaging as a practitioner or theoretician. In a similar way the formalist approach to film analysis can contribute to the pedagogy of scriptwriting and advance such studies from the traditional position that asserts creativity as inherent and 'god-given', which cannot be learned or nurtured. Furthermore, formalist approaches to narrative can narrow the vacuum between theory and practice, a project some branches of Film Studies have taken on in recent times.

In the context of this chapter, what formal analysis reveals are the different approaches to story-world and story design adopted by the writers and directors of these two films. The appropriation of narratological tools of analysis can have the

effect of revealing similarities and differences. While the structural approach to story design in *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* is quite different and therefore interesting from the perspective of scriptwriting, the similarities between the films are equally as revealing. As already mentioned the national identity debate has not served the 2nd Wave of Irish cinema well by imposing an out-dated model on this body of work. More useful is to explore film in terms of a post-national discourse where the emphasis is placed on the relationship between the global and the local, thus offering a space to determine and explore the tensions that apply to contemporary cinema.

Applying a formalist analysis to these two films is useful in revealing stories that resonate at many levels, appropriating, negotiating and reflecting international trends. While cause and effect play a dominant role in *Disco Pigs*, chance is *Accelerator*'s underpinning motivation. Similarly *Dead Bodies*, *Goldfish Memory* and *Intermission* rely on a series of chance encounters to motivate the action and justify the consequences in these narratives. Formal analysis therefore identifies in these films 'characters trapped by annihilating fate and narrational strategies that seem without empathy' (Sconce, 2002: 364).

Distrustful of the hippy past, dismayed by the yuppie present, disillusioned with a bumpy future, so the narrative goes, a bitter Gen-X retreated into ironic disengagement as a means of non-participatory coexistence with boomers and their domination of cultural and political landscape (Sconce, 2002: 355).

What the formalist approach facilitates is the filmic identification of the local and the global, the national and the international, the universal and the specific. Far from being contradictory terms as often asserted, this template of opposites facilitates the opening up of readings that account for the unusual 'mid-Atlantic' position Ireland finds itself in. Both *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* display structural similarities to the new American 'smart' film.

Parallels between *Accelerator* and American 'smart' films are evident in the nihilistic approach to characterisation yet this film reveals a strong, clear local resonance as evidenced in its aesthetics of the urban milieu which the characters inhabit. The foregrounding of urban, working class youth culture echoes the ideological project of many 1st wave films. *Disco Pigs* on the other hand, while suggesting nihilistic

tendencies of its main characters, adopts a more redemptive outcome by the close of the film. Less local in its resonance, it draws on the traditions of storytelling from drama and literature in its exposition.

Finally, as a preliminary study this approach reveals the complexities embedded in contemporary Irish cinema, particularly in relation to their modes of address. Irish cinema is finding a new identity, asserting its voice from many directions by displaying the more widespread tensions within Irish culture, generated by the competing influences from 'Boston and Berlin'. While it could be argued that *Accelerator* displays alignments with British Social Realism and the road movie genre and *Disco Pigs* is closely linked to classical Hollywood, both films exhibit tensions between national and international approaches to narratology. Rather than using this as a stick to beat the 2nd wave with, these oppositional and parallel influences may offer the key to revealing what is at work in the evolution of contemporary Irish cinema. Chapter 5 will explore more closely how the local and the global can manifest along narrative lines by appropriating different levels of narrative complexity.

Far from cultivating a marginal film culture, Irish cinema remains in a tug of war between American and European influences. The project of the 2nd wave of Irish cinema, it can be argued, while less concerned with national issues and themes than the *condition humaine*, is the playing out of dual influences through its formalist address. What formal analysis therefore can highlight is the aesthetic style and structural influences that are shaping the 'new wave' and thus give some account of what has been happening in Irish cinema over the past ten years.

¹ These have been explored in the key debates of *Screen* in the late 1970s and 1980s, for example, Rosalind Coward, 'Class, "culture" and the social formation', *Screen* 18, 1, Spring 1977; Iain Chambers *et al.*, 'Marxism and Culture', *Screen*, 18.4, Winter 1977/78; Rosalind Coward, 'Response', *Screen* 18.4; Paul Willeman, 'Notes on subjectivity – on reading "Subjectivity under siege"', *Screen* 19, 1, Spring 1978; Colin McCabe, 'The discursive and ideological in film – notes on the conditions of political intervention', *Screen* 19, 4, Winter 1978/79.

² While this is a cultural studies approach, here I am referring to the extra-filmic experience of the audience.

³ However Kristin Thompson argues the opposite position that the notion of new Hollywood has been overstated and she calls for a reclaiming of classical narrative as the dominant form (Thompson, 1999).

⁴ Most cinemas in Ireland are owned by one group and therefore distribution of film is quite homogenous across the country. There are more cinema screens in Ireland now than there were ten years ago. However, the majority of screens can be deemed 'mainstream'. There were more outlets for 'art-house' films ten years ago even though there were less cinema screens. Having said that, recent initiatives by Bord Scannán na hÉireann have attempted to redress this by launching schemes to support the emergence of art-house cinema screens. Similarly the UGC cinema in Dublin's city centre has, in the past year, assigned one screen to art-house film, thus indicating a change in demand on behalf of audiences.

⁵ A discussion in the context of this thesis on the distribution scene of *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* has its limitations. What is most interesting about these two films is that they received a cinema distribution in Ireland and therefore had the opportunity to be 'judged' by a general audience. In terms of commercial success and box office receipts, *Accelerator* was clearly more successful. It opened strongly in eleven screens occupying Number 7 in the top ten films in Dublin that week (January 2001). The following week it moved to Number 4, a position only a handful of Irish films supported by Bord Scannán na hÉireann have occupied (*Intermission* and *Adam & Paul* are two examples). *Disco Pigs* occupied Number 7 in Dublin in its first week and Number 9 in its second. It took less than £50,000 in box office returns, a paltry sum compared to *Accelerator*'s £177,485. In crude economic terms this points to *Accelerator* as clearly more successful. However, *Disco Pigs* received a smaller distribution, confined to a 'semi-art-house' exhibition in Dublin's Screen Cinema at College Green. *Accelerator*, on the other hand, got a more mainstream distribution, reportedly hitting a nerve with audiences in the Tallaght multiplex, in particular. Tallaght is a suburb of Dublin containing a population of c. 100,000. Since its construction in the 1970s it has been dogged with many social problems such as high unemployment, drug abuse and poverty. The social problem of joy-riding would be a familiar occurrence in parts of this area. Short of an in-depth analysis of the distribution of these two films, which is beyond the scope of this study, the conclusion to be drawn from these figures does not say an awful lot. But what can be said is that there is an audience 'out there' for Irish film, that Irish people will go to films that are representational of their own society, that tell stories to themselves about themselves yet are told within a framework that is identified as more global and universal. What can be gleaned from the success of *Accelerator* in particular is that the audience is not homogenous, but is indeed fragmented and that the audience votes with their feet; they seek out films that resonate in some way with themselves.

⁶ There are clear literary references to *Great Expectations* (Brereton, 2002, forthcoming). This film has cross-genre references to films like *Badlands* (Terence Malick, 1973), *Bonnie & Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) among many others.

⁷ 2000/2001 saw an eclectic mix of Irish films to emerge, supported by Bord Scannán na hÉireann in terms of visual and narrative style and subject matter. While it is comparatively easy to cross-reference films with *Accelerator*, there are few films emerging at this time similar in either subject matter or style to *Disco Pigs*. At the same time, 2001 was a year of 'box office' success for films supported by the BSÉ, a point that will be explored later when looking at post-compositional factors.

⁸ The script of *Disco Pigs* was written by Enda Walsh and based on his play of the same name. While a comparison between the stage play and screenplay would be an interesting exercise and has generated some comment in the popular press, it is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice to mention that the most 'controversial' aspect of the comparison between the two works is the ending. Some critics have pointed to the more 'open-ended' text of the play that creates a much more avant-garde work in contrast to the 'closed' and 'unsatisfactory' ending of the screen-play. This chapter will argue that in

keeping true to the story-world created in the script and the character that was created, the conclusive ending is apt.

⁹ According to Ging 'there is widespread consensus that the figure of the New Lad was generated by the British men's magazine market and, more specifically, with the launch of *Loaded* magazine in 1994...laddism's aggressive but playful portrait of masculinity was quickly adopted across a wide range of media texts...[New Laddism embodies] ironic sexism, self-conscious individualism and unreconstructed masculinity espoused by 'the lad credo' (2004: 123)'.

¹⁰ At this time many commentators were demanding that Irish films address contemporary issues and reject the 1950s and the Troubles as dominant subject matter. See Linehan in *Journal of Historical Film & Television*, 1999.

¹¹ See Alan Williams (Ed.), *Film and Nationalism*, NJ, Rutgers, 2002, for a current discussion on this discourse.

¹² The relationship between global and local is taking precedence over national suggesting a post-national state. The position Ireland finds itself in the new millennium is no different to any other European nation-state although for Ireland, the changes have come about much later. While Ireland (or any country for that matter) could not define itself exclusively in national terms due to the proliferation of external influences for many decades, its effect on Ireland is much more recent. It is within this context that the search for a new discourse on Irish cinema takes place.

¹³ An example of character over plot is *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1944). A plot analysis of this film breaks down event by event to reveal a 'hermetically sealed' world. An analysis of character is what has given Film Studies a subject to explore at a high level of extra-textuality. It is the character of Mildred that presents discourse for a series of diverse schools - narrative theory; feminist theory; psychoanalytic theory; genre theory. The discussion of plot remains the same, 'what is visibly and audibly before us on the screen' whereas the discussion of character is what makes the discourse complex and exciting. This example is just one of thousands that can be offered.

¹⁴ Vinny Murphy, like other directors of the 2nd wave (namely Gerry Stembridge, *About Adam*), was reacting to the perceived notions of what Irish film is, a preoccupation with the 1950s, the Catholic Church and the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. In an interview in *The Sunday Independent* (4 July 1999) Vinny Murphy says '*Accelerator* doesn't sound like an Irish film, but is actually more Irish than anything.' In an interview with Ted Sheehy in *Film Ireland*, Issue 75, April/May 2000, Murphy said that what drove him in making this film was 'kicking against other Irish films. The 1950s thing?...I'm not a fan. All that sexual guilt, it doesn't exist in that form anymore.'

¹⁵ There are many examples of 'social realism' films that display characters who are externally mobilised but also display an emotional depth or interiority, for example, British Social Realism (1950s/1960s) and Italian Neorealism (1940s/1950s). While films of these movements can explore characters at the level of internal focalisation, their motivations are often explained as outside of their own control.

¹⁶ This thesis has argued consistently that the same attention has not been given to 2nd wave films as was given to 1st wave films by the *academe* principally because the former does not lend itself to scrutiny along the lines of national identity. This thesis argues that contemporary Irish screenwriters are less concerned with national issues than their 1st wave counter-parts. Instead, the stories emerging while located locally, strive for a more universal address.

¹⁷ In *Shane* (George Stevens, 1952) the main character also fights the last battle. While he does not appear outwardly to have changed or grown in character, the purpose of the narrative is to save the other people. This type of approach is not at work within *Accelerator*.

¹⁸ <http://indigo.ie/~obrienh/acc.htm>

¹⁹ They explore other structures such as ironic three-act structure (*Chinatown*, Roman Polanski 1974); two-act structure (*She's Gotta Have it*, Spike Lee 1986); One act structure (*Mean Streets*, Martin Scorsese 1973; *Working Girls*, Lizzie Borden 1986).

²⁰ In *Ourselves Alone* (Donald Taylor Black, 1996), a documentary commissioned to celebrate one hundred years of film, both Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan elaborate on issues national. While Jim Sheridan clearly links cinema to the wider universal field of dramatic structure, Jordan acknowledges that the national can be important but at a personal level, the act of filmmaking he argues is ultimately an international pursuit and thus defined that way.

²¹ Clearly a reference to Heathcliffe and Cathy in *Great Expectations*.

²² John Hill has written on the fatalism of Irish male characters and their relationship with violence, in particular the film *Odd Man Out*. While he sees this as a perpetuation of the myth of atavism (Gibbons *et al*, 1987) the approach adopted in *Disco Pigs* could refer extra- and intra-textually to a trend identified by Geoffrey Sconce in American 'smart movies'. Debbie Ging states that 'the proliferation

of laddish representations of men in cinema and the ostensibly apolitical, disaffected and 'fucked by fate' attitudes they exhibit may indicate more than a resurgence of traditional masculinity or a new era marked by apathy and individualism' (Ging, 2004: 130).

²³ See Zucher, 2001 (unpublished) for a more detailed discussion of the voice over in *The Butcher Boy*.

²⁴ There is the potential in this film for a sociological reading along the lines of the growing and disturbing male suicide rates in Ireland as a consequence of changing society, a reading which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁵ *Disco Pigs* took less than IR£50,000 in box office returns in Ireland. *Accelerator* took IR£177, 485 and was particularly successful in the west Dublin suburb of Tallaght. This could be due to the fact that the writer/director was well-known in the area having been involved in youth theatre workshops. Or Tallaght's reputation as a location for 'joy-riding', in the 1980s in particular may account for the disproportionate interest in this film in this area.

²⁶ A film dealing with the issue of suicide more explicitly is *On the Edge* (John Carney, 2002). Not a BSE film and thus beyond the parameters demarcated by this study, it is interesting nonetheless in a wider 'Irish cinema' context. John Carney along with Tom Hall is credited with writing/directing some of the few art-house movies of this time (*November Afternoon*; *Park*) and it was from the 'success' of these films that he became a 'director-for-hire' on the Hollywood financed film *On the Edge*. In a talk to students at IADT in 2003, he details the contrasting experience of working on a small-budget film such as *November Afternoon* where you maintain more creative control compared to the bigger foreign budget of *On the Edge*, where your autonomy is greatly reduced because you are part of a larger infrastructural machine, bringing with it many benefits but also some sacrifices. Echoing statements by Cathal Black quoted elsewhere, it would appear that within a national cinema there is space for both approaches to co-exist. It is not just a matter of smaller-budget/more autonomy and bigger-budget/less control but rather a creative and professional choice that directors can exercise in a multi-faceted film industry.

²⁷ <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/film/interviews/story.jsp?story=505030> Accessed 4.10.2004

²⁸ According to these definitions, *Disco Pigs* could be seen as more traditional in structure and more closely aligned to classical narrative.

²⁹ Debbie Ging makes pertinent observations about this film when she states '*Intermission* is perhaps more interesting when read not as a straightforward tale of male (mis)adventure but rather in terms of its exploration of diverse masculinities in crisis and its conscious acknowledgement of macho excess' (Ging, 2004: 129).

³⁰ It could also signal a desire to put distance between old and new Ireland.

³¹ This theme will be explored further in the next chapter when a series of films are examined in relation to this topic.

³² It is useful to refer here to another multi-protagonist, episodic film produced around this time. *Separation Anxiety* (Mark Staunton, 1997) is a romantic comedy 'set in the context of the recently-introduced legislation allowing divorce in Ireland' (Rockett, 2003: 43). This summary suggests the main obstacle to a narrative coherence that could have ensured a more favourable reception. Driven 'ideologically' to tell a story in 'divorce Ireland' it falls between two stools by neither being an ironic tale that engages at a certain level nor a sociological statement of contemporary Ireland. Rather than castigating the film for its narrative flaws, it is more useful to view this film within the context of an evolving cinema that tests new narrative styles while trying to shake off old one.

³³ *Adam and Paul* was made on a tiny budget of 400,000 euros and was part of Bord Scannán na hÉireann's micro budget scheme, a scheme introduced following the dominance of the medium – budget film over the previous ten year period. The significance of the budget is that the film was both a critical and commercial success despite the meagre budget.

³⁴ Parallels have been drawn between this film, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Hollywood's *Laurel and Hardy*. In both cases, the dark side of Hollywood's slap stick comedy is evoked.

CHAPTER FOUR

Negotiating Narrative Coherence through Internal and External Struggles: *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland; A Man of No Importance, About Adam and When Brendan met Trudy*

INTRODUCTION

I would say that politics, topicality and prosaic realism have generally been over-valued in Irish cinema, and they threaten to keep that cinema from making its next creative leap. To put that another way, works of genre or imagination (ghost stories, romances, action films, say) here tend to be viewed as *inherently* commercial, i.e. frivolous, while realistic depictions are seen as *inherently* serious, worthy, artistic. That “inherently”...points straight into a cul de sac, for several reasons: It obliges artists to obey arbitrary limits; it sets up barriers against various kinds or experimentation. (Cheshire, 2001).¹

Contrary to some writers on contemporary Irish Cinema (Ging, 2002; Linehan, 1999; Quinn, 2004) who tend to view the 2nd wave of Irish filmmaking as the poor relation, at the level of both content and form to its more radical predecessor the 1st wave, this chapter argues that the past ten years has demonstrated a challenging period for Irish filmmakers who have had to ‘swim with the sharks’ of universal storytelling in film form. This has been achieved without the comfort of an art movement that sometimes places form over content in a hierarchy of values and is cushioned by a *ciné-literate* audience willing to engage at an intellectual level with the text.² Unlike the work of Joe Comerford, Cathal Black and Pat Murphy who worked within an avant-garde movement which by its definition is focused and limited in a challenging and experimental way, recent Irish directors have embraced the medium of film from a global perspective to tell stories that appeal to a wide-ranging audience at home and abroad, to varying degrees of critical and commercial acclaim. Unconstrained by notions of national identity and preoccupations around what it means to be ‘Irish’, the medium of film in Ireland is now employed to tell *human* stories while clearly rooted to a particular local and cultural milieu.³ While this has been criticised pejoratively for

constructing 'globally digestible narratives' (Ging, 2002) and 'slowing down, stopping and then retarding the development of an aesthetic' (Joe Comerford, 2004: 23) the potential in the films produced over the past ten years has been understated and undervalued. In some cases these films have addressed themes and issues of cultural significance (*Dancing at Lughnasa*, Pat O'Connor 1998; *A Love Divided*, Syd MacCartney 1998) while in many other instances they have deliberately rejected this style of filmmaking that centres on the 'Irishness' of a particular story (*Park*, John Carney & Tom Hall 1999; *I Went Down*, 1997; *Accelerator*, 1999; *About Adam*, Gerry Stembridge 2000; *When Brendan met Trudy*, Kieron J. Walsh 2001). Aware of their positioning within Irish film, many contemporary film directors (Dudi Appleton, Vinny Murphy, Damian O'Donnell, Gerry Stembridge) have declared that their narrative approach is partly an attempt to shake off the legacy left by this 1st wave.⁴ Rather than dismissing outright this volume of cultural matter because it does not address, through its narrative structure, the margins of Irish society, this chapter seeks to explore the level of story-world a selection of these films create. In doing so this chapter addresses some of the concerns that contemporary critics have raised and responds to the dual tensions of local and global features that others have overlooked, principally because the parameters of the discourse has tended to remain the same (national identity) while the praxis within the medium has shifted in new directions.⁵ Hence, this chapter proffers a formal analysis that will shed light on the films themselves but also the wider discourse that is shaping the responses to new Irish cinema.

The work of the 1st wave of filmmakers was situated in a particular time and place of cultural activity that took its influences from European art cinema and the American avant-garde. It appropriated the form and style of Third Cinema in its aesthetic (McLoone, 2000: 165) and, as Debbie Ging points out, through its formal address interrogated many aspects of contemporary Irish society. Furthermore, it was an era that was characterised by oppositional practice without the back up of a state-supported infrastructure, ironically leading many of the 1st wave film producers to search for funding outside Ireland, from Britain in particular. The political landscape, both nationally and internationally was significantly different then than it is at present with key historical signifiers transforming between the end of 1st wave (1987) and the commencement of 2nd wave (1993). The Cold War between east and west concluded

and the Eastern bloc collapsed while political violence was no longer an acceptable method of resolving the 'national question' in Ireland. The economy in Ireland progressed from one of recession to boom, solving unemployment and emigration as two of the most serious social problems that dogged Irish society for decades.

Given the shifts globally and locally that have emerged since the 1970s and 1980s, the context for filmmaking and storytelling in Ireland is radically different. Not only has the political, cultural and social landscape been altered significantly, the world of cinema has moved in new directions, where dichotomies between mainstream and art-house cinema are less defined and the borders more blurred. Godfrey Cheshire identifies Irish cinema as 'nearing a crossroads that will determine whether it simply continues to develop as an industry and cultural project or [grow] as an art' (Cheshire, 2001). Citing Italian Neorealism as an example, he argues that the great works of Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti and Bertolucci were allowed to emerge by embracing the potential of the medium to tell local stories that resonate globally yet at the same time remaining a product of their native Italy.⁶

That leap happened because the filmmakers didn't allow themselves to be shackled to the initial paradigm; they shifted their focus from "Italy" to "cinema" without at all abandoning the former. (Ibid.)

What this chapter, therefore, proposes is taking the text, the narrative and the story-world created as the focus of analysis to reveal how contemporary Irish cinema relates to the essence of the medium of film in a universal, global way while exploring at the level of style and structure what is culturally specific or local. So rather than offering a tautological response to recent writings on Irish cinema (Ging, 2002; McLoone, 2000; Pettitt, 2000), this chapter proffers an approach that addresses the filmic by teasing out the tensions between the universal and the local. By taking the text as the focus of study and a selection of contemporary Irish films, what is presented is a new approach that seeks to avoid the traps of essentialism.

CULTURAL SHIFTS

The election of Mary Robinson as President of Ireland in 1990 is generally viewed as heralding in a new age 'that would tell new stories'. In "Remembering Ireland's

Architecture of Containment: “Telling” Stories in *The Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*”, James M. Smith points out that this time was characterised by a ‘hunger for change and a renegotiation of Irish identity’ and a re-imagining of Ireland’s foundational narratives, advocated by Richard Kearney in *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture and Philosophy* (Kearney, 1997). If stories emerging in this post-Robinson era signal a transformation towards a post-national society, then these narratives warrant further investigation. Given that the discourse around national identity has contributed little to the analysis of film since the emergence of this new age⁷, maybe it is timely to reconfigure the framework in the direction of post-nationalism. A discussion of *A Man of No Importance* (Suri Krishnama, 1994), *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (Dudi Appleton, 2000), *About Adam* (Gerry Stembridge, 2000) and *When Brendan met Trudy* (Kieron J. Walsh, 2000) will reclaim the 2nd wave as worthy of close analysis and examination albeit in a new way. While *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* have been recognised for their deliberate attempts to create a distance between the old nativist, inward looking Ireland that prevailed since the foundation of the state and was carefully crafted by Eamonn de Valera and the Catholic Church, this chapter will argue that *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* demonstrate a maturity of style that is characteristic of a developing and advancing society in European and global terms and consequently less concerned with issues *national*.

One of the reasons for choosing these four films at this point in my thesis is that they represent what is happening as the new millennium dawned at the level of filmmaking and discourse while at the same time evoking key cultural tensions within society. *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* have, in general, been welcomed as a positive development within Irish cinema at the level of style and representation. Debbie Ging (2002: 177-195) regards *When Brendan met Trudy* as ‘a far more self-conscious attempt to break into a modern narrative tradition’ while *About Adam* is described as ‘guilt-free sex, about young people who are fairly happy in their lives and are free of certain moral imperatives’.⁸ Gerry Stembridge, writer/director says ‘I’d like to think the film is political in that sense, like films by some of the younger directors coming up now, free of constant introspection of what a terrible country this is. Free of introspection about Irishness’ (Ibid.)⁹, thus echoing the position that Vinny Murphy espoused after the release of his film *Accelerator*. In their attempts to put

distance between the old and new Ireland through the stories they tell and the visual style they adopt, these directors are also actively and self-consciously putting distance between the 1st and 2nd wave of filmmaking. While the 1st wave interrogated aspects of traditional Ireland, the 2nd wave appears to be engaging with what is deemed 'modern Ireland'.¹⁰

Ciaran Carty¹¹ in his review of *About Adam* says that 'it's the first movie to celebrate an evolving metropolitan culture that believes in itself and couldn't care less what the neighbours think anymore'. Gerry Stembridge¹² further backs this up by saying 'it is celebrating a city that I have lived in for over twenty years and love living in and I have often wondered why it is not depicted in the way that I see it. I wanted it to be full of freshness and charm and affection and make people feel good about living here.' While these statements can only be taken at face-value and must be viewed within the context of the publicity machine of the film production and distribution process, if they do not accurately represent the motivation of the film it can be assumed that they say something about the perceived audience for the film, as it is in this direction that these comments are directed. These comments suggest therefore that the film is directed at an audience who will probably subscribe to the imagined construction of Dublin in the film, either as 'reality' or 'utopia' which is captured at a particular moment in the 1990s when the 'Celtic Tiger' economy was 'roaring'.¹³

What is interesting about commentary on *When Brendan met Trudy* and *About Adam* is that in the rush to embrace what is seen as the new Ireland (post-nationalist?) critics and commentators alike have failed to interrogate the narrative at a deeper level to reveal the inherent tensions in many of their own statements. Both Vinny Murphy and Gerry Stembridge suggest an adherence to social realism whereas they clearly work in fantasy mode, particularly in the case of the latter. On the other hand, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* have received a lukewarm at best and often negative reception from critics while the *academe* has remained deafeningly silent on these two films. Dudi Appleton, director of *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* points out that the criticism waged against his film is primarily concerned with the portrayal of the 12th of July bonfire whereby it was seen to stretch credibility in its visual representation. Rather than presenting a Garvaghy Road-like march characterised by sectarian divide, anger and aggression, the bonfire scene in this film

is modern, celebratory and good-humoured, satirical and fantastical. Appleton is bemused when he places this criticism in the context of the film itself and says that nobody seems to find the basic premise of the film stretching credibility (a man who has the power to impregnate even the most infertile with one sexual encounter) yet commentators are troubled with how the 12th of July celebrations are depicted. While the critics variously describe the film as ‘a send up of the proverbial Irish bachelor’¹⁴ or criticise it for not ‘treating the issue of infertility with more seriousness’¹⁵, they fail to read it as a multi-layered narrative. For Appleton (who grew up in the Jewish community in Belfast of Irish and Israeli parents) the film is about challenging preconceptions. He embraced the opportunity to tell a universal story yet firmly rooted it in a local setting in post-ceasefire Ireland.¹⁶

Like *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, *A Man of No Importance* while generating a positive response failed to arouse any level of debate. Geoffrey Macnab in *Sight and Sound* describes the film as ‘portraying its little corner of 60s Dublin as a picture postcard community, full of loveable eccentrics’¹⁷ while Paul Power in *Film Ireland* sees it as a film that is ‘not given enough justice in its direction...the overall impression is of a film with the writer far more apparent.’¹⁸ Michael Dwyer in *The Irish Times*, in the closest scrutiny given to this film by the Press, says

But this was a time when “the love that dare not speak its name” was still considered unspeakable, and while the movie displays an affectionate and jovially nostalgic feel for the period, it eschews any predictable “rare auld times” trappings and further sets about exposing the bigotry and hypocrisy that lurked beneath the superficial bonhomie (*The Irish Times*, April 21, 1995: 15).

The critical responses to these films are significant. Clearly speaking in a new age, it suggests that these films need to be re-examined within a new framework. This chapter proffers such an examination by returning focus to the film form. In doing so, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* will be reclaimed as films that tell universal tales about aspects of humanity while echoing locally in a way that the critics and academics expect but often overlook, through a formalist examination. Conversely, this chapter will argue that the films which are embraced and interpreted as symbolising the ‘new Ireland’ as progressive and liberal (*About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*), often fail to resonate at a deeper level once the

surface is peeled back and consequently it will be argued that these films present a discourse that is rooted more to the past than the present. Not totally negating the discourse of national identity, this chapter steers the analytical direction off course slightly to move beyond national concerns but in doing so, this formalist address will shed light on aspects national that have been overlooked heretofore.

EVOLVING NARRATIVE FORMS

It's good, as the Stoics tell us, to have tools that are simple to understand and of a very limited number – so that we may locate and employ them on a moment's notice. I think the essential tools in any worthwhile endeavor are incredibly simple. And very difficult to master. The task of any artist is not to learn many, many techniques but to learn the most simple technique perfectly. In doing so, Stanislavsky told us, the difficult will become easy and the easy habitual, so that the habitual may become beautiful. (Mamet, 1994: 411).

In the last chapter, *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* facilitated a discussion that shed light on the plot versus character paradigm within the structure of narrative forms. It was argued that this approach revealed the varying psychological depths a character plunges to within the story-world thus illuminating the narrative strategies adopted in creating narrative coherence. Developing this approach further, it is proposed here to explore the internal and external levels of narrative construction thus revealing two dimensions of characterisation – what is termed interiority and exteriority. A common criticism of contemporary Irish film is that it fails to reflect what is going on in Irish society and comment on the major changes that have taken place in recent times, some protracted, others more sudden (Ging, 2004; Linehan, 1999; Quinn, 2004). While cultural studies and arguably more importantly sociological analysis tends to emphasise the representational nature of film to reveal what the stories tell us about ourselves and as a result has contributed enormously to debates within film studies, the other aspect of art that seeks to transcend 'reality' and instead reflect, comment and observe the essence of what it means to be human, often gets ignored. By developing the formalist approach further, this chapter appropriates four films that are clearly products of Ireland at a particular time and comment extra-textually in a local way but also are narrative structures that reveal the potential exploited by the writers and directors in illuminating on human nature. Inevitably this approach leads to a contradiction between what is socially and culturally constructed as individual and

that which is inherent or intrinsic to human nature. While not attempting to answer fundamental philosophical questions about humanity, through a formal address this chapter discusses the relationship between the local and the global, hence the cultural and the universal.

Selecting four Irish films, *A Man Of No Importance*, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* that signify key aspects of new Irish cinema this chapter will further develop the formalist thesis. All four films have a comic element, can be categorised as 'romance films' and play with the tropes of love, sex, masculinity, femininity, the public and the private, themes which will frame the textual analysis further in the chapter. These films also explore some of the issues that are central to the concerns of those involved in the national identity debate (Ging, 2002; McLoone, 2000), principally what do they reveal about the 'national psyche'?¹⁹ *A Man of No Importance* tells the story of Alfie Byrne (Albert Finney) who conceals his homosexuality in a sexually conservative Ireland of the 1960s. A bus conductor in Dublin's inner-city, he is a devoted *Wildean* who proposes to stage a play involving the local people on his bus route and in his community. *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* presents a comedy about a single man ironically called Eamonn Manly (Kris Marshall), a Catholic who offers an insemination service that guarantees pregnancy after his carnal attentions, once he has discovered his 'hyper-potency'. Initially just helping infertile couples he soon becomes central to the race between Catholics and Protestants to out-breed each other, a potential (comic and serious) trope within the power struggle of Northern Ireland but one rarely explored. *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* concern the more general themes of romantic love and relationships. While these films display similarities in their underlying ideological positioning with regard to Irish film, their main point of contrast is at the level of characterisation. Adam (Stuart Townsend) is confident and assured in his purpose, whereas Brendan (Peter MacDonald) is awkward and shy. Like Alfie, Brendan's character changes along the narrative trajectory while Adam's purpose is to bring change to those he encounters and gets involved with. Thus these films can be read beyond cultural boundaries as they explore key human themes, principally about love and sex.

Even though not a widely explored concern within film studies, all films enquire into some aspect of humanity that can transcend cultural boundaries. While some would argue that love is a socially constructed phenomenon invented by a 'group of Provençal poets at the end of the eleventh century' (Deleyton, 2003: 167), it is a concept and experience that is sufficiently widespread to be taken as an expression of the human condition. Even though Sergei Eisenstein subscribed to the James-Lange theory of emotion that 'we weep not because we are sad, we are sad because we weep' (Nordby & Hall, 1974: 93), his approach to formalism was intrinsically linked to human emotions, seeking to prove that dialectic montage gave rise to psychological and physiological responses. So while the discourse within Irish cinema has been restricted to representational analysis, the concerns about how the narrative works to evoke an emotional response is a concern of film studies dating back to Russian formalism and equally relevant now through the cognitive sciences. Combining Propp and Eisenstein with Bordwell and Branigan, this chapter further develops this approach.

Before examining each film separately, it is necessary to outline some basic methodological tools and explore some preconceptions that have underlined analysis of Irish film heretofore. In doing so, it will be useful to address some of the key writings on scriptwriting. When David Mamet says, 'a good writer gets better only by learning to *cut*, to remove the ornamental, the descriptive, the narrative, and *especially* the deeply felt and meaningful. What remains? The story remains' (Mamet, 1994: 346) he is emphasising the *story* as the primary communicative objective of the writer, and hence an object of study for the film analyst. According to Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Bord Scannán na hÉireann (2003-2005), 'it will always be about the story...there's no short cut for good development...Just because you're able to start the camera rolling doesn't make it a good film. You have to have content that invites passion'²⁰. The transcendental nature of narrative is difficult to explain as it concerns something as concrete yet as illusory as the term story. Theorising on creativity and craft poses the danger of falling into the *essentialist* trap as the principal critique of formalism is its reductionist approach to analysis. This study develops a methodology and proffers an approach to formalism that asserts itself as inductive. If writers concern themselves first and foremost with structure like any artist building something, surely theorists of the film form can also use this as a starting point, even

if their final objective varies widely. For this reason, Mamet's definition of screenwriting as a 'craft based on logic' is pertinent. This logic is based on the 'assiduous application of several basic questions' (Mamet, 1994). These are applied to the goal-oriented main character that is a regular feature of the mainstream narrative structure.

If you aren't telling a story, moving from one image to another, the images have to be more and more 'interesting' per se. If you *are* telling a story, then the human mind, as it's working along with you, is perceiving your thrust, both consciously and, more importantly, subconsciously. The audience members are going to go along with that story and will require neither inducement, in the form of visual extravagance, nor explanation, in the form of narration.' (Mamet, 1994: 384).

According to most writers on scriptwriting (Altunen, 2004; Ballon, 1995; Dancyger, 2001; Mamet, 1994; McKee, 1999; Vogler, 1999) basic rules are necessary to developing the craft and creating something; they may vary slightly but as outlined in the last chapter, narratives bear a common structural foundation. Mamet uses counterculture architecture in the 1960s as a comparative example whereby the design did not begin with the purpose of the building but rather with how the architect 'felt'. What transpired was a series of buildings that eventually fell down because they failed to use doors and windows functionally, the purpose for which they had been invented for in the first instance. While this may appear an obvious and simple point, it is worth highlighting the impasse between theory and practice when the abstract fails to relate to the concrete. This study proposes that the first stage in film analysis is at the level of function and structure. In analysing a film along the lines of character, plot, genre, voice and narrative, the level of skill and craft of the writer and director can be established. Avoiding reductionism depends on the method of application. The Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi demonstrated that the architecture can be visually extravagant yet still stick to the principle rules. Similarly as has been demonstrated in cinema for more than one hundred years, the mainstream can be functional and stylistic. This chapter presents a case for mainstream narrative carving out a space that can still negotiate the global and the local within a post-nationalist and post-modern environment.

Further, a common approach employed by critics of Irish cinema is to categorise film as either Hollywood or European Art cinema in a pejorative way, whereby the former

is assumed to be artistically, aesthetically and narratively inferior to the latter. This is where the concept of universality can be usefully appropriated. A cursory glance at the history of Hollywood will reveal its constantly changing narrative face as influences move back and forth across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. To give 'Hollywood' monolithic status is to ignore the evolution of cinema and narrative history and the major changes in the past thirty years since the demise of the studio system. Ken Dancyger in *Global Scriptwriting* (2002) has updated his own scriptwriting manual to embrace these changes and offers a useful summary of the various categories. While his categorisation is highly contentious and doesn't account for the deeper levels of emotional engagement that characterises cinema, it is a useful exercise in illustrating that '[e]very national cinema exists with the impulse to appeal to the mainstream (the goal of entertainment), as well as a set of artistic goals (parallel to those of the independent film), all in the context of the particulars of the culture in which the films are made' (Dancyger, 2002: 114).²¹

In Europe in particular there is a connection between the theory and practice of film narrative. Eisenstein wrote and made films in accord with those theoretical ideas, as did Pudovkin and Vertov... The impulse to think about film narrative and to experiment with those ideas gave the work an exciting quality that was singularly absent from the Hollywood film.' (Dancyger, 2002: 115).

While there is a clear dichotomy between European cinema and Hollywood under the studio system, the lines of demarcation have been blurring since the 1960s and 1970s (Dancyger, 2001), something that critics often ignore in their attempts to position national cinema in opposition to mainstream Hollywood narratives. In examining recent trends in narrative models of the past thirty years, one may reveal a space whereby the discussion of national cinemas can take place in a new light. As Dancyger says, recent narrative models do not really fit into the Hollywood model, 'although some of them have been produced in Hollywood. Nor do they fit into the independent model or the national model, although some of them have been produced independently or in Europe or Asia' (Dancyger, 2002: 127).

What has happened, he argues, is that these new models have emerged as a result of constantly searching for 'novelty in an essentially conservative medium' (Ibid). The tension between satisfying a large audience by fulfilling expectations yet surprising

them with something new, while being at the core of these developments, is not a recent phenomenon; this underlying structure has been a principal of genre filmmaking since the Studio System. What is central to these new narratives, according to Dancyger is the emergence of the non-verbal at the expense of the verbal and thus the scripts are more a product of the individual writer's world view than a product that seeks to meet industry demands. These changes have happened over a long period once the break-up of the Studio System took effect: the occupation of scriptwriting has changed from factory-like under the studio system to an isolated pursuit comparable to writing in other media. The 1st wave writers and directors worked in this way also and in the first part of the 1990s this approach to the occupation continued. However this method is set to change once again as the script development process becomes more central to scriptwriting, as outlined in Chapter 1. What Dancyger suggests in his re-categorisation of narrative echoes what Godfrey Cheshire suggested to the Galway Film Fleadh audience in 2001 - that Irish film is entering a new phase.²² It is this 'new phase' that this chapter seeks to elucidate.

So while Mamet sees the medium of film as simply a mode of expression for storytelling with no space for preaching, Dancyger advances the 'ascent of voice' as one of the primary changes in narrative over the past twenty years, whereby the writer and director's *world view* is given scope for expression.²³ Thus the process is constantly evolving and the medium forever changing. While there was a move away from the writers' pool of Hollywood to the *auteur* approach in the 1960s and 1970s, the increasing involvement of script editors and script doctors suggests that the collaborative nature of the filmmaking process is spilling back into the writing stage, while still incorporating the individual, artistic worldview.

For the longest time, particularly in the United States, the film was considered an entertainment medium and consequently the level of ambition of its storytellers was circumscribed by their perception of the medium. Chaplin and Welles are exceptions. Today there are far fewer exceptions, and consequently there are far more storytellers who view character and structure as a means to express their own views, particularly about society and power in that society. (Dancyger, 2002: 153).

The ascent of voice, therefore, is not just an American trait but one that surfaces in many national cinemas. What this suggests is a blurring of the lines of demarcation between Hollywood cinemas and 'alternatives', thus putting the context of

contemporary Irish cinema in a new light. Rather than criticising the 2nd wave for being artistically and thematically conservative, there is now space to examine what is at work within a broader universal framework that sees global narratives negotiating local features within a general framework.

When Bordwell says that narratives are amplifications of 'simple statements', he is effectively stating that the story behind most films can be summarised in a sentence or two. The process of gathering finance for film production progresses from the simple to the complex. The stages of production start from an initial idea (synopsis) to final screen version (film) with the treatment, final script and shooting script acting as clearly defined and institutionally accepted stages in between. For this reason, any analysis of film ought to start with the analysis of the basic form. The basic form refers to the structure that the writer/director employs to tell his/her story.

In applying such an analysis to the four films being investigated in this chapter, it will be necessary to start with some key definitions. As stated in the last chapter David Bordwell offers some clear statements of meaning for film narration. At its most fundamental, he describes a narrative as a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space (Bordwell, 1990: 55). The plotting of the story is how the story is told and is everything perceived materially in a visible and audible way by the viewer. While the story and plot overlap at a central point, the plot contains extra-diegetic material while the story embodies non-depicted, inferred events.

From the perceiver's standpoint, things look somewhat different. All we have before us is the plot – the arrangement of material in the film as it stands. We create the story in our minds on the basis of cues in the plot. (Ibid: 57)

Viewers generally have to make inferences about story space, time and action that are not always explicit in the film. Watching a film, therefore, is an active and interactive process. The audience ought to be familiar with the range of devices a writer/director can employ and in addressing an audience (if this is the intended function) the writer/director must be aware of those devices an audience is expected to decode. This clearly has implications for the type of story constructed and the narrative devices selected which can range from conventional (unidirectional and chronological) to unconventional (episodic and anachronous). To suggest a monolithic appropriation of

one narrative style across a 'national cinema' therefore, is to ignore the artistic and formal possibilities in contemporary narrative. Thus it is a worthwhile exercise to return to basics in assessing the foundations of individual films and from those appraise the deviations and digressions.

In the last chapter the plot/character divide was appropriated to shed light on the narrative strategies of *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs*. In this chapter these aspects of narrative construction are less segregated and instead the reading will reveal their entwined nature and how this determines the nature of the story-world constructed. Whereas the last chapter separated character and plot as a formal exercise, this chapter through a Proppian analysis unites them. While Propp argues that his 'functions' (of which he isolates thirty-one in the morphology of the Russian folk-tale), must be defined independently of the characters who perform them (Propp, 1968: 68) principally because a character can perform more than one function and a function can be performed by more than one character, he views the functions as the basic elements of the tale, 'those elements upon which the course of action is built' (Propp, 1968: 71). This reading of Propp suggests he adopts a similar position to Aristotle whereby plot is 'everything'. However, by describing the dramatic persona he gives a role to the character previously negated through absent reference. In Propp's analysis the spheres of action (of which there are seven) are distributed among characters and thus while the characters are performing actions, they do so by employing attributes – 'external qualities such as age, sex, status, external appearance, peculiarities of this appearance, and so forth' (Propp, 1968: 87).

By integrating character and plot through the performance of functions within spheres of action, Propp offers a tool to read structure. The character thus relates to the action through a combination of exterior attributes and interior qualities. How the writers and directors draw the characters into the fabric of their narrative reveals the function of the story elements, whether they operate primarily at the level of interiority, exteriority or a combination of both. The relationship between the two levels will be assessed in each of the four films under scrutiny in this chapter as a way of assessing the narrative structure. Ken Dancyger's integration of plot and character therefore is useful here: foreground story refers to the *plot* whereas the character layer is Dancyger's background story (Dancyger, 2001: 9) with character functioning at an

interior and exterior level. Edward Dmytryk in *On Screen Directing* (1984) goes further when he states that 'the characters should always be the chief concern. If they are interesting and fully developed, the plot often comes quite easily' (Dmytryk, 1984: 5). Echoing Propp he says that it 'is commonly accepted that the number of plots is extremely limited' suggesting that the variety of character is almost infinite given the proliferation of the narrative form through space and time. It is this aspect of narrative that is central to the analysis in this chapter.

Thus two key aspects of narration will be examined through Branigan's theory of focalisation, voice and narrator. Central to this level of examination is character, and how the voice of character is positioned in the narrative. Inextricably linked to character is the level of plot detail executed and central to plot and character are foreground and background narratives. Breaking down the story-world constructed in *A Man of No Importance*, *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* at this level will reveal the level and type of engagement the narrative facilitates. Given that form and content are inextricably linked in film narration, this level of analysis will reveal different layers of story construction. These dimensions in turn will indicate where the audience is being steered at the level of emotional involvement and what the consequences are for the negotiation of a universal story that also resonates locally.

SEX VERSUS LOVE

Romantic comedy is devotedly urban. Its milieu is the city. It loves the night-life, the high-rise, the dance floor. Its fated couples rent designer apartments, wear high fashion, flick through lifestyle magazines, and bump into each other at nightspots. The city buzz is background noise for romantic comedy's rapid-fire conversation on the dialectic of sex.²⁴

In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy (Frye, 1957: 186).

Central to this analysis is an examination of the story-world created in each film formally within the mythic structure of romantic comedy, what purpose the narrative thematically serves and how this is achieved. In applying a formal examination of narrative structure and story-world, the multi-layered narrative of *The Most Fertile*

Man in Ireland and *A Man of No Importance* will be revealed. By looking at the dual tensions between internal and external focalisation of the characters, the level of craft realised in each production will be illuminated. This method opens up the analysis to focus on a new discourse that centres formalism as the *modus operandi* and accordingly rescue these two films from academic oblivion.

According to Aristotle's *Poetics* the fundamental building blocks of drama are tension and conflict which evoke pity and fear leading to *catharsis*: one way this process is realised is through the playing out of opposites – pitting oppositional characters against each other or playing out opposite themes until one supplants the other, traditionally the opposites of good and evil. In examining each film, I propose to look at how the form and content of these films plays out oppositional states in order to realise conflict. Central to my discussion will be an examination of the consequences for the story-world based on these conflicts of opposites.

The conflict between the search for love and sexual gratification manifests itself at some level in each of these films. The internal struggle of Eamonn in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* is his love for Rosie (Kathy Keira Clarke) who works in the nearby funeral parlour. His search for love is contrasted with the world around him which is superficially concerned with sexual gratification as expressed through the visual iconography (dating agency, the love-themed posters, graffiti and wall murals) and further complicated by his Catholic state and her Protestant allegiance. In the hierarchy of values expressed, love is clearly superior to sex. Eamonn, the central protagonist is portrayed as *different* to the 'standard male'; he is still a virgin in contrast to his macho brother and his mother is concerned that he doesn't have a girlfriend. As he says himself 'just because I'm not chasing skirt doesn't mean I'm a homosexual. I'm looking for love'. This theme is echoed in *A Man Of No Importance* where sex and love are clearly distinguished as separate and not necessarily linked. After Alfie has discovered Ms. Rice (Tara Fitzgerald) having sex with a stranger, he is visibly distressed. It is Adele who points out to him that sometimes sex and love have nothing to do with each other. The central conflict in *A Man of No Importance* is Alfie's awakening sexuality in which he is required to recognise his homosexuality and hence allow its expression, thus proceeding from the private to the public domain.

Alongside this development he moves from his conservative and naive disposition towards sex, accepting that sex and love are not necessarily the same thing.

The depiction and exploration of sex and love as tropes expressed in these films, and in *Intermission*, *Goldfish Memory*, *Separation Anxiety* among others, displays a shift in 2nd wave films from the fixed meta-narratives that linked the portrayal of sex to guilt, religion and moral ethics (*Hush-a-bye Baby*, Margo Harkin 1989; *December Bride*, Taddeus O'Sullivan 1990; *The Playboys*, Gillies McKinnon 1992). When the trope shifts to an exploration defined by a framework of humanity rather than national identity, there is a release from dominant meta-narratives and restrictive meanings. In this chapter it is argued that by appropriating a structure that seeks to address beyond limiting cultural and national borders, not only is there potential for the *story* to change but also the point of address. Consequently, recent Irish film has been less concerned with the links between the individual and religious or national norms and instead focuses on the 'human' as motivator. Through their exploration of the tensions between sex and love, these films move from one position to another where sex is acknowledged as having dual functions: in the case of *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* it is seen as a means to procreate but can also be an expression of love that has nothing to do with sexual reproduction. The narrative trajectory of this theme culminates in the final scene whereby the only future for Eamonn and Rosie is for him to have a vasectomy; this will secure their love with the by-product being an end to procreation. In its own way, this film signals a clear move away from the traditional, nativist position of Catholic Ireland, whereby sexual gratification was linked to guilt and the portrayal of sexual intercourse outside of wed-lock was tied up with 'fear of pregnancy' tales, in the direction of a post-national discourse that extends its address beyond cultural boundaries.

Similarly in *A Man of No Importance* (See Figure 1), the narrative moves forward at two levels: at the level of exterior struggle Alfie is attempting to stage a production of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* in a society that is closed, inward looking and censorious. This is matched by the interior struggle of his awakening sexuality. Figure 1 illustrates the two lines of narrative action – interior and exterior character engagement displaying the complexity of character function within this film. Exterior action refers to plot details that perform external actions of the characters. The interior

action is where the character, through internal focalisation (such as ‘the look’ or voice-over) reveals an inner thought or feeling. Unlike *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* these interior and exterior struggles progress in tandem to present a story-world that is structured around dual conflict. Consequently, this presents more narrative space to explore the story from the individual’s perspective (universal) and the community or society with which they are attached (the local), thus commenting at two levels, through individual voice and narrator.

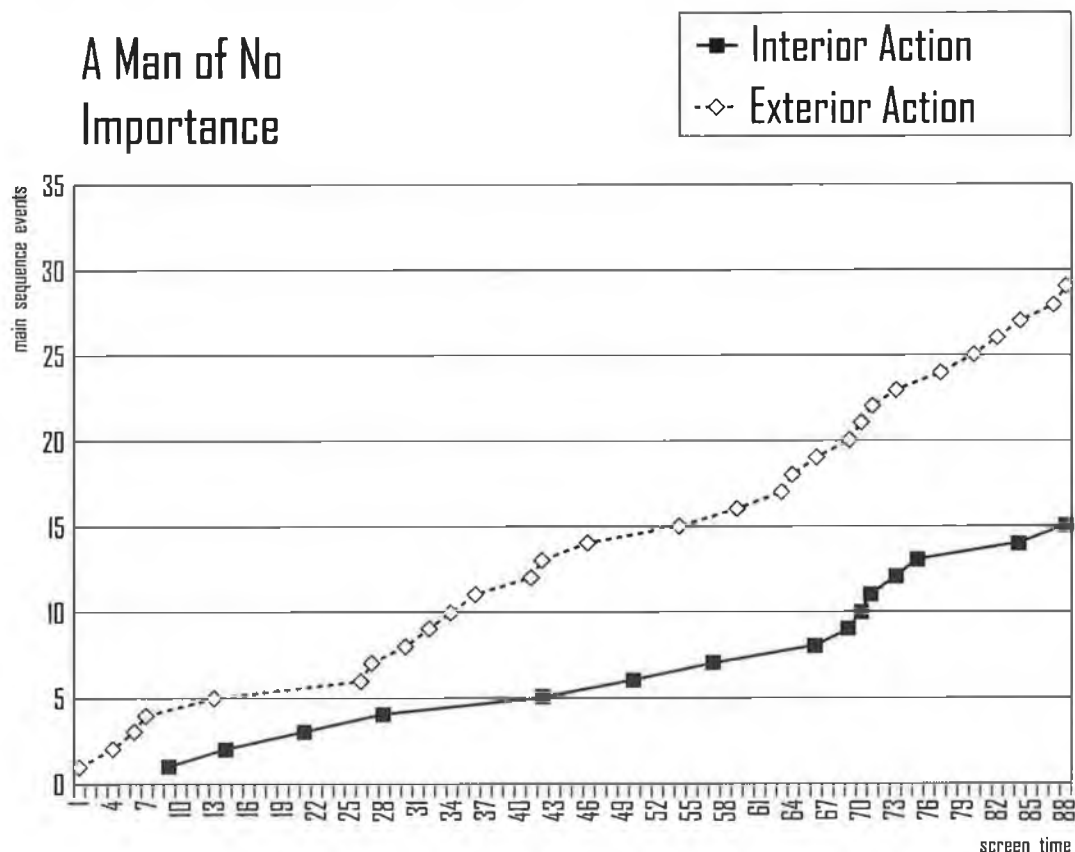


Figure 1 – Interior and Exterior lines of action in *A Man of No Importance*

On the other hand, *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* appear to operate principally at one level, that of narrator (See Figures 3 & 4). In contrast to *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance*, Figures 3 and 4 reveal two narratives that are principally externally focalized. Because there is little revelation of the interior aspect of the characters, the narrative trajectory as depicted in Figures 3 and 4 reveal stories that rely on what the characters ‘say and do’ rather than demonstrating them as ‘seeing and hearing’, manifesting in a dominance of exterior action and little interweaving between internal and external characterisation. One of the consequences for the narrative experience is the absence of psychologically complex characters. This is revealed through focalisation.

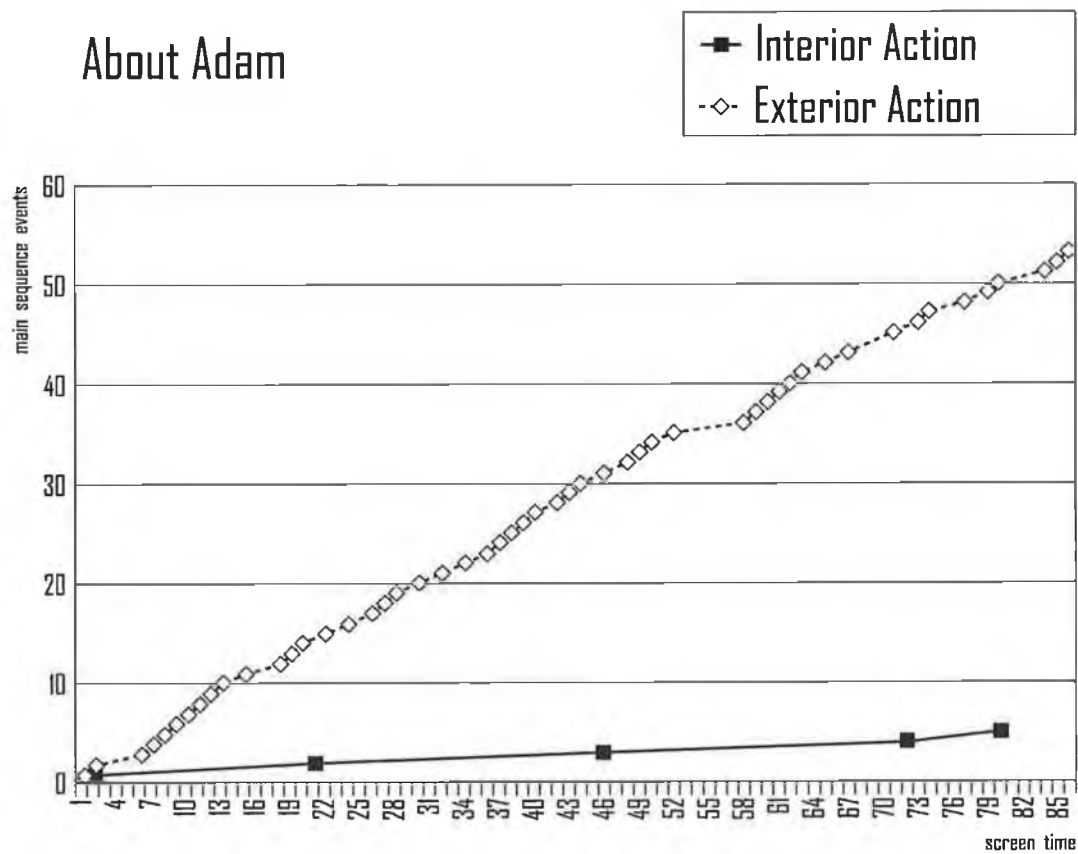


Figure 2 Interior and Exterior lines of action in *About Adam*

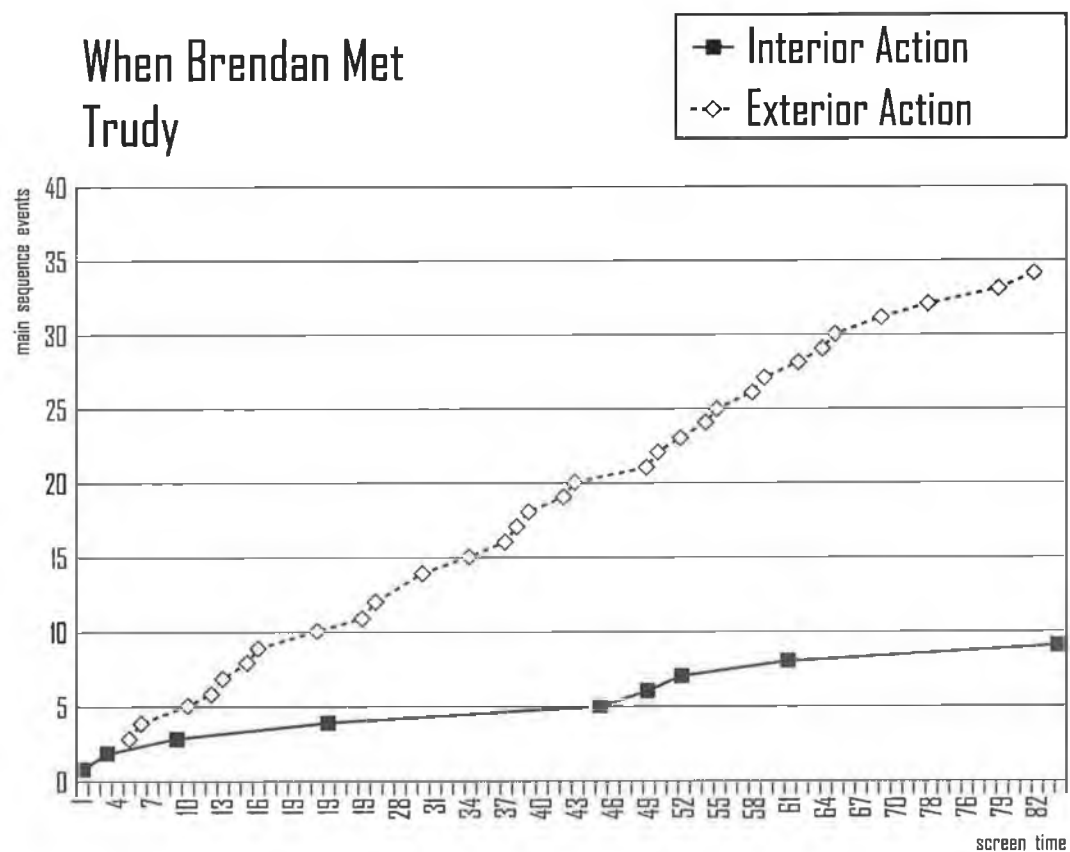


Figure 3 Interior and Exterior lines of action in *When Brendan met Trudy*

Both films embrace aspects of the new Ireland through their iconographic depiction of modern, sophisticated multi-cultural Dublin yet when the narrative surface is scratched it appears that these films are more entwined with the past than first impressions suggest. *About Adam* centres the plot action around the Temple Bar area commonly regarded as Dublin's left bank, and the leafy suburbs of Edwardian Dublin whereas *When Brendan met Trudy* portrays an angst-ridden suburbia (of which Brendan is a product) in contrast to the easy-going life of the city. The characters in *About Adam* frequent ultra-chic cocktail bars and live in sophisticated, modern apartments or beautifully restored period residences. This depiction, particularly of Temple Bar captures the excitement of the 1990s when the 'Celtic Tiger' was peaking and the city façade was changing in line with a more affluent society, and echoes the style of the romantic comedy genre in US and Australian films in the 1990s (*Sleepless in Seattle*, Nora Ephron 1993; *Clerks*, Kevin Smith 1995; *Love's Catastrophes*, Emma-Kate Croghan 1996). However, the depiction of the city in the film is in contrast to the 'reality' of Temple Bar as it developed throughout the 1990s. Far from attracting the cultural activities of artists and bohemians as the film suggests, the dominant Saturday-night activity was that of drunken Stag and Hen parties.

While this thesis seeks to explore the story-world as an imaginative creation without constantly referring back to the 'reality' it purports to represent, it is interesting to draw analogies here between the Dublin that *About Adam* claimed to portray and the one that was experienced in reality as a result of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Far from being a progressive representation, it could be argued that this film reinforces Ireland's inferiority and post-colonial position in relation to its dominant neighbour. Just as British film sought to declare 'Cool Britannia' in the early nineties, Irish film a decade later, seeks to catch up by introducing a new Dublin full of trendy bars, restaurants and art galleries where everybody enjoys guilt-free sex.

The director Gerry Stembridge was so keen to omit any of the old, established and stereotypical images of Dublin that the cinematography of the film reveals an ideological leaning towards the new, imagined sophistication that is embarrassed by the traditional, backward past. *About Adam* initiates a style of photography that rejects the familiar icons of Dublin city in favour of an 'imagined' place. For example,

Stembridge reframed many of the scenes in the café/bookshop that Laura, the English literature student frequents (in real-life *The Winding Stair* bookshop located at the corner of Liffey Street and Bachelors Walk which closed for business in 2005) principally because when the camera was pointed at the window in the café, the Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin's centre was visible in the background. According to Gerry Stembridge the Ha'penny Bridge is seen as an emblem of Old Ireland appearing as a dominant signifier in many films and documentaries set in and about Dublin and hence was out of place in this film.²⁵ Yet ironically one of the bridge's enduring images is in Phil Lynott's music video *Sarah*, clearly not a symbol of old, conservative Ireland but rather an expression of an art form on the cusp of modernity.²⁶

What this aspect of the film suggests is a reaction to what went before rather than an attempt to reflect on the present. Furthermore, this approach to cinematography suggests that the more 'reality' that is stitched into the narrative, the greater the chance for contradictions to emerge (unless irony is being employed) whereas those texts that are rooted to an imaginary world obey their own internal laws of construction and ultimately achieve a narrative coherence. The text of *About Adam* is highly contradictory – on the one hand it purports to capture 'new' Ireland yet it also suggests a place that could be 'anywhere', or in the words of Fintan O'Toole when he describes new Irish writing, anywhere, everywhere and nowhere. In *Adam and Paul*, Lenny Abrahamson similarly rejects the popular icons of Dublin and seeks to portray a city that cannot be identified yet Abrahamson does so with the intention of telling a story that could happen to characters anywhere, rather than commenting, in a social realism way on the heroin problem of Dublin.

Thus on a surface level *About Adam* is refreshing in its theme and visual style by presenting an imaginary world that is fun-filled and pleasurable. The narrative, in its self-conscious effort to represent a new Ireland that is free of any sexual guilt presents a world where sex is the key to happiness, personal development and liberation and Adam is charged with bringing that gift to those who need it. Consequently in *About Adam* there is no conflict between the depiction of sex and love. The reluctance to appropriate the narrative as a means of complicating sex in a similar way to *The Most*

Fertile Man in Ireland and *A Man of No Importance* marks it out as a quite different film.

Before looking at the form, it is suggested here that the reason the film fails to complicate through the playing out of opposites as a means of introducing dramatic tension could well be due to its desire to appear more ideologically progressive. However, in an ironic way it presents a more conservative and nativist portrayal of sex than the other two films. While most of the film reviewers appear to have taken their lead from the pre-publicity of the film and therefore failed to see its inherent contradiction, only one reviewer questioned its sexual politics. Ciara Dwyer in *The Sunday Independent* says 'Screwing around I can cope with. Infidelities are fine. But sisters betraying each other without a smidgin of guilt? Not an ounce of moral conscience? This I cannot swallow'.²⁷ After interviewing the main actor Stuart Townsend who persuaded her to give the film a second chance, she concluded by saying 'and in the end I [didn't] believe the film', indicating a serious narrative flaw when 'suspension of disbelief' fails for the viewer. The film, in its efforts to be modern and sophisticated, negates the use of multiple formal features of drama to explore conflict. Sex is presented in a unidimensional way as a gift from Adam.²⁸ In the absence of a counter force, while gratification is achieved in terms of entertainment or pleasure rather bliss, the narrative fails to resonate or linger at a deeper level.²⁹

The exploration of the conflict between sex and love in these films is central to distinguishing the different story-worlds created. Rather than reading the tropes of sex and love along ideological lines, the approach of this thesis seeks to reveal how these themes function at the level of structure, as opposites presenting conflict. While the outcome of this positioning is ideological, depending on which force is privileged, it is the purpose of this thesis to reveal formal structures as a means of creating drama. Central to any drama is the relationship between internal and external conflict. It is this relationship that structures a story along narrative lines. According to Ari Hiltunen in *Aristotle in Hollywood* the 'key to understanding plot structure....lies in discovering exactly how it is able to produce the necessary pity, fear and *catharsis*' (Hiltunen, 2002: 6), that is how it is able to evoke an emotional response. In *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance*, sex and love are structured

along an axis of opposites thus complicating the relationship between them. In playing out of these themes, the narrative works through its internal and external conflict towards resolution, this is expressed through focalisation, a narrative technique revealing how emotion is evoked (See Figure 4). In *About Adam*, most of the action is external or plot driven and therefore externally focalized, as illustrated in Figure 2. The themes of sex and love, which are central to the narrative and the story-world, are uncomplicated. This is evident primarily because of the absence of a narrative layer dealing with internal conflict. While the narrative is complicated in an interesting way along structural lines by the use of the episodic device, the absence of dual focalisation results in negating the tension created by playing out of opposites.

The narrative in *About Adam* is divided into four sub-narratives – Lucy, Laura, David and Alice. In doing so, the narrative presents an enigma, evoking the question, ‘who is Adam?’ However, the only level of internal focalisation is when each of these characters introduces their own narrative. Without further internal focalisation, many questions with regard to each character remain unanswered. What each character presents is Adam from their individual experience (not necessarily their point of view). The absence of an ‘Adam’ narrative, while clearly a structural device to pose questions, instead simply functions to construct Adam as elusive, puzzling and superficial. The ‘enigma’ theory fails to take root not because it is misplaced, but because the narrative does not offer any answers. According to Phil Parker in “Reconstructing Narratives” (Parker, 2000: 66-74), for romance stories to be recognised certain events need to be included in the narrative: a character who is emotionally lacking is introduced; a solution presented; barriers to reaching this are erected; and the character ultimately overcomes these by rising to the challenge. The narrative in *About Adam* negates these structural devices, principally because of the way Adam’s character is constructed, consequently presenting a greater challenge for the analyst in figuring out what is at work.

In the search therefore for more narrative depth, one possible reading is that *About Adam* concerns the activities of a prince-like character or ‘fairy godmother’ bringing each person he encounters his or her wish.³⁰ According to Propp it is through performing the functions ‘which are an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action’ (Berger, 1992: 14) that the character

develops. Thus analysing Adam's actions can reveal character. After an encounter with Adam, each character is diegetically enriched and better off, personally or professionally. Laura finally writes her thesis (by rejecting all her original ideas) and David gets to have sex with his girlfriend (after Adam has seduced her). Even Alice finds her husband appealing after an encounter with Adam. Adam lends weight to this theory when he says to Alice 'would you believe me if I told you that when I am with people, I notice that they always want something from me and it doesn't annoy me, I really like it, I like to give people what they want if I can, whatever makes them happy it is a very easy thing for me to do'. Adam's actions of seduction lead to a specific outcome for the other characters, one that enriches their lives, hence the fairy-godmother role.

However, the flaw with this device is that there is an absence of conflict and tension. As Adam is an externally focalized character who simply 'says and does', there is nothing to search for, and thus the key pleasure of the text is missing. The conundrum presents no challenge as little is revealed about the character through the performance of his actions (functions), principally because he does not change, transform or grow. While the prince theory offers an interesting reading, it defies the logic of the story by positioning the prince / fairy god-mother in the dominant position. In traditional fairy-tales the prince emerges at the end to save the princess or the fairy-godmother appears at key moments when she is needed. However, Adam is clearly the principal protagonist, a dominant prince or fairy-godmother that shadows his subjects.

Because the narrative rules of cinema have been challenged, broken down and mutated since the 1960s, contemporary narratives present greater challenges to the story analyst in figuring out what is the purpose behind the structural decisions made by the writer and director. By analysing the structure of *About Adam*, because many expectations of the 'hero' are not met, the 'prince theory' must be re-visited. The only way this can work is in a post-modern Brechtian way. If Adam's position in the narrative is ironic, maybe the text seeks to critique patriarchal bourgeois relationships and the 'queer theory' reading would support this. However, by going through with the wedding, Adam breaks the rules of expectation predicated on the notion of suspension of disbelief. When he looks directly into the camera, he breaks the spell. The 'other-worldly' figure, the prince is now human, like the rest of us! Through a

rejection of the fundamentals of dramatic construction in an attempt to make an ideological statement, this film reinforces much of what it purports to reject. In *About Adam* the old Ireland is very much alive and kicking, the Ireland where a woman's place is clearly with her man, where family relationships are shrouded in secrecy, where sex is hidden and not discussed. In its attempts to be modern and progressive, it could be argued that ironically this film is more traditional and nativist. By rejecting structural complexity, Adam's character simply performs functions within the narrative that are devoid of challenge, conquest or resonance.

MASCULINITY VERSUS FEMININITY

The emergence of 2nd wave feminism at the end of the 1960s had the consequential effect of new knowledge being sought. Women's Studies courses, latterly known as Gender Studies mushroomed throughout universities in the developed world. More recently issues around masculine identity became a preoccupation of those seeking to assess the male response to feminism and post-feminism. While this thesis does not purport to be a representational study, a key feature of these films is the theme of masculinity and femininity. These themes are of interest here not because they present ideological statements but rather as structural devices that create tension within the drama, principally through pitting as opposites. According to Jungian theory, each human embodies the masculine and feminine, the animus and anima but society, or culture prevents co-existence irrespective of gender.³¹

Jung's term for the archetypal feminine in men was *anima* which he theorised as a vital link through which the consciousness of males accesses the unconscious and the resources of the Self. Jung notes that Western culture and consciousness in general was typically masculinist and governed by a hierarchical, linear, goal-oriented thinking. (Hauke & Alister, 2001: 159).

Post-Jungians regard patriarchy as the expression of the suppressed anima which explains why the anima is aligned with the shadow in the psyche of contemporary males. Each of the four films being discussed here in their own way are concerned with these issues, not so much in a representational way but through affirming a position on the subject. In this way it is argued that the films present a universal theme (concerning the complex nature of masculinity and femininity) in a local setting, and the tensions therein when humans attempt to articulate outside the perceived norms.

Unlike earlier Irish films that were concerned with issues of masculine and feminine identity in an overtly political way (*Maeve*, Pat Murphy 1981; *Anne Devlin*, Pat Murphy 1984; *Póitín*, Bob Quinn 1978; *Reefer and the Model*, Joe Comerford 1988), the approach here is not to reveal the national or political dimension but rather the human, universal or global approach to this subject matter. At a thematic level, feminine and masculine identity is indeed political but at a structural level the exploration serves the purpose of creating conflict and tension in the drama as it relates in a human way.

Arguably the most interesting exploration is in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*³² (See Figure 4) where from the outset Eamonn's 'feminine' side is presented in a progressive and appealing light. Figure 4 reveals the complexities and intricacies of the narrative when the interior and exterior levels of narration constantly entwine. Living in a society of machismo values, Eamonn chooses to surround himself with the 'feminine' (the dating agency, buying flowers every day, being a confidante to his mother, fantasising about Rosie at night as he looks through his scrap-book of newspaper clippings about Rosie and the funeral parlour). When Mary seduces him he openly discusses his virginal status with anybody who will listen as he prepares for his first sexual experience. The barman presents him with a pint of Guinness, 'that'll sort you out, it's an aphrodisiac'. The taxi man advises him, 'It's like a ride on a bicycle. Take hold of the handlebars and keep peddling'. Like Alfie in *A Man Of No Importance* Eamonn is not averse to doing a spot of ironing. When he finally secures a first date with Rosie, he is keen to know what 'her Ma was like'. In both films, the main male character is complicated at the level of the masculine and the feminine. Alfie cooks 'exotic' meals such as spaghetti bolognese for his sister Lily (Brenda Fricker) and he likes to dress up and put on make-up. This clearly contrasts with the portrayal in *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*. Adam's masculinity is what defines him as 'predator' while Brendan's choir practice, his feminine pursuit, is clearly a source of fun and ridicule within and outside the film, or in Jungian terms his shadow. While it could be argued that the gendered roles are being subverted, particularly in *When Brendan met Trudy* depending on whether the audience is invited to laugh with or at the character. However, the incongruity of the relationship and the dominant role Trudy occupies suggests that far from being subverted, the roles are simply being reversed.

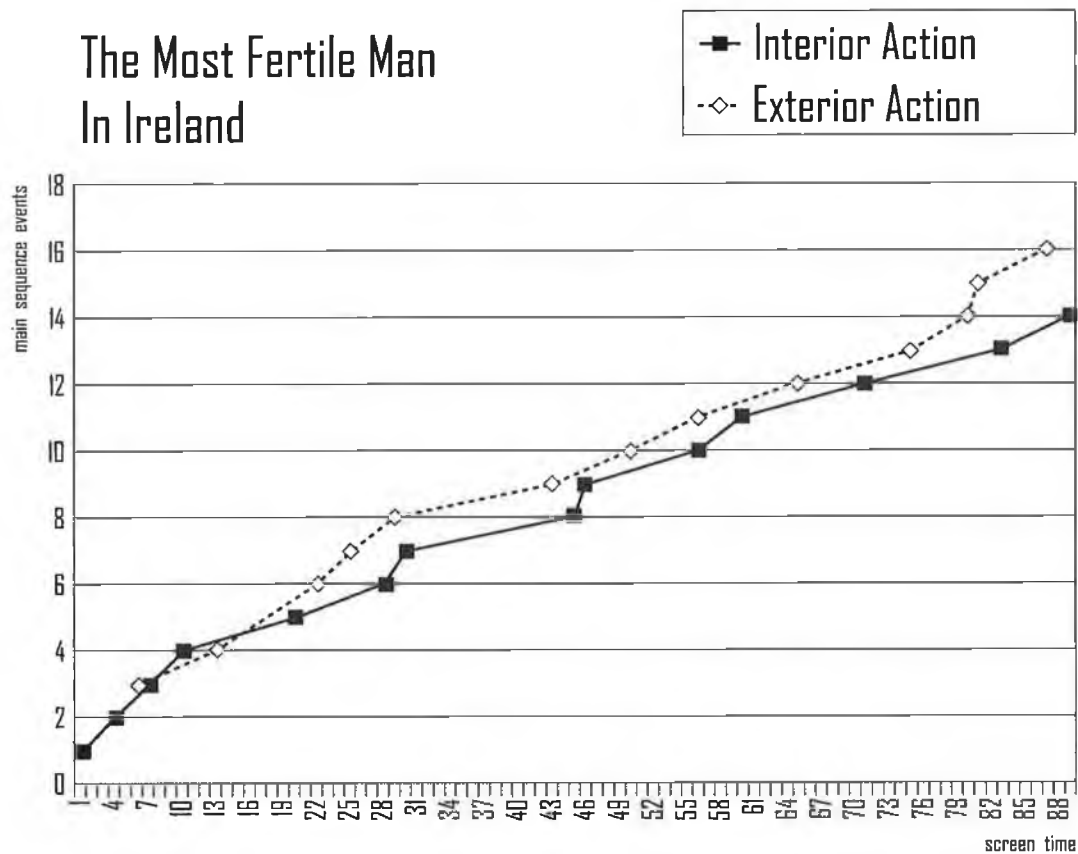


Figure 4 – Interior and Exterior lines of action in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*

On the other hand, masculinity and femininity is subverted and challenged in their traditional sense in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*. Now that he is with Rosie, Eamonn faces losing her when she finds out about his ‘virility’. According to Northrup Frye, ‘comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character’ (Frye, 1957: 165) which in film often refer to negative aspects of characterisation. Rather than being a bonus, Eamonn’s hyper-potency is clearly Eamonn’s nemesis. Unlike Adam where his virility is his most positive attribute and valued possession, Eamonn’s extreme sexual powers threaten to ruin his relationship with Rosie. It also brings the wrath of the loyalist ring-leader Mad Dog Billy Wilson down on him when the latter wants Eamonn to help increase the Protestant population by impregnating childless Protestant women. ‘But your women are fat and ugly’ Eamonn says. Billy Wilson replies ‘You are fucking for us now, boy!’ As life gets more difficult and Eamonn is being presented with the challenge of ‘using his gift to help others’, he does not see it this way. ‘Cut it off,’

Eamonn says, 'it's a monster and I don't want it anymore'.³³ In keeping with Northrup Frye's *mythos* of romance whereby 'the enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life and old age and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigour and youth' (Frye, 1957: 187-188) *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* taps into generic forms of character that transcend cultural determinations.

The tension between his masculine aspect and feminine side is climaxed when Eamonn meets his father (old man versus new man). His father says to him, 'c'mon son, be a man about it', to which Eamonn replies, 'what the fuck does that mean?'. While Eamonn's father clearly sees himself as 'a real man' and Eamonn's mother has enshrined his memory in this way by pretending that he is dead rather than acknowledging that he has betrayed her, the film presents 'contemporary' man through the character of Eamonn as far more complex, one that can allow the masculine and feminine, anima and animus to co-exist. While Irish literary and filmic texts have been pre-occupied with representing the traditional male in a particular light, from James Joyce to Jim Sheridan, contemporary Irish film seeks to complicate the notion of 'manhood' and in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* the narrative seeks to position the traditional father-figure as an anachronism.³⁴ Furthermore, in post-ceasefire Ireland it could be argued that the traditional man has no future. Not only are the paramilitaries who hang around telling everybody how fierce they are now redundant, they are impotent and unable to keep the tribe going. The demands for narrative closure are met when Eamonn has a vasectomy after Rosie gives birth to twins. Knowing that 'other women will want him and that Eamonn will want to help', Rosie tells him that she cannot take him back. The only way he can be reunited with her is to undergo a vasectomy, much to the chagrin of Mad Dog Billy Wilson. The operation over, Rosie takes him back and the film ends on an image of Rosie, Eamonn, his father and the twins lounging in the hospital bed, traditional and modern Irish expressions of masculinity having found a space to co-exist. This film thus offers a counter-force to the new-lad influences that dominate other recent Irish films such as *I Went Down*, *Flick* and *Accelerator* which are clearly influenced by recent British productions (*Trainspotting*, Danny Boyle 1995; *Twin Town*, Danny Boyle 1997; *Snatch*, Guy Ritchie 2001) (Ging, 2002: 191), suggesting an innovative departure for some 2nd wave films.

The Most Fertile Man in Ireland and *A Man of No Importance* by creating an internal and external dimension to their main characters present a subversive discourse that has been overlooked heretofore. In defining the *mythos* of comedy, Frye presents two ways of developing the form: 'one is to throw the main emphasis on the blocking characters, the other is to throw it forward on the scenes of discovery and reconciliation' (Frye, 1957: 166). The conflict played out between Eamonn's internal and external struggle, his masculinity and femininity, his desire for love rather than just sexual gratification is what complicates this narrative, and contributes to a structure of 'discovery and reconciliation'. By creating these layers through using the full range of story devices, this film presents a story-world that acts simultaneously as an expression of the universal with some sharp local commentary. *A Man of No Importance* shows the journey towards sexual awakening of Alfie as he explores his internal struggle. This is mirrored through the exterior line of action, which is his attempt to bring his community together through the staging of *Salome*, in a closed, conservative society. Alfie's interior and exterior struggles constantly intertwine, as does his masculinity and femininity until one becomes dominant. In the scene when Alfie bravely goes out dressed in his *Wildean* garb, the feminine dominates by giving expression to his hidden secret. At this moment Alfie has reached the point of sexual awakening. However with it comes the trauma of rejection and assault. Far from presenting a sentimental, nostalgic picture of 'coming out' it is the gay community who reject Alfie foremost and most aggressively as he appears to transgress the acceptable norms of 'deviancy'. Ruth Barton's response to this film is understandably confused. She regards it overall as 'whimsical' yet describes the outing scene as one of 'shock'. While suggesting there is some hope for social inclusion she immediately dismisses this 'given the reaction of most of the central characters to Byrne's 'outing'' (Barton, 2004: 124-125). Because we expect these types of scenarios to be portrayed in ideological terms, it is confusing that Alfie's attackers would come from within the 'gay scene'. It is among his own domestic community, in a quiet way that he receives acceptance. Figuring out what is at work within the narrative therefore requires closer analysis.³⁵ It is a combination of the complicated multi-layered narrative (that allows the interior and exterior struggles weave and coil) that gives rise to a story-world that addresses both the universal and the local. When Alfie is found beaten and bruised, he encounters the obvious discriminatory comments but to people who matter (Lily, Robbie, Adele) they acknowledge and endorse who he is.³⁶

This more complex address is clearly absent from *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*, not just at the level of content, but arguably more importantly at the level of form. The interior layer of *When Brendan met Trudy*, while present diegetically, its purpose is often unclear. The internally focalized shots of Brendan the teacher gazing out of the window fail to present an explanation – what is his interior struggle about? Unlike Eamonn or Alfie, Brendan's purpose or function within the story-world is cloudy and as a result the narrative is compelled to rely on self-conscious self-reflexive signifiers (inter-textual references to the Nouvelle Vague being the most dominant) that simply jar the story in a post-modern way. While there are a series of shots that suggest something internal at work (when he gazes out the window for example), in the absence of clear focalisation, it is unclear what the purpose of these scenes is. This approach to structure and focalisation may also account for the confusion around Adam's character. While his role and function is more obvious than that of Brendan, the deliberate rejection of any internal focalisation leaves him elusive. While there is an argument to be made that these films present shallow characters for a shallow post-modern world, something the era of 'Celtic Tiger' in Ireland is often accused of, maybe these films present new pleasures for this new age.

The self-reflexive references in *When Brendan met Trudy* are clearly deliberate and echo a recurring tradition in cinema, revived by *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino 1994). However, when used elsewhere (*A Bout de Souffle*, Jean Luc Godard 1959) they function as quotes or comic notes in addition to the story, rather than dominating the narrative flow. Although *When Brendan met Trudy* has a cinematic message to impart, unlike *A Bout de Souffle* which was Godard's attempt at simultaneously challenging the dominance of Hollywood and paying homage to its *auteurs*, the function here is unclear. Inter-textual references are often embedded in the narrative in order to be effective. Whereas these references in *When Brendan met Trudy* serve no inter- or intra-textual function because they do not relate in a focalized way to Brendan's character. They are separate and distinct from his function as an agent within the narrative.

Unquestionably another attempt at disavowing the legacy of the 1st wave of Irish cinema³⁷, like *About Adam* its *raison d'être* of asserting itself as new Irish cinema

appears to be its greatest burden rather than prime motivation. Instead of offering something new at the level of discourse like *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance*, this film simply reveals an urge to move forward without knowing where it wants to go in its cinematic journey. The inherent contradiction of not wanting to say anything political³⁸ while self-consciously visualising a perceived new Dublin³⁹, gives rise to a narrative that fails to resonate beyond the superficial. The directors of *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* have recorded their political intention with regard to Irish film and in doing so they have revealed an underlying extra-textual motivation that gets in the way of telling their story and constructing an involved and complicated story-world.

PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE

Continuing the exploration of opposites as a primary device used in drama, these films play the public and private persona in order to work through their separate narrative threads. Central to the tensions between public and private is the need to keep secrets and in these four films, the heuristic aspect of the plots is fundamental to the unfolding stories. Not only is the notion of 'secrets' pivotal to universal narrative structure as a device for creating tension and conflict⁴⁰, it has played a key role in many aspects of Irish cultural history. As a colonised nation that rebelled against its colonial power, the place of secret societies was essential to Irish life at particular historical moments. More recently, the revelations over the past ten years of endemic child abuse at almost every level of Irish life (the family, religious orders, educational and reform institutions), have uncovered another layer of secrecy that was woven into the very fabric of Irish life and thus protected the abuser for many decades by keeping their secrets. It is interesting therefore that in each film under scrutiny here, secrecy is not only a narrative device (universal) but has echoes of cultural specificity (local). Furthermore, despite the frivolity of films like *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*, their resonance within the wider body politic of the local and the global cannot be suppressed.

In *A Man of No Importance*, the dual world that Alfie occupies is symbolised through the juxtaposition of the fictional world of reality (public) versus the world of theatre (private). The narrative device that interweaves the public and private manifests itself

in his staging of *Salomé*, using the passengers on his bus as his cast. The narrative is complicated at the level of *mise-en-scene* by interweaving the public and private, interior and exterior action. The 'secret' in this film does not function as an enigmatic device that is simply concealed, in order to be uncovered at a certain dramatic point in the narrative. Like many aspects of Irish society, it is known (unofficially) and unknown, or more likely suppressed (officially). Alfie affectionately refers to Robbie, his bus-driver, as Bosie. In the opening sequence of this film, it is clear (to the audience) that Alfie is in love with Robbie, 'a love that dare not speak its name'. As Alfie recites poetry, Robbie replies, 'You're at it again, big words, poetry. I'm going to find out who this Bosie is, better be a bloke, regular young fella, you know what I mean'. Robbie knows that Alfie is gay, thus representing the unofficial acceptance (private and secret) which contrasts with the official suppression (public) of homosexuality. The fictional structure necessitates the bringing together of the public and private narrative dimensions for effective narrative coherence. The only place that Alfie can be himself is in private; in his room that he keeps locked and concealed from public access. When the public and private converge, the secret is out. As Alfie encounters expression of sex/love (Adele having sex with a stranger; Robbie kissing his girlfriend) in the public domain, he is motivated to finally 'come out'. As he quotes, 'all that remains is the recollection of a pleasure or a regret.' Having brought his secret out into the public, he now faces the consequences.

In a society that seeks to repress at many levels, it is ironic that the consequences for breaking the spell of secrecy is often a positive and liberating outcome.⁴¹ When Alfie cooks Lily's favourite dish, sweetbread, she responds, 'I couldn't touch a thing, when I think of where your hands have been'. 'That's the point, they've never been anywhere, I've never been close enough to anybody to rub up against them let alone lay my hands on them...the one person I like, well love dammit...yes Lily, it's a fella'. He finally brings his secret out into the public. 'So eat up, my arms are innocent of affection' he concludes poetically. The strength of this narrative, like that of *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* is in its interweaving of interior and exterior lines of action and playing out of opposites. Bringing the theme of homosexuality from the private to the public and thus breaking the spell of secrecy corresponds to Alfie's awakening sexuality. By integrating the character development and exploration

(universal) with the plot exposition of theme (local), the writer and director create a story-world that resonates on two levels.

This film indeed is reminiscent of films from the 1950s and 1960s British Social Realism (Hill, 1986) at the level of narrative and visual style and may account for the reception of this film that saw it as overtly sentimental and innocent. Geoffrey Macnab in *Sight & Sound* says that 'rather than acknowledge that Alfie is a victim of a prejudiced, repressive society, it persists in portraying its little corner of 60s Dublin as a picture postcard community, full of loveable eccentrics' (Macnab, 1995: 50). However, in contrast I would argue that far from looking back with nostalgia, this film has an edge to it, particularly in the 'coming out' scene which is carefully crafted to eschew any definite positions. Not only is conventional society hostile to Alfie's sexuality, the 'gay community' is not yet ready to embrace femininity alongside homosexuality and hence greets Alfie's 'outing' with a violent and brutal response.

This contrasts with the films *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* where the interior line is sparse, almost non-existent and submerged in the shadow of the external line of action. *About Adam*'s story is structured around a secret but in this case Adam is reliant on the sisters (and possibly their mother) keeping a secret from each other, that they all had sex with Adam. The episodic narrative style is interesting in suggesting an Adam of many different personae, reminiscent of Woody Allen's *oeuvre* (*Hannah and her Sisters*, 1986). However, when examined more closely it is a narrative of Adam, a chameleon that produces a persona to suit every occasion. While the proposal scene is used in each narrative to present different perspectives, it simply displays Adam's ability to switch. Adam plays the role that other characters want him to play rather than presenting different character layers. In the absence of internal focalisation, the 'Adam' character is never revealed, which has the effect of creating an enigma but to what narrative end is unclear.

When Laura asks if he is going to tell Lucy about them, Adam replies, 'God no, your whole family would disown you, you would be denounced as a jezebel, Laura, I couldn't bear to see you treated that way, I'm crazy about you, what I feel, it's like you said, it's not about settling down and planning our whole lives together, it's a different kind of passion.' Rather than pleading with her to keep their secret he turns

the tables and persuades her that it's in her best interests. Laura's voice-over replies, 'Oh Laura, just go with it.' Adam's powers of persuasion mean that Laura will keep a secret from her sister and finally write her thesis, but first she must revoke her original ideas, 'those women, those stupid women, my Victorian women putting all that mad passion into their novels and their poems instead of just doing it.'

Thus what is truly ironic about this film is the level of secrecy central to the narrative. Adam is reliant on all the characters subscribing to his world of secrets, unbeknownst to each other. Far from being a progressive, modern take on contemporary Ireland, by rejecting the device of opposites, this narrative sanctions 'secrecy' as being good for everyone, a device central to Catholic nativist Ireland which relied on the dual perspectives of public and private. When Lucy wants to tell Adam that she slept with Simon before going through with the wedding, he silences her, 'we all need to have secrets Lucy. I'm not going to tell you mine.' Far from sustaining the air of mystery or enigma attached to Adam's persona, he simply silences her so as to survive, a survival technique used by many public figures in recent Irish history (clerics, politicians, bankers *et al*).

Far from presenting a narrative that is symbolic of the 'new' Ireland of openness and pluralism, this film relies on the traditional nativist characteristics of deception and secrecy as central to its narrative coherence. Furthermore the extra-textual analysis is negated by dismissing any questions about the hidden politics and deeper message within the film. Not only does the press and publicity machine rely on a superficial reading (Stuart Townsend, the actor who plays Adam, tells Ciara Dwyer of *The Sunday Independent* 'it's a movie, it's a comedy, lighten up')⁴², but the absence of any engagement from the *academy* with this film suggests that critic, viewer and academic do not want to break the spell or spoil the party and hence the regressive rather than progressive messages linger through foregrounding 'hit' films.

On the other hand, if one does 'lighten up' and look for meaning in this film through its generic counterparts, what emerges? Celestino Deleyto in her *Screen* article entitled "Between Friends: Love and Friendship in Contemporary Hollywood Romantic Comedy" notes the resilience of romantic comedy which may be due to 'the powerful need in human beings to believe in the utopian possibilities condensed in the

image of the couple, or....to the irresistible attraction of the notion of love' (Deleyto, 2003: 167). She traces more recent developments within the genre, principally that while audiences may no longer believe in the traditional values attached to love, the genre provides an outlet for entertainment and emotion with more recent examples confirming the 'presence of a postmodern aesthetic of ironic vampirization of tradition rituals' (Deleyto, 2003: 170). While *About Adam* scoffs at the traditional expectations of romance, its ending is not so much ironic as sinister. While the analogies have been drawn with Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968) it could be argued that like *Intermission*, this film displays the unease Irish film has with its Hollywood influences without embracing the intentions of European art cinema. Pasolini's film is about destroying the bourgeois family and hence functions politically, whereas *About Adam* appears to celebrate it, secrets and all.

Critics and audience alike responded very positively to this film because it marked a break with what has come to be accepted as 'Irish film'.⁴³ Desmond Traynor in *Film Ireland* referred to it as 'a defining moment in the growth to emotional maturity (if that's not too boring a concept to introduce in this context) of indigenous Irish Cinema' (Issue 79, Feb./March 2001: 43) and at the level of visual style, it does mark a break with the past. However, the potential offered from the episodic, multi-layered narrative style is largely negated by the absence of an interweaving exterior and interior line of action. On first viewing it presents a fun-filled experience principally of visual bliss and excess. However, unease lingers when the sexual politics are mulled over and subsequent viewings induce a level of suspicion, particularly around Adam's character and motivation. Proffering the 'prince' theory is interesting but only goes so far while the new Dublin presented is shallow and superficial. Furthermore, far being a mimetic representation of Temple Bar and all it purports to symbolise, the absence of any visual portrayal of Stag parties, late night brawls, street vomiting and theme pubs suggests that this is an unrealised utopian vision of its creator, intending to echo the dreams of the target audience. When Jake Wilson, contributing to the symposium on contemporary Australian cinema⁴⁴, says 'at the time, [*Love and Other Catastrophes*] felt silly and delightful; seen again today, it's all too obvious that just about everything in the preceding ninety minutes is driven by a related, faintly irritating narcissism' he could easily be referring to *About Adam*. If a mark of narrative coherence and complexity is one that reveals layers and demands re-visits,

when the froth is blown away subsequent viewings unveil an endorsement of old ways rather than new.

CONCLUSION

Godfrey Cheshire identifies an inherent problem with Irish film narratives in that they place 'commercial' in opposition to 'worthy', whereby commercial attracts negative connotations while 'worthy' has been celebrated (Cheshire, 2001). This dichotomy, advanced by Peter Wollen in his article "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent D'Est*" when he set out his seven cardinal virtues and vices of mainstream and counter cinema, appears to be enjoying a sense of re-vitalisation. The analysis of the 1st and 2nd waves in Irish cinema has re-inforced this assumption: the 1st wave is seen as realistic, artistic and challenging whereas the 2nd wave is regarded as superficial and commercial. Rather than elevating one while suppressing the other in a hierarchical approach to values within the art form, the analysis offered here of *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* suggests that genre or imaginative films can be 'worthy' and 'commercial' by offering entertaining material that has an inter-textual commentary to impart. It could be argued that the satirical approach in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* has been overlooked while the ironic dimension in *About Adam* has been over-celebrated.

About Adam and *When Brendan met Trudy* display an urge not 'to be shackled to the initial paradigm' (Cheshire, 2001) which is clearly a feature of film in Ireland since *I Went Down* (1997) that seeks to put distance between new Irish cinema and what is perceived as 'Irish film' – an obsession with the 'Troubles', the Catholic Church and rural Ireland in the 1950s. In their desire to put distance between old and new cinema, the old and new Ireland presented in these narrative forms are overtly political and ideological, despite what the directors say. *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* are hindered at this narrative level by having to offer 'inducement, in the form of visual extravagance' because the films negate the audience's need to work at a conscious and subconscious level with the storytellers (Mamet, 1994: 384) through complex narrative construction that embraces levels of interiority and exteriority. The narrative drive includes an extra-textual function responding to the wider aspects of Irish film and hence gets in the way of telling the story.

On the other hand it could be argued that the films that have generated least comment (*The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance*) are the films that reveal more about contemporary Ireland by using the full range of narrative devices of interior and exterior space. While giving expression in a humanistic way to the universal they also echo local preoccupations. According to Dudi Appleton, like Pat Murphy twenty years before him, he was responding to media images of his environment that failed to correspond to the reality he lived in and hence was driven to portray Northern Ireland differently. While it could be said that his motivation was not all that different to Gerry Stembridge's response to 'his Dublin', what prevents the ideology dominating in the former is the use of narrative layers that sustain the film beyond that of imparting a 'message'. The films which exploit the full range of narrative devices to a much lesser degree (*About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*) end up relying on visual extravagances and in-jokes while displaying a message that is more regressive than progressive. Formal and structural analysis is a key tool, therefore for assessing the filmic and recovering pieces of cinema that have been overlooked when first encountered. Continuing the exploration of love and romance within contemporary Irish film, the next chapter explores points of continuity as well as rupture between 1st and 2nd wave films, through an examination of Pat Murphy's film *Nora*.

¹ The US film critic Godfrey Cheshire delivered a paper at the Galway Film Fleadh (13 July 2001) entitled 'The State of Irish Cinema in the Light of Changing World Cinema'. An edited version of the paper was published in *The Irish Times*, (16 July 2001: 9). Godfrey Cheshire is the film editor and senior film critic for the *New York Press* and he is also a contributing film critic to *Variety*. His visit to the Galway Film Fleadh was part of the Arts Council's *Critical Voices* programme, in partnership with *The Irish Times* and *Lyric fm*. The purpose of the programme was to bring international writers, critics and artists to observe the cultural scene in Ireland and to participate in public debate.

² The 1st wave of filmmakers which included Pat Murphy (*Maeve*, 1981; *Anne Devlin*, 1984), Cathal Black (*Pigs*, 1984; *Korea*, 1984; *Love and Rage*, 1998) and Joe Comerford (*Reefer and the Model*, 1988; *High Boot Benny*, 1994) did not identify with the mainstream in terms of narrative or audience expectation. The 2nd wave (1994 to present), in the main, are working within mainstream narratives and addressing a general, as opposed to art-house, audience. While writers have generally placed the two waves within the same category, this study takes the 2nd wave on its own merits and while applauding the 1st wave for its ground-breaking attempts at narrative address, examines contemporary Irish film within a contemporary context.

³ In an interview on the Radio 1 programme *Rattlebag*, Damian O'Donnell talking about his film *Inside I'm Dancing* (2004) states that although the film is about disability what appealed to him about the script was the characters and the story rather than the issue. He sees his purpose as a filmmaker as someone who tells a story for an audience, a view reiterated by many contemporary directors when asked about the motivation for their films. (*Rattlebag*, RTE Radio 1, October 15, 2004)

⁴ There is a perception abroad that Irish film is characterised by the dominant tropes of repression of the Catholic Church, the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and an aesthetic evoked through rural landscape. Directors such as Gerry Stembridge (*About Adam*, 2000) and Vinny Murphy (*Accelerator*, 1999) have said that their films are a direct reaction to this type of film and an attempt to move away from these dominant themes and aesthetic.

⁵ Martin McLoone, while noting that many films of the 2nd wave are not *political*, he puts the case that they can be engaged with *politically*. While this is not what I am attempting in this thesis *per se*, I am proffering a new interpretation by shifting the discourse in a new direction.

⁶ It is important to note here that unlike many of its European counterparts (British Social Realism, French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, German Expressionism) Ireland has never offered a resistance to mainstream cinema that has left an impact of the scale of these movements. This is partly due to the lack of government support for Irish film since the foundation of the state (See *Cinema and Ireland* for a detailed historical account) whereby state support for filmmaking was at best sporadic. Ireland's position as a post-colonial nation distinguishes it from many of its European neighbours and critics (McLoone, 2000) have often argued for comparisons to be drawn with places like Mexico which would say more about the Irish situation. Ireland's relationship with America is important here. Although geographically part of Europe, Ireland often draws more influence from America, economically and culturally. This may account for developments in recent Irish cinema, notably at the level of form.

⁷ *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and *A Man of No Importance* have generated almost no discussion within this discourse whereas *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy* have been generally acclaimed for breaking with what is generally perceived to characterise Irish film.

⁸ Gerry Stembridge in an interview with Gerry McCarthy, *The Sunday Times*. 9 May 1999: 6.

⁹ Stembridge's earlier film, *Guiltrip* (1995) is political in a different way. Released just before the Divorce Referendum in 1995 it tells the story of psychological abuse within marriage.

¹⁰ See *Transformations in Irish Culture* by Luke Gibbons (1996) for an in depth analysis and discussion of the tradition / modernity debate in Irish culture.

¹¹ "Good Things Come in Threes" by Ciaran Carty in *The Sunday Tribune*. 22 October 2000: 19.

¹² Interview with Gerry Stembridge by Michael Tierney in *Film West*, Spring 2001, Issue 43: 14-17.

¹³ Interestingly, in a recent interview Gerry Stembridge stated that he would not make the film *About Adam* in this way now, thus suggesting that the developing Ireland (or Dublin) of the late 1990s did not mature into the expected advanced, progressive society of Stembridge's imagination.

¹⁴ "Fertile Imagination" by Ciaran Carty in *The Sunday Tribune*, 2 October 2001: 5.

¹⁵ "Sperm on the Rampage in Belfast" by Stephen McMahon in *The Sunday Business Post*. 28 August 2001: 8.

¹⁶ Appleton is greatly amused to find one of the murals the crew painted for the film – an image of Queen Elizabeth and KD Lang above the slogan ‘lesbians are everywhere’ – turn up on a website devoted to pictures of Belfast murals.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Macnab in *Sight & Sound*, 1994.

¹⁸ Review of *A Man of No Importance* by Paul Power in *Film Ireland*, June/July 1994, Issue 41: 40.

¹⁹ Interestingly enough neither *A Man of No Importance* nor *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* warrant close analysis in the any recent publication on Irish cinema despite the subject matter these films are concerned with (homosexuality and infertility) against the backdrop of a specific time period (1960s Ireland and post-cease-fire Ireland). Ruth Barton simply includes *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* in a list of post-cease-fire comedies (Barton, 2004: 175) while she gives a garbled and contradictory account of *A Man of No Importance* (Barton, 2004: 124-125). On the other hand, *About Adam* and *When Brendan met Trudy*, two films that I will argue negotiate the local and the global in a less satisfying way, are more central to the discussion of recent writers in their criticism of the 2nd wave. They argue that the latter two are among the more challenging of recent Irish film (Ging, 2002; McLoone, 2000). This chapter will find otherwise.

²⁰ ‘Making Ends Meet’, Interview by Ailbhe Jordan with Mark Woods in *Film Ireland* 100, Sept./Oct. 2004: 42-44.

²¹ He goes on to point out one of the main differences between Hollywood and European cinema. In Europe, film was accepted as an art form very early on whereas it wasn’t until well into the 1970s that the perception in Hollywood of films other than as a form of popular entertainment began to emerge. (Dancyger, 2002)

²² Dancyger’s categories will prove useful when discussing each film separately, in particular, myth and non-linear narratives.

²³ This is not to say that the ‘voice’ did not get articulated under the Studio System. The auteur theory identified the notion of artists within the industrial mode and reclaimed directors such as John Ford, Nicholas Ray, Orson Welles, Howard Hawks to name but a few as using the industrial model to express their own particular ‘world view’.

²⁴ Quoted from Felicity Collins, author of *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, during a symposium on Contemporary Australian Cinema on *Senses of Cinema* web-site, accessed 24.02.2004.
www.sensesofcinema.com

²⁵ Recounted by Gerry Stembridge in an interview with Pat Kenny on the *Late Late Show*, RTE 1, April 2001

²⁶ This would have been one of the first music videos to be produced in Ireland.

²⁷ “Sisters are doing it for themselves” by Ciara Dwyer in *The Sunday Independent* 28 January 2001: 2L.

²⁸ The film has often been compared to Pasolini’s *Theorem*. This is ironic given that *Theorem* was about destroying the bourgeois family whereas Gerry Stembridge sees *About Adam* as a liberating force. “Family Affairs” by Michael Dwyer in *The Irish Times*, 17 January 2001: 8.

²⁹ Those who questioned the sexual politics of this film were generally told to ‘chill out, it’s only a film’ or to lighten up. See Ciara Dwyer in *The Sunday Independent* as mentioned above. What is interesting about this type of response to criticism is that its purpose is to silence, an ironic position given the expressed motivation of the film by its director.

³⁰ There is another reading of *About Adam*, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, but worth signalling. *About Adam* could be read within the discourse of ‘Queer Cinema’. Clearly a critique of monogamous, heterosexual norms, presenting polygamy (albeit for the male only) as a viable relationship model (by adopting the conventional resolution whereby the wedding goes ahead), this film offers an alternative to the bourgeois, nuclear couple of mainstream cinema. One of the key sequences in this film, and arguably the most finely crafted is the David narrative. In the proposal scene of the David narrative, Adam comes across as cool and calm to David. Adam agrees to help David – Karen will not sleep with him. Initially unsuccessful in his methods, Adam and David end up platonically sleeping together. In voice-over the confused David says, ‘I’m getting a hard on for Adam, please don’t tell me I’m queer as well’. Adam is David’s fairy godmother who works his magic by transforming Karen from the virgin into the vamp. Although still in the heterosexual arena of relationships, this sequence is interesting in complexing the notion of homosexual and heterosexual relationships. David is clearly sexually aroused by Adam.

³¹ According to the Glossary in Hauke & Alister the anima and animus correspond to ‘the internal psychological principle held by a man and the corresponding masculine principle at work in a woman’s psyche. Both are psychic images arising from an inherent archetypal structure common to all human

beings. As the fundamental forms which underlie the “feminine” aspects of man and the “masculine” aspects of woman, they are seen as opposites’ (Hauke & Alister, 2001: 244).

³² According to Mark Woods (*Film Ireland* 100, Sept. Oct. 2004: 44) referring to the Irish film industry he says that it ‘is also capable of producing stories like *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, which was a perfectly good movie but struggled to find an audience’. The narrative analysis of this film reveals a film of potential yet it was received luke-warmly by the critics and performed adequately at the box office. While this study is completing an appraisal of the film narratives of the period and assessing them along certain criteria, the distribution and exhibition dimensions to the process are equally determining of the outcome of a film.

³³ This could be read along the lines of Declan Kiberd’s assertion that the traditional father under colonialism relied on ‘patriarchal modes to emphasize his potency’ (Moser in Rockett & Hill, 2004: 91).

³⁴ See ‘Fighting within the rules: masculinity in the films of Jim Sheridan’ by Joseph Moser in *National Cinema and Beyond* (Ed.) Kevin Rockett & John Hill.

³⁵ This is an interesting take on conservative Ireland. While much has come to light in recent years about public institutions and how they dealt with what they called ‘moral transgressions’ such as pregnancy outside of marriage, little has emerged about the people who accepted these ‘transgressions’ in a human way. While many families did assign their daughters to the Magdalene laundries, others put their daughters first by dealing with the situation in a human way by giving support and acceptance. While these stories have not dominated the public discourse, like Alfie’s experience of his own community there were many people who did not follow slavishly the teachings of the church in how they lived and dealt with challenges they faced in their personal lives, in Ireland of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

³⁶ *A Man of No Importance* has been ignored by commentators who inaccurately point out that Johnny Gogan’s film, *The Last Bus Home* (1997) is the only Irish feature film in the past ten years to explore the issue of homosexuality. Both *Goldfish Memory* and *Borstal Boy* (Peter Sheridan, 2000) explore the issue of being gay in Ireland. Homosexuality in *The Last Bus Home* is defined as marginal along with the punk sub-cultural theme whereas in *A Man of No Importance* it is centred in the normal, ordinary (Alfie is a working-class bus conductor sharing digs with his sister) and everyday fabric of Irish society, similar to *Goldfish Memory*. Rather than portraying homosexuality as ‘Other’, by centring the issue in mainstream society, *A Man of No Importance* is, arguably, more subversive than *Last Bus Home* signalling the ‘new’, more complicated, post-nationalist Ireland.

³⁷ Roddy Doyle describes the preconception of Irish film as ‘those who think it’s always bog-cutters having rows with their fathers and others who think they’re all about drugs and poverty in north Dublin’ in *Film Ireland* 79, Feb./Mar (2001:12-14) It is this perception that he is reacting to in *When Brendan met Trudy*.

³⁸ Roddy Doyle is quoted as saying ‘*When Brendan met Trudy* has no hidden message’ (Ibid).

³⁹ In the same interview he is also quoted as saying that Dublin ‘has changed so much in the last decade and I wanted to get that across’.

⁴⁰ David Bordwell presents narrative as a combination of story and plot. Story includes inferred events, explicitly presented events and plot includes explicitly presented events and added nondiegetic material (Bordwell, 1999: 57). Screenwriting manuals define the method of keeping and revealing information to the audience as a device to create tension. At some points the audience know more about the character than the character themselves, at other points this situation is reversed. It is the careful crafting of this relationship that creates the fundamentals of dramatic experience, tension and conflict.

⁴¹ A key difference between Ireland and Britain is the way the public react to ‘sexual transgression’ of people in the public eye. Such revelations often lead to resignations in Britain whereas in Ireland the consequences are quite different. See Emmet Stagg in the ‘Phoenix Park’ incident, Ben Dunne in ‘cocaine and call-girl’ incident as examples.

⁴² Dwyer in *The Sunday Independent*, see above.

⁴³ It took IR£158,000 from 42 screens in its first seven days on release. This made it at the time the highest grossing Irish film released by Buena Vista, whose previous biggest success was *I Went Down* which took IR£137,000 on its opening week. Source - *The Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 2001.

⁴⁴ www.sensesofcinema.com (accessed 24.02.2003)

CHAPTER FIVE

NORA – A LOVE STORY OF EQUALITY

INTRODUCTION

The Joyces moved to Switzerland, where he taught English and started a theatre to produce English plays. They were very hard up. One day when he was in the theatre rehearsing, a letter came announcing that a huge sum of money (£5000 or \$5000) had arrived from an anonymous donor. Nora, all excitement, put on her hat, went to the theatre and, before all the company, announced their good fortune. Joyce always remembered that, in the midst of congratulations, the wife of an actor in the company turned to Nora and said with an edge in her voice: “And so, Mrs. Joyce, you open your husband’s letters”. (*The Irish Times*, 20 April 2000).

Pat Murphy’s film *Nora* is one of the most challenging texts to emerge in Irish cinema in recent times. Clearly regarded as a feminist filmmaker from her earlier works *Maeve* (1981) and *Anne Devlin* (1984), this film has defied labelling. Aside from Gerardine Meaney’s study of the film in her recent publication, *Nora* (2004) little has been written about this film, outside of the usual film reviews and interviews with the director and lead actors in newspapers and film magazines as part of the pre-publicity machine of the film’s launch. It hasn’t received the same attention within academic discourse as *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* did, nor has it been claimed as a feminist film and yet its *politics* are complex and contradictory, particularly in relation to debates within feminism.¹ It is within this context (of Irish cinema, feminist film and the Joycean world) that this chapter seeks to explore what is at work within Murphy’s film. Through the appropriation of a modern, liberal, humanist philosophy combined with a formalist examination, this chapter will argue that Murphy articulates a progressive discourse of equality in the film *Nora* through the agency of its main characters, Nora Barnacle and James Joyce, and in doing so, negates an overtly ideological determinism that leaves little room for negotiation. Instead, Murphy creates a challenge for the viewer, the film analyst and the poststructuralist, in responding to this film in a new way.

Within the context of Irish cinema, this film presents a particularly significant case study for two reasons. Firstly, Pat Murphy is a director more clearly associated with the 1st wave of Irish cinema (*Maeve* 1981; *Anne Devlin* 1984) and worked very much in the avant-garde and modernist movements. Her Art College training is evident in the *mise-en-scene* of her early work and her ideological influences emerge focussed in the stories she tells. *Nora*, therefore, cannot be examined in isolation and must be seen as part of Murphy's *repertoire*. Secondly, *Nora* was co-written with Gerry Stembridge, a director notably associated with the 2nd wave of Irish film. One of the few directors who has made more than one film, he wrote and directed *Guiltrip* (1996) and *About Adam* (2001), was scriptwriter on *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (1999) and was the creative force as scriptwriter and director on the television drama *Black Day at Blackrock* (2001). *Nora* therefore presents an interesting case study that may shed light on the meeting point of the 1st and 2nd waves, where these two phases of Irish cinema converge. As noted elsewhere, these distinct stages of Irish film development have been pitted against each other with critics and academics generally privileging the former. *Nora*, through narrative analysis and theoretical examination, illustrates how the writer/director Pat Murphy has negotiated the move from one wave to another that involves shedding previous ideological and stylistic baggage that no longer functions within contemporary film, because the political 'moment' has changed. She constructs a narrative style that embodies a universal dimension, without fully endorsing the mainstream approach she previously challenged, thus echoing her earlier work while shirking outdated modes of representation. Gerardine Meaney states that

Nora is an unusual instance in the tendency in recent Irish films, and films set in Ireland, to recount hidden histories. It tells a story outside the paradigms of official history, but also outside those of contemporary Irish film's construction of the past. A large measure of this derives from the chief protagonist herself. Nora Barnacle still has a quality of unexpectedness about her. Much of what is most surprisingly contemporary about her character as represented in the film is painstakingly accurate. (Meaney, 2004: 7)

This chapter, therefore, seeks to contextualise this film within the framework of recent Irish cinema and make a case for Murphy representing a development and evolution characteristic of 2nd wave film, which moves beyond national concerns in the

direction of a broader, universal address at the level of narrative structure and visual style, yet still resonating at times locally.

CONTEMPORARY IRISH LOVE STORIES

The love story or romance tale is a dominant form in world cinema, storytelling, myth-making and any form of narrative expression. It is not surprising, therefore, that this type of story has dominated 2nd wave Irish cinema yet the articulation and nature of these stories remains heterogeneous. While Pat Murphy acknowledges that she did not initially set out to tell a love story; her interest in Joyce '[goes] back to the *Rituals of Memory* days' while her interest in Nora Barnacle developed much later having read Brenda Maddox's 1988 biography *Nora*. It wasn't until the early nineties that she was inspired to make a film about Joyce's wife. As the film *Nora* evolved it then became more about Nora and Joyce and about their relationship, in particular. According to Pat Murphy in an interview in *Film & Film Culture*

I wanted to make a love story, partly because we're not really known for movies about sexuality and relationships and I'd never seen a really passionate love story coming out of Ireland that wasn't gloomy and thwarted and tragic. *Nora* is a distilled intimate portrait of a marriage, an exploration of what it's like to be in love and the task in making the film was to give a sense of a relationship which felt alive and dynamic now as well as representing a historical reality.²

In Meaney's book, Murphy elaborates on how she sees the depiction of erotic love in Irish film as 'something forbidden and transgressional. No movie narrative seemed to be able to hold the notion that people could just be together, have this great passionate love affair and be together. There was always a level of punishment' (Meaney, 2004: 14). As explored in the last chapter, 2nd wave films have considered the tropes of love and sex in a range of ways from restating traditional values (*About Adam*) to complicating notions of masculinity and femininity (*The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*). The articulation of the love story is the primary focus of examination in this chapter – principally what narrative strategies are employed to give expression to the notion of 'equality' in this story.³

Before embarking on a close analysis of *Nora*, it is useful to glance briefly at other Irish love stories of this era in order to assess where *Nora* is positioned stylistically

and thematically.⁴ The love stories of the 2nd wave mark an entry into the diverse range of, mainly, heterosexual coupling but generally embed themselves to Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope of 'adventure time'.⁵ Although there are only two major events in this chronotope, falling in love and getting married whereby all action unfolds between these two points - the poles of the plot's movement, there are many events which can take place in the intervening time (Clark & Holquist, 1984:281).

According to their typical narrative formula, a young boy and girl of marriageable age, beautiful and chaste, meet and fall in love suddenly and unexpectantly. But their marriage cannot take place because they are parted. There are shipwrecks, pirates, slavery, prison, miraculous rescues, recognition scenes, court trials, and sleeping potions. The story ends happily, with the marriage of the two lovers. This plot is, in other words, the original of the boy meets girl, loses girl, gets girl stereotype. (Ibid: 281).

If the chronotope is appropriated as a narrative prototype, what marks the 2nd wave stories as distinctive is their initial adherence and subsequent resistance to the template or formula. While all the stories structure themselves along the lines of 'boy meets girl', in many examples the ending negates the reunification of the lovers after the initial separation. Instead, the love story is simply a device to tell a different story. *Ailsa* (Paddy Breathnach, 1993) focuses on how the main protagonist Miles Butler, through his obsession with an American woman, Campbell Rourke puts his own relationship with his girlfriend Sara under pressure. Made distinctly in a low budget, art-house style it is closer to European art cinema than mainstream Hollywood narrative. By concentrating and focussing the narrative on Miles and Campbell, the film resembles a *short film* stretched to feature length, ultimately hindering what could work well as an intimate piece. What is arguably most relevant in this piece is the way it chooses to objectify Miles' obsessional behaviour rather than Campbell, the object of his obsession. In Hollywood mainstream film, the object of obsession is usually what is visually scrutinised and therefore objectified. Rejecting the classical bourgeois mode of narrative construction as defined by feminist theory in the 1970s, this film marks one of the few examples of contemporary Irish cinema that appropriates an art cinema aesthetic and subject matter.⁶ Miles' thoughts and actions are internalised and ultimately he destroys himself rather than the object of his obsession.

In a similar way, *November Afternoon* (John Carney and Tom Hall, 1997) explores an unconventional relationship and subject matter that is generally seen as taboo, in a non-mainstream aesthetic.⁷ This film is about the incestuous relationship of Richard and Karen, brother and sister. Structured around events when they are together on a week-end away with her husband and his American girl-friend, the story brings to the surface the sexual relationship between Karen and Richard over the past fifteen years. This psychological drama is brave in its attempt to explore such difficult subject matter: it does so at the level of the emotional turmoil that this complex action brings to its characters. Rejecting conventional closure, the story is unresolved when both couples return home to deal with the revelations of the week-end.

Thus, *Ailsa* and *November Afternoon* are noteworthy on two fronts: firstly the subject matter and aesthetic employed contrasts with later trends in 2nd wave films. Functioning as some of the few examples of 2nd wave films that signal references to European art cinema, they straddle 1st and 2nd wave by embodying characteristics of both. At the level of style they have more in common with 1st wave films yet the stories they tell which address aspects of what it means to be human suggest they are moving and evolving in the direction later revealed as characteristic of 2nd wave. While the themes explored in these films can be seen as more adventurous and ambitious than many later 'love stories', these narratives display a move towards universal themes⁸ that are not location specific, a characteristic that clearly distinguishes the 2nd wave from the 1st wave. In their adoption of unresolved or open endings, they reject the conclusion of Bakhtin's chronotope 'Adventure Time' thus marking a characteristic of early 2nd wave films.

Clearly a metaphor for colonial tensions (Rockett, 2003: 25), Cathal Black's film *Love and Rage* (2000) uses the love story as a device to explore the relationship between landlord and tenant in a colonised state. Like Pat Murphy, Cathal Black is more closely associated with the 1st wave of Irish film (*Our Boys*, 1981; *Pigs*, 1984) yet he has also directed films in the later period. Following *Korea* (1995), *Love and Rage* through its form and style indubitably rejects classical narrative. Telling the story of Agnes McDonnell, an independent land-owner living on Achill Island, Co. Mayo during the nineteenth century who falls in love with James Lynchehaun, an Achill native, it is a historical piece based on real life events.⁹ Their intense

relationship results in a violent incident which leaves Agnes disfigured. Fleeing to the United States, Lynchehaun's assault on Agnes is regarded as a political act and he escapes imprisonment. Ten years later he returns to Ireland and as he taunts Agnes at her house, she shoots him.¹⁰ The main narrative tension and rupture from expected norms in this film is at the level of exposition and motivation. In *Love and Rage* this aspect of story-world construction and narrative is confused and unclear. Black resists the dominant form of storytelling but fails to put in place a structure that can get the most from what could have been a strong female-led narrative. Neither a mainstream narrative, nor does it draw on the European art movement that Black is more commonly associated with, this film is confused, historically and romantically. While the film draws on a historical love story, it acts as an allegory for colonial tensions but through narrative confusion it is unclear what story it wishes to tell. Unlike the progression Murphy makes from 1st to 2nd wave, Black arguably is constrained by an ideology that sees the creative process inevitably diluted when the budget rises as more financiers get involved. He is more closely aligned to creative-led as opposed to finance-led production. Laudable as this is, it is generally agreed, and has been a lynchpin of Bord Scannán na hÉireann since 1993 that foreign finance and production input is necessary to sustainable film production in Ireland.¹¹ Since 1993 and until recently it was impossible to finance a film solely in Ireland, rather the global nature of film impacts firstly at the level of budget.¹²

Another film that takes its subject matter from historical detail is Syd Macartney's *A Love Divided* (1999). Based on the now familiar episode in Fethard-on-Sea in 1957, seen as a turning point in modern Irish society when the couple of a mixed marriage refused to accept the 'Ne Temere' rule of the Catholic Church.¹³ Sheila Kelly, daughter of a Protestant cattle dealer and Sean Cloney, a Catholic farmer, got married in a London registry office in 1949. They returned to Ireland marrying again in a Protestant church and finally in the local Catholic church where Protestant Sheila was obliged to sign the 'Ne Temere' agreement ensuring her children would be educated in Catholic schools. When she refuses to see this through after the local Catholic priest took it upon himself to enrol the eldest child in the local Catholic school, she flees to Scotland. She goes alone when her husband fails to question the authority of the priest and reject his instruction. This incident divided the Catholic and Protestant communities of Fethard-on-Sea at the time, when Sheila and her children returned

home and for many years after. Interesting as a historical detail in the church/state chapter of Irish history and the developments that took place in the middle of the twentieth century when many of the Catholic Church regulations crossed into wider society, this film points to the tension within film narrative when exploring historical fact. What started off as a political film led mainly by Gerry Gregg as its producer, in the process that is script development and production, it changed becoming in the final version, a love story set against a political backdrop. Gerry Gregg's career as a current affairs producer in RTÉ and a documentary maker is known for its political motivations.¹⁴ As the film went through development, key figures along the way questioned its overtly political slant, and the portrayal of Catholics and Protestants in particular. When Stuart Hepburn was brought on as script writer, he saw his 'Scottish agnosticism'¹⁵ as a way to counteract what the director Syd Macartney saw as a 'religiously political' emphasis, the latter preferring to 'come at it through the love story of Sheila and Sean and make all the other stuff a backdrop to that'.¹⁶

What emerges in the final film version is a narrative that privileges the love story, locating it against the backdrop of a significant historical detail and embracing Bakhtin's 'adventure time' chronotope and thus points to the difficulty the medium of popular film and its particular narrative structure (mainstream, classical) has in dealing with historical stories. This is not simply an 'Irish problem'¹⁷ or a film dilemma but also one that has been identified and debated in historical drama-documentary and television production¹⁸. Ironically, in spite of this difficulty *A Love Divided* points to an apparent predilection for historical films by Irish audiences if its popularity among audiences is a reliable bench-mark. This film was the third most successful Irish film of 1999.¹⁹ The debate that films such as *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan, 1996) and *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, 1993) generated within the public sphere is further evidence of Irish audience's sense of ownership of what is perceived as 'historical film', thus making the task for the writer and director all the more challenging. Similarly, the film *Nora* is complicated by the extra-textual references that the Joycean industry has generated over time, entangling the film's reception and fragmenting the audience. If the audience favours historical stories or stories based on historical fact or real life circumstance, how then are writers and directors to approach the material from a narrative point of view? Clearly classical narrative structure squeezes the story into a pre-determined shape of equilibrium,

disequilibrium, equilibrium which is not always appropriate to historical stories. On the other hand, audience reception of Irish films which disavows mainstream narrative is not always embraced favourably, either because these films are inaccessible or narratively flawed, a position which is supported not only by critics' appraisal but also from box office receipts.²⁰

It would appear that contemporary Irish love stories are often more about the destructive nature of love, either for psychological or historical reasons or about separating rather than uniting couples, and in this way contravene Bakhtin's chronotope. These early films appear to use the narrative device of romance/love story in an allegorical way to deal with aspects of Irish society, just like the 'childhood' films examined in Chapter 3 use the themes metaphorically to resemble something other than childhood experience. However, these stories were much less popular than their more recent counterparts that explore what may be called the universal nature of love and romance (*About Adam*, *Goldfish Memory* and *Intermission*). What distinguishes these latter films from their earlier counter-parts is that heterosexual and homosexual love are seen in a positive light as a means towards human fulfilment. Rather than focussing on the 'boy meets girl' paradigm already mentioned, the narrative progresses along a multi-character plot akin to 1990s independent American film whereby the classical device of protagonist and antagonist relating narratively in cause-effect is supplanted with a multi-character set up where chance and coincidence is what generates the narrative advance. Not only are these films moving away from what could be seen as 'Irish' preoccupations, they are embracing a narrative style that would appear at one level to be ironic. However, despite the apparent challenge to the conventions, by the narrative closure of these three films, the 'boy and girl' having metaphorically experienced 'shipwrecks, pirates, slavery, prison...and sleeping potions' the 'story ends happily with the [symbolic] marriage of the two lovers' (Clark & Holquist, 1984: 277), thus relegating them to the mainstream. Framed against this back-drop, Pat Murphy's *Nora* presents a complex love story that narratively is more challenging than most of its 2nd wave equivalents. When the surface is scratched on many of these films, they reveal little at the level of resonance yet Murphy's film which has not attracted much comment offers a complicated discourse in the field of romance.

SHIFTING IDEOLOGIES

What warrants closer analysis of *Nora* is a combination of factors which include this film's relationship with its contemporaneous love story counterparts and its departure from Murphy's earlier films, *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*. Arguably what has prevented *Nora* receiving the same attention that *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* were accorded is a combination of *Nora*'s style and the prevailing discourse as explored in earlier chapters. *Nora* does not lend itself easily to the national identity debate or a feminist reading, thus suggesting that the method of interpretation requires tweaking. This chapter will appropriate humanism, a branch of philosophical enquiry as a substitute for 1970s feminist theory.²¹ By valorising humanism as a discourse, this study of *Nora* seeks to reveal a modernist and post-feminist treatment of the romance story. Such a task requires a significant leap in Film Studies given that ideological studies have played a dominant role since the emergence of post-structuralism. Pat Murphy's film presents a challenging text from which this journey can be made, not least because Murphy herself offered two ideological works to the canon in the form of *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*.²² In these films she explores key issues around the question of national identity and in particular, feminist national identity. *Nora*, it can be argued, bridges the gap between the common purpose of 1st wave films and where the 2nd wave is headed for, arguably in the direction of a more universal, global expression. In doing so, Murphy demonstrates how national film relates as much to the wider field of film and what is going on at the level of creative and artistic practice elsewhere as it does to its national cinema borders. Furthermore, it illustrates Murphy's own trajectory and development in film and narrative expression that sees her work reflect the developments from 1st wave to 2nd wave in Irish national cinema.²³

Pat Murphy argued that the conditions of production for *Maeve* were obsolete by the late eighties. In 1980 British institutions such as Channel 4 and the British Film Institute were interested in issues pertaining to Ireland, (the television series *Ireland: A Television History* (Robert Kee, 1981) and *Troubles* (ITV, 1982) are symbolic of a more widespread engagement). However, as the eighties progressed there emerged a diminishing commitment to Irish-related productions, particularly with regard to Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the moment for the avant-garde had passed, principally because the politics that gave rise to it had changed. Film production in

Ireland and Britain was being brought into the mainstream, particularly at the level of funding. By coming under state control, film's earlier *raison d'être* as oppositional had changed. While counter-cinema still existed it did so in a re-imagined way whereby the aesthetics were the dominant radical aspect.

While *Maeve* is a narrative that interrogates the relationship between feminism and republicanism, *Anne Devlin*'s ideological project is one of telling her(story) in history.²⁴ Through the narrative of *Maeve* Murphy de-constructs Hollywood narrative by fore-grounding the means of representation whereas in *Anne Devlin* she adopts the three-act structure common to cinema and theatre, while simultaneously forcing the spectator into an awareness that what they are looking at is a construction.²⁵ Both films display influences emerging from radical feminism in America and Britain of the 1970s. However, unlike other 1st wave directors who made films in the 1990s, Pat Murphy demonstrates a move away from overtly ideological influences and feminist practice in particular and casts her story in a similar vein to other 2nd wave texts, those that are more concerned with issues human than political.²⁶ In an interview with Pat Murphy in *Film West* Katie Moylan states that '[i]n telling what is essentially a love story, *Nora* is a humanist film rather than a feminist one.'²⁷ In response to a question about labelling Murphy replies that it is complicated 'because the word [feminism] means different things at different times. It should be a liberating thing. But for a lot of people, when they call you that, they are limiting you, because they bring all these preoccupations and preconditions to the word...I think *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* are feminist films but I don't think *Nora* is, in the same way.' Meaney, while acknowledging the shift in her work states that 'Murphy's filmmaking remains a commitment to sites of social and cultural difficulty, but also to code breaking. As such it offers a highly productive context for an examination of the divergent trajectories of feminist film theory and feminist filmmaking in the closing decades of the twentieth century' (Meaney, 2004: 32).

A traditional feminist of the subject matter might reclaim *Nora* from historical oblivion in a similar way to *Anne Devlin* but would fail to tell the story of *Nora* as Murphy sees it, hence the political departure. This move in the direction of more conventional structures and universal storytelling, far from 'selling out', demonstrates Murphy's reaction to events around her. In presenting what is fundamentally a love

story in a post-ideological²⁸ or post-feminist way, this film challenges the viewer's expectations. According to Joanne Hayden in *The Sunday Business Post*, referring to the inevitable backlash that comes with a film that touches on James Joyce's life, 'Murphy has been criticised for "undermining" James Joyce for presenting him as "craven and sexually insecure"'.²⁹ The scene in which Joyce masturbates while reading Nora's letters in the projection room of his cinema, *The Volta* has been described by one newspaper critic as 'prosaically characterizing' the writer. However, Hayden points out that Joyce, despite his 'selfishness and rabid jealousy, [is] empathetic and above all very human.' Rather than pitting Nora against Joyce, either as a mainstream classical device for dramatic purposes or as a political exercise to elevate Nora above Joyce, Murphy's narrative structure frames a story around a relationship involving two people. As Murphy herself states³⁰, '[p]eople should be able to see this movie and not be obsessed with Joyce – and relate to it on a very core level as a love story.'³¹

The greatest challenge that the film *Nora* poses is figuring out and situating the narrative within the feminist discourse that Pat Murphy is so clearly identified with from her earlier work, *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*. The film *Nora*, however does not fit the model so easily and thus requires new frameworks. At a superficial level, it can be argued that this film is feminist because it tells the story of a previously forgotten historical figure. However, is a feminist film achieved by simply telling the story about a woman in history? Are all such stories feminist by virtue of their content alone? Should there not be recourse to a feminist aesthetic or structure like *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* to deem the film feminist? Historically it can be argued that Nora Barnacle, unlike Anne Devlin, is notable only through her association with James Joyce, *great writer*, and therefore not feminist material as such. Indeed, this point has been used to criticise Murphy's film for the way it portrays the relationship. Declan Burke in *The Sunday Times* while he agrees that 'few writers deserve demystification more than Joyce, the constraints of cinema mean Murphy has to paint her characters in bold strokes. In order to render Barnacle heroic, she has to make Joyce a villain with few redeeming features. Barnacle is strong and beautiful; Joyce is craven and sexually insecure. And while the film poses the potentially intriguing question of what Joyce would have been without Barnacle, it sidesteps the glaring reality that, had she never met Joyce, her story would never have been told.'³² It is precisely this type of

reaction that prompts the question why did Murphy resist the feminist narrative structure which celebrates previously neglected female figures by promulgating her(story) displayed in her earlier work, for a problematic text that resists feminism in the traditional sense, embraces humanism or what some call post-feminism (Braithwaite, 2004).³³

In doing so she makes the task of defending a 'humanist text' difficult for the feminist and the liberal. Humanism is a problematic term primarily because it can be defined in such a way as to be easily appropriated by the *right* and *left*. Feminism has had an uneasy relationship with the term, many seeing it as pre-feminist because it is concerned with self-identity at the expense of a collective or socially-determined connection. It also sits uneasily with the post-structuralist position that sees identity as culturally constructed. However, at a more complicated level it could be seen to align itself with post-modernism at one level, whereby both account for the notion of identity separate from cultural determinism, albeit the latter constructs such identity in a fragmentary way.³⁴ While this individualistic position which is counter to the position of post-structuralists, for example, may seem problematic and anathema to the main aims of feminism, Ahmed goes on to appropriate Baudrillard to further enunciate this position. She says that Baudrillard's post-modernism (as espoused in *Seduction*) can be read as normative and a positive reading of the subject, 'rather than as a rejection of its limits, a reading which refuses to recognise the determining influence of structures of power but sees the subject as governed only by the radical free play of its own (in)difference' (Ibid: 81). The subject is determined then by its own undetermined possibilities, by its own limitless potential for dispersal and betrayal. Rather than recognising the subject as an effect of discourse and power (and in this sense being positioned and rational) this approach ontologises and autonomises the subject by rendering it primary at the same time emptying it of any determinate content (Ibid: 81-82).

Ahmed thus identifies some potential, fragmentary meeting points between humanism and post-modernism that are interesting in analysing Murphy's film, *Nora*. Rather than seeing this film as resisting a feminist discourse because it rejects the 're-writing women into history' project or portraying 'a woman ahead of her time', or as a post-modernist text that resists the fragmentation of the individual, maybe it can be read as

articulating a discourse that is problematic, complex and contradictory, that is based on 'realist, affirmative and humanist aspirations as well as on postmodern forms of resistance' (Ahmed, 1996: 71).³⁵ Finding a way whereby feminism and humanism can mutually support each other in their practice as philosophical tools of enquiry is the key to analysing the narrative structure of *Nora*, a text which is simultaneously enlightening and problematic in this arena of post-feminism.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE & *NORA*

Nora is therefore an intriguing text for the feminist analyst as well as the narratologist. Pat Murphy denies the viewer a challenging aesthetic or a complicated political discourse that stimulates intellectually and engages at the level of the rational. Instead, through this film, the audience is invited to relate emotionally with a relationship that is both destructive and loving at the same time without the excess generally associated with melodramatic stories. By telling a romantic tale or love story without the extreme highs and lows of plot development and binary opposites of characterisation, Pat Murphy makes a leap from radical ideologically-driven narratives to a progressive and humanistic narrative that is characteristic of some 2nd wave films and in doing so distinguishes herself as an Irish director whose work has evolved from 1st to 2nd wave alongside the developments and changes within the national cinema.

Like Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), Pat Murphy moves beyond the traditions of feminism to create a film that is difficult to categorise. However unlike *The Piano* which relies on many binary oppositions anchoring the narrative to many discourses, *Nora* explores the irrational e.g. love and desire, rendering it rational for the audience's interpretation. As Herman argues, structuralist notions alone cannot account for the immersive potential of stories. Story analysis must be more than the breakdown of plot and character along lines of action arranged in a narrative sequence in cause-effect (or chance) relationship occurring in time and space.

Interpreters of narrative do not merely reconstruct a series of events and a set of existents but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world in which, besides happening and existing, things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief, and so on – both for narrative participants and for interpreters of the story. More than reconstructed timelines and inventories of existents, story-worlds

are mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative responses, encompassing sympathy, the drawing of causal inferences, identification, evaluation, suspense and so on. (Herman, 2002: 16-17)

This suggests that there are two stages to narrative analysis: firstly, the narrative can be broken down along the lines of 'canonicity and breach' exploring how the writer/director uses familiar or ordinary contexts to explore unfamiliar or extraordinary events, stereotypic and non-stereotypic knowledge (Herman, 2002: 7). In the case of *Nora* what is interesting is how Pat Murphy tells an extraordinary love story within the structure of the familiar love story (Bakhtin's 'adventure time' chronotope for example). Secondly, there is a need to explore how this universal yet ever-changing medium uses stories to organise and comprehend experience (Herman, 2002: 86). What makes *Nora* a challenging text is that the viewer must make a leap of faith and imagination to match what they see and hear with 'pre-stored groupings of actions that they have already experienced' (Ibid: 89), not just in 'real life' but as scholars within Film Studies, and thus cognitively map the story-world conveyed (Chatman, 1990: 8).

In Irish films that could be loosely described as feminist, an independent woman who knows her own mind and wants to move through her story as an active dominant character generally is not framed within a relationship with a male counterpart: where he exists he is removed or side-lined in the narrative to allow the female voice emerge (*Maeve*; *Anne Devlin*; *Hush a bye Baby*, Margo Harkin 1989; *The Playboys*, Gillies McKinnon 1990; *December Bride*; *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*) whereas in classical mainstream film a woman who asserts herself beyond a 'man's world' must be annihilated (*Mildred Pierce*; *Thelma and Louise*, Ridley Scott 1991). Positive heterosexual relationships that espouse progressive messages are largely absent in contemporary Irish film, thus signalling the importance of Murphy's text. Irish love stories do not ensure a happy ending, in fact, most love stories at surface level are about negative properties that bind people (*Guiltrip*, Gerry Stembridge; *Snakes & Ladders*, Trish McAdam 1996; *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Pat O'Connor 1998; *Peaches*, Nich Grosso 2000). *Nora* defies the various category norms to present a text that is simultaneously feminist and humanist, romantic yet unsentimental in an accessible narrative structure.

Based on Brenda Maddox's 1988 biography of the same name *Nora* explores the relationship of Nora Barnacle (Susan Lynch) and James Joyce (Ewan McGregor) from the moment they meet on Dublin's Nassau Street in 1904 until their final departure from Ireland in 1912. Pat Murphy says that the film started off being about Joyce, primarily because Nora is a minor figure in the intertextual Joycean industry but

[I]t's larger than them as well. They go through a lot of what it means to be in love. It's in a sense beyond biography. Love is the subject of the film. The kind of inspired mistakes that people make when they fall in love, that's what Nora and Joyce have to do, in a very intense way, make these massive allowances. Or not make allowances and have big rows.³⁶

By proclaiming the film as bigger than its subject matter, one can infer that Murphy is telling a story that is more universal and global than local and national, a radical departure from her earlier work. In telling this love story she is framing her narrative around the lives of Nora Barnacle and James Joyce but 'it's like a creative angle on their lives, which I believe is a true angle on their lives, but it's still through the medium of a cinema feature film'.³⁷ Quoted in Meaney (2004: 20) she states that she really felt Irish cinema needed this love story, '[i]t is very complex and not doomed. It is epic in terms of the dark space it goes into, but it also has this domestic daily-ness in terms of raising children'. Film has an inherent narrative logic which can require the reshaping of historical fact to propel the action forward. Thus, for Murphy, a kind of essential truth, as represented in cinema, transcends historical chronology. The end result therefore is greater than historical truth and biographical detail but steers the story in a direction that resonates beyond national boundaries and historical frameworks while at the same time relates to some form of truth.

The central narrative focus of this film is the growth of a relationship in the direction of equality. As Harvey O'Brien states, 'this is a film about a woman's place in a man's world. It is considerably more subtle and even-handed about it though, portraying a relationship between equals which oscillates throughout rather than falling on one side or the other on questions of superiority or dominance'.³⁸

Gerardine Meaney agrees with this interpretation when she notes that the 'sense of

Nora's integrity as a subject and of the radicalism of her relationship with Joyce is indicative of the director's objections to contemporary evaluations of their relationship as exploitative or hierarchical' (Meaney, 2004: 8). If this film is part of the 'feminist project', it would fall into the project that tells private histories or silent stories but as this telling of the story is focussed philosophically along human lines instead of a gender track, it is difficult to see it as feminist in the traditional sense. If some branches of feminism have moved towards humanism in a post-feminist way³⁹, it could be argued that Murphy's is a post-feminist film.

Nora opens in 1904 when Nora Barnacle runs away to Dublin from her native Galway.⁴⁰ From the outset she is portrayed as an active, dominant character. Evoking a small, localised milieu, Nora meets James Joyce on a Dublin street. Recognising her as a stranger in town and identifying her accent, he establishes that she is from Galway. Nora from the outset is confident and assertive. When Joyce introduces himself and arranges a date but fails to ask her name, she calls after him, 'Hey James Joyce, don't you want to know my name?...My name is Nora Barnacle'. From the opening shot when she is framed seated on a bench in Galway station to when she declares on a public street who she is, Pat Murphy is privileging her in the narrative.⁴¹

From the outset, the portrayal of the sexual relationship between Joyce and Nora sets this narrative apart from its Irish cinema and television counterparts, thematically and aesthetically. The depiction of the first date sets the tone for the rest of the film. Meeting in a city centre park the passage from day light to night suggests that their courtship takes place outdoors, aptly in the city and over a long time. Walking down steps until they reach a secluded spot they start kissing. Nora reaches for Joyce's trousers and puts her hand inside. After bringing him to orgasm, she concludes the scene with the request, 'Do you have a hanky, Mr. Joyce?' From the outset, the narrative of *Nora* is distinctive in its portrayal of women of this era. Mary in *Strumpet City* (1981), a successful RTÉ television drama set between 1907 and 1913, is dismissed from service when it is discovered that she has been 'walking out' with a man even though her relationship with Fitz is entirely sexually innocent whereas Nora leaves her employment, in her own time to run off with her lover, unwed to continental Europe. Challenging preconceptions about early twentieth century Ireland,

Murphy's text presents a refreshing modernist tale, one that attempts to give voice to female sexuality, a discourse that has been absent by and large in Irish visual texts.⁴²

Murphy develops this modernist theme further by presenting the relationship in terms of equality albeit with the emotional challenges that stalk any relationship. The film does not advance an ideological project that declares Nora Barnacle as 'modern woman' or ahead of her time. This is evident from Murphy's avoidance of the structural device that would have pitted Nora against other female characters or against Joyce. While clearly an independent woman as constructed in the film, Nora is not shown in contrast to women in her society. Murphy does not believe that Nora was all that unique: rather 'Murphy's work mirrors a current interest in the history of spaces of sexual dissidence and difference within Irish culture and society' (Meaney, 2004: 8). Quoted in Meaney, Murphy says that '[t]here must have been women – of course there were – who just refused to take the shit. Who were able to form decisions and create their own lives, the way women do all the time' (Meaney, 2004: 8). In fact, when Nora and Joyce go to live on continental Europe they mix with like-minded bohemians where Nora is not an oddity by virtue of her unmarried status. What is interesting, therefore, is that Nora is shown within the context of her own world, her relationship with Joyce and rarely is attention drawn to Irish morals or social norms of the time. This achieves the effect of creating a story-world that demonstrates what is at work between Nora and Joyce, rather than between Nora and Joyce and wider society. While the style of the film is similar to *Anne Devlin*, particularly in its visual address when the opening sequences of both films set the way for privileging the female character within the narrative, its ideological thrust is quite different. Where Murphy digresses from her earlier work is in portraying Nora as she relates, in equality, to Joyce whereas Anne Devlin is shown as separate and independent of Robert Emmet. This latter portrayal was important in challenging the myths surrounding Anne Devlin and her involvement in the 1803 rebellion while the portrayal in *Nora* in a similar way sets out to challenge myths and preconceptions by showing Nora Barnacle as more than a primitive, Irish *cailín*. However, the text of *Nora* goes further in its articulation of a modernist discourse that espouses equality.

Even though Murphy explores the love story around the theme of equality, it is not a romance story without conflict. Pat Murphy says that one of the things that interests

her 'in *Nora* is that there is this intensely dark obsessive period in the Joyces' lives but no one dies. They come through it. Children are reared and great books are written.'⁴³ She sees death as structured into the narrative when dealing with unsanctioned love, citing *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) and *Damage* (Louis Malle, 1992) as examples. However, death as a theme is absent in *Nora* suggesting, on the one hand a more conventional approach to this relationship while also dealing with the negative emotional state that does not inevitably lead to 'death' in one form or another. She rejects the structure of extremes or opposites in exploring the trope within her narrative.

Clearly Joyce's jealousy, as it manifests itself for the first time when Nora attends the concert with his friend Cosgrave, is an obstacle to their relationship and thus one source of conflict. Despite having arranged the escort himself, seeing Nora and Cosgrave together sends Joyce into an irrational state of jealousy. By choosing to tell the story along the lines of a humanist discourse, whereby the relationship is constructed within the boundary of character motivation and action, and not influenced by extra-textual factors such as social norms, Murphy is making Joyce's jealousy one of the obstacles to overcome as they develop in their relationship. However, the narrative by privileging Nora's character, clearly situates Joyce's jealousy as his flaw, his obstacle to overcome.⁴⁴ This also problematises the reading of the text in feminist terms. While the romance novel and the melodrama have been re-claimed as worthy of analysis in their own right, principally for the telling of 'women's stories', they are generally constructed around the classical narrative that reinstates the status quo as a standard form of closure. The challenge Murphy brings to this narrative is articulating equality in a romantic relationship that is increasingly dominated by such an emotionally destructive force as jealousy. The experience Murphy conveys is ironically simultaneously liberating and equal for both parties.

The love affair and relationship between Nora and Joyce is largely internally focalized; it is conducted through physical expression and letters. Further maintaining the film form as an expression of equality, the narrative does not privilege perspective. Clearly Nora's story, it is also James Joyce's story albeit not as a great writer or genius, but as a deeply flawed lover and partner. When he shows Cosgrave, Stanislaus and Gogarty the letter Nora wrote to him, he seems oblivious to the breach

of trust he is enacting. Not perceiving anything wrong with what he has done he does not attempt to conceal his actions: instead he tells Nora that his friends said she copied the letter from a penny novel. This is the start of the key narrative tension in the film, the destructive force that Joyce's jealousy brings to their relationship and how the couple overcome it.

The written word plays an important role in the narrative at the level of form and content. On one level it is used to debunk the notion that Nora Barnacle was virtually illiterate, instead it ironically undermines what Joyce is known most for. The 'great writer' tag is separate and distinct to his 'emotional' make-up. It is the latter attribute that Murphy seeks to explore while at the same time not negating the 'real' life Joyce. At the level of form, the device of writing is a way of internally focalizing the characters. Unlike the novel, the medium of film does not readily lend itself to 'getting inside the head' of the main characters. However, the medium of film has seen, over time, the conventionalisation of devices that facilitate the articulation of deeper emotional levels. Voice-over is one such device that has been used both in mainstream and art-house films to serve the function of accessing the interiority of the character. As Seymour Chatman states, 'the film medium could in theory facilitate a greater degree of narrative richness and complexity than commercial cinema allows, especially in the use of the human voice as narrator co-temporal with visuals of the story' (Herman, 1999: 315). European art cinema is credited with being more experimental and adventurous, developed and sophisticated, in the use of voice-over (Ibid: 325). The use of homodiegetic voice-over in *Nora* thus offers the potential for the narrative to penetrate beneath the surface of the story. These key narrative devices of voice-over and personal letters are used to give expression to the most intimate parts of their relationship.⁴⁵

What is most intimate between them often enters the public sphere as a result of Joyce's compulsive jealousy. When Joyce returns to Dublin to open Ireland's first cinema, *The Volta*, his jealousy seems to grow and intensify. He writes a letter to Nora accusing her of being unfaithful. As she is reading it to herself, Joyce's brother Stan asks, 'is there something wrong, Nora?' She hands him the letter and as he reads it to himself she says, 'read it out, read it out where he asks if Giorgio is really his son, read it out where he asks who else fucked me before he did'. She continues,

‘people in Dublin are laughing at him for taking on a girl many men have enjoyed, nice isn’t it? That’s your brother, the great writer!’ This sequence is particularly pertinent given that internal focalisation is a narrative device that reveals the interiority of the character. Murphy combines it with a device that makes what is most private, overtly public, by externally focalizing through Nora’s dialogue. Later Joyce refuses to come back to her until she threatens to have Lucia baptised. When she receives the letter that announces his return, she says to Stan, ‘I knew I’d best him at this writing game’.

Despite living apart and having the destructive powers of jealousy impacting severely on their relationship, they manage to conduct a sexual relationship, Joyce masturbating in the projection room of his new cinema while reading her letters and she doing the same, reciprocating, at the other side of Europe. Unlike classical narrative that portrays such negative emotional states in polarised terms, *Nora* manages to simultaneously portray the destructive force of jealousy alongside the ability to still engage in the act of love. What complicates the narrative structure of this film is the disavowal by Murphy of the simplistic polarisation of emotional feeling that is often a common and simplistic approach to romance narratives. Arguably, it does this by embracing a humanistic model which constructs the story along the lines of character motivation and action in a way that classical narrative has been condemned for. But Murphy, in her film, complicates the emotional states that conventionally are constructed along a polar axis of good / evil, thus presenting human relations in a much more complex way.⁴⁶ Jealousy is generally portrayed as a negative and destructive emotion, from the fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to Hollywood’s film noir *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987). The narrative follows a trajectory that results in destruction as a consequence of the force of jealousy. However, Murphy while showing the destructive potential of this state, also limits its profusion by constructing Nora as sometimes emotionally dominant or superior. While jealousy is the catalyst for a break-up of the relationship, its effect is not permanent.

A common theme of Irish film and literature is the ubiquitous drunken Irish father (*My Left Foot*, Jim Sheridan 1987). Pat Murphy’s *Nora* departs once again from the norm when she neither constructs Nora as a victim of an abusive relationship nor

glorifies her as the long suffering Irish mother. The maternal narratives that Martin McLoone refers to in *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* is clearly absent in Murphy's *Nora*. Rather than pitting protagonist against antagonist in a mainstream way, Murphy attempts to delve deeper into the emotional layers that constructs a relationship. In terms of parenthood, neither Joyce nor Nora is privileged as being more nurturing or providing. Murphy goes as far as to portray them as equally neglectful. Nora is rarely shown in a 'maternal' position. In one scene when she is breast-feeding Giorgio with her back to the camera, the baby is shown to kick against his mother, resisting her efforts at 'mothering'. When Joyce returns to Dublin and Nora is left alone in Trieste, she is portrayed mostly lying in bed instead of looking after Lucia who remains with her on the Continent. When Lucia enters Nora's bed-room looking for her mother she is immediately sent away. Even though Joyce has taken Giorgio to Dublin with him, the audience is never presented with father/son scenes that suggest a progressive child/parent relationship. So while both parents assume the care of one child, they are shown neither as particularly good or bad carers or minders. Meaney states that when asked about this, Murphy agreed that 'built in to her narrative is the view that the intensity of the couple's relationship marginalized the children: 'The dynamic is always between Nora and Joyce and the children are peripheral to that'.' (Meaney, 2004: 25). On the one hand this may infer 'progressive', even 'feminist' role play regarding parenting by not relegating Nora to a traditional role while continuing the modernist discourse evident from the start of the narrative. However, Meaney interprets the film's representation of 'Nora's occasional disregard for the welfare of her daughter [as] disturbing, complicating the film's romanticization of the couple's irresponsibility' (Meaney, 2004: 25). More importantly, however, from a narrative point of view, it allows the focus remain on the parents' relationship, which is the central theme of the film.⁴⁷

The narrative portrays Nora and Joyce at their happiest when they have nothing, are devoid of material possession. This is not an uncommon device of mainstream narrative; a deep, loving relationship is often portrayed as anathema to material wealth, a traditional moral that is widespread in fairy-tales and myth-making. The ideological position that links happiness and poverty in Ireland can be traced back to de Valera's era and has only recently been debunked, notably by Frank McCourt in his autobiographical novel *Angela's Ashes* (1997). So while the audience can

recognise this *cliché* as a familiar device, canonicity, what sets it apart, makes it breach is the way in which rather than celebrating their poverty as a device that lifts them to a higher emotional plain and deeper love, Joyce and Nora do the opposite. Pat Murphy in an interview in *Film Ireland* says that the costumes are used as a kind of narrative, any sense of flamboyance is a kind of gesture against poverty.⁴⁸ When Nora and Joyce are evicted from their apartment and Giorgio gets hold of Joyce's writings scribbling on them with a crayon, rather than portraying this as a double catastrophe, Nora laughs it off. They meet at a hotel, she has already ordered and has champagne chilling on the side. Joyce greets her, and observing the table comments that there is one month's salary before them. When she shows him the defaced writings, he tells her that he has just handed in his notice at the language school. 'Is it my turn for bad news?' she says and informing him that they have been evicted she announces 'we are staying here tonight'. Continuing a modernist aesthetic, Murphy says '[y]ou go to the most expensive hotel, you buy new clothes and then you even stay in the hotel. I think it's very 'them'. I think it's quite a modern take on them so it's not about trying to slavishly recreate the period' (Ibid).

Constantly challenging the audiences' expectations, Murphy doesn't portray Joyce's drunkenness as a device for which Nora can use, either to persecute or rescue him, which would have the effect of elevating Nora to the position of sufferer or saviour, martyr-like. While this is a common device in mainstream narrative, Murphy clearly and deliberately disavows it, a similar treatment she gave Anne Devlin. It is Stanislaus, Joyce's brother, rather than Nora who tries to save Joyce from drink.

At the end of the film when Nora and Joyce are re-united as a couple and decide to return to Europe together, Joyce says, broke again, 'I don't actually know how we are going to get back to Trieste, Stan was supposed to send us some money'. Rather than being an obstacle to their future it is incidental to their story. What is important is that they are united and the audience can only assume that the rest will fall into place. As Harvey O'Brien states, '[t]he relationship issues between them and especially for Nora have been resolved satisfactorily as far as the narrative is concerned when the movie ends, and the rest of the adventure is for the viewer to pick up on by reading some books.'⁴⁹

VISUAL STYLE & NORA

While Pat Murphy makes an ideological departure from her previous work in *Nora*, at the level of visual style there are many similarities between this film and *Anne Devlin* in particular. Her art college background and its influences manifests itself in the way she organises the *mise-en-scene*. Many scenes, particularly when Joyce and Nora are at their most united are almost like portraits, appropriated from the world of art history. When Nora and Joyce first move to Italy their arrival gets off to a shaky start. Joyce abandons Nora in a park when he goes to the Berlitz school. He fails to tell his employer that he has a companion for fear that this will jeopardise the post. Returning that night when darkness has fallen he thinks that Nora has left, abandoning their luggage beside a park bench. But having endured harassment and ridicule from two men in the park she has taken refuge by hiding behind a tree. This conflict is articulated through an argument when Nora tells Joyce that she wants to go home, 'Is that home in Finn's hotel or home in Galway?' he replies dismissively. However, because of the way Murphy constructs the narrative, this bad feeling between them is short lived. They find their lodgings and they make love. The scene following their love-making portrays a couple lying amid sheets like a portrait from classical art whereby they are framed, tableau-like in a warm glow on their first morning in Italy. This contrasts with the depiction of Edwardian Dublin in a cold, damp, dark restrictive aesthetic, conveying Joyce's attitude to his homeland but also contrasting with the potential for the relationship when they are released from the stranglehold of Irish society.

In the film *Anne Devlin*, Murphy also constructed scenes that are reminiscent of art history. Evidently influenced by artists such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt, Murphy adopts the technique of chiaroscuro, the balance of light and shadow in a picture, with darkness being predominant. This technique was used in art to create the effect of relief or modelling. The device is used in the scene when Anne is being interrogated by Major Sirr, where both figures are surrounded by darkness, illuminated only by candlelight. In contrast, Murphy makes the most of constructing natural day-light in *Nora* which achieves the effect of contrasting dreary Dublin with sun-drenched Trieste. Aesthetically this film does not suggest *oppression*, rather it is a celebration

of what is possible when two people grow in a relationship. Released from the bind of the homeland, escaping to a bohemian life brings about a freedom articulated through the film's visual style.

Pat Murphy continues her idiosyncratic style of long shot in framing Nora. Clearly rejecting the mainstream classical style of compartmentalising and therefore objectifying the female form, female characters in the films of Pat Murphy are more often photographed in long shot. What this achieves is central and definitive positioning of women at the heart of the narrative. This is particularly noted in the opening sequence of *Anne Devlin* whereby Anne and the other women take a dominant position over the Redcoats when they encounter each other early in the film. The women standing up in the cart has the double effect of firmly placing them, and Anne in particular, at the centre of the narrative as Murphy's objective is to re-write *Anne Devlin* into history. Likewise, in *Nora*, while arguably not a political exercise in feminist terms, Murphy quietly challenges the wrongful perception of Nora Barnacle as a wild, simple, illiterate Irish *cailín* from the west of Ireland. Through the use of long shot and other framing devices, she establishes a character that is dominant, proactive and emotionally confident, thus plumbing to her psychic depths. In doing so, she is creating a character that marks itself in contrast to the banal, stereotypical characters that have characterised many of the 2nd wave Irish films.⁵⁰ Not just in the character construction but also how it relates to the *mise-en-scene*, this film demonstrates one of the more accomplished character studies of recent Irish film.

In *Maeve*, the camera movement draws the spectator around the narrative by the use of constant circular tracking shots. By refusing the spectator a fixed position, identification becomes impossible, an ideological exercise in feminist filmmaking. Murphy uses a perpetual motion shot when filming the female body in order to negate the dominant Hollywood device of objectifying the female form that feminist film theory highlighted in the 1970s (Mulvey, 1975). Similarly in *Nora*, she uses a two shot in circular movements to frame Joyce and Nora singing *The Lass of Aughrim* together in the café-bar in Italy, just after Nora reveals her ignorance of literature. The group that Nora and Joyce are socialising with are holding a conversation in Italian and as Nora doesn't speak Italian at this stage she cannot partake until she hears the word Ibsen, to which she interjects 'is that the Ibsen you know Jim?' as those around

the table snigger at her ignorance. The party breaks up and Joyce starts playing the guitar. When she moves towards him, the camera holds the two of them in shot privileging neither as it moves in a circular movement. Further attempting to articulate a relationship of equality, Murphy rejects any opportunity at creating a hierarchy between Nora and Joyce. When they finish, Joyce says to her, 'an Irish ending to the evening' as she begins to cry.

Singing the traditional (but English-language) sentimental song together is indicative of a willingness to own emotions not acceptable to the respectable societies of either Dublin or Trieste. The ballad takes the form of a dialogue, so it is art produced jointly by them, unlike his writing. (Meaney, 2004: 65)

In restorative three act structure (Dancyger & Rush, 1990) the narrative is structured around obstacles placed in the way of 'solving a problem' or 'achieving a goal'. Throughout the structure of mainstream cinema are dotted mini-plot points and false solutions which have the effect of creating conflict that in turn leads to dramatic tension. However, in *Nora* the audience is not presented with the mini-plot points and false solutions that may be the expected norms or conventions. Nora is never in any doubt about leaving Ireland to be with Joyce, which in classical narrative would be an obvious point for a false solution. Despite his bad behaviour and jealousy, she does not attempt to change him in a drive for redemption and restoration, which classical narrative would have audiences expect. Having said that, there are obstacles that are placed in their way that they must overcome and she does eventually leave him because of his obsessional behaviour, but unlike classical narrative that would pit one against another in order to force change, Nora refuses to take on his problem as her 'problem to solve'. This contrasts with *A Love Divided* whose narrative started off as political but culminated, through various creative changes, in melodrama when the lead male and female characters were pitted against each other in order to structure conflict. Sean becomes passive as the narrative progresses, even though he wasn't in real life, whereas Sheila is active until she becomes a bit mad, culminating in a caricature that fails to evoke sympathy or empathy. It is by contrasting *Nora* with a more conventional approach that the modernism of Murphy's text is revealed.

In another challenge to the dominant classical model, Murphy often follows a period of equilibrium with one of upheaval more in keeping with a multi-act narrative, closer to European art cinema than mainstream classical Hollywood. When Joyce goes to the

bar after they have sung *The Lass of Aughrim* together, he is advised by one of his bohemian group to get himself out of the situation before he makes Nora any more miserable than she already is – ‘One would have to say Joyce that you should get out of this situation while you can, you’ll only ruin her life by making her even more unhappy than she is now.’ Hurt, Nora leaves the café-bar and he immediately follows her out into the rain. Overcome by his fear of thunder he huddles into the wall. Rather than Joyce finding Nora, she finds him, pulling him away from the wall, ‘Feel it, it’s nothing, it’s only a bit of wet’ as she forces him to confront the thunder storm and his fear. ‘If someone hurt you and I was there, I’d hurt them so bad I’m telling you’, she says. Nora is not concerned about what others say, she cares about how he relates to her. She is more emotionally mature in the sense that she knows how she feels and how to express it. It is the task of the story for Nora and Joyce to reach a state of equilibrium that means they are emotionally equal. The following scene re-instates this temporary equilibrium when they are shown making love. Meaney subscribes to the central message of the film espousing equality by identifying the complex nature of Murphy’s portrayal. She asserts that ‘[t]heir relationship is not outside of society nor does it have the tragic destiny usually associated in literature and film with lovers who are at one with storms and the sea. While the couple are socially marginalized, the film also celebrates the way in which they find their way in and around society.’ (Meaney, 2004: 66).

Further aesthetic similarities can be drawn between Murphy’s 1st wave work and this film in the way she uses locations and spaces symbolically to evoke questions around possession and ownership of space. When Anne Devlin first goes to Butterfield Lane she strays into Robert Emmet’s room. In an attempt to explore what Murphy constructs as the boundaries of patriarchy, Anne opens the shutters, shedding light on Emmet’s work as if to reveal aspects of his character. Anne explores the items on the table: she examines the quills, she smells the gunpowder, and gazes at his handwriting, all attempts at exploring patriarchal space. The imagery suggests that Emmet is more an artist than a pragmatist. Anne is soon interrupted by Emmet, who immediately closes the shutters, thus relegating this space to its original darkness, at least to the eyes of Anne. Further attempts by Anne are interrupted whilst in Major Sirr’s office. Like the science of archaeology, Major Sirr must piece evidence together in order to capture his prey. If the evidence is not there or the precedent absent his job

is threatened (O'Connell, 1992: 48). In a similar scene in *Nora*, Joyce visits the room Nora used to lodge in while working in Finn's Hotel, before she left Ireland to be with him. He is now back in Dublin, not able to be with her because of his jealousy. He moves through the room as if expecting to find evidence that will validate his obsessive jealousy as the woman who now occupies the room looks on, presuming his 'wife' is dead. This scene dissolves to a shot of Nora lying in bed in Trieste. The space placed between Nora and Joyce when he returns to Ireland has the added effect of confining his problem to his character. Attempting to possess Nora and feed his obsession by visiting her former lodgings, Nora is saved from implication in this action by being a thousand miles away. As stated earlier, the most challenging aspect of this text is how Murphy attempts to portray a relationship of equality despite negative attributes constantly impinging. The spatial separation of Nora and Joyce means that they still share love but his jealousy is confined to his personal realm. However, they must be re-instated physically for equilibrium and equality to manifest.

What is particularly interesting about this text is how the narrative structure and visual style entwine to illustrate a simultaneous development from and continuation with the style of her earlier work. Murphy's re-invention of the classical form to accommodate 'canonicity' and 'breach' in creating what is both a romantic tale and a modernist, humanist, arguably post-feminist work is what sets this film apart from its 1st and 2nd wave counter-parts. In Vladimir Propp's analysis of the folk-tale, he claims that a story begins with a disruption of a stable state by 'an act of villainy' with the next phase being separated into crisis and privilege. What is particularly important is the symmetry between beginning and end, bounded at both ends by synchronic order. In the folk-tale the hero's disruption is leaving home, equilibrium is restored on arrival at a new home. Joyce returns to Trieste when Nora threatens to have Lucia baptised but she leaves him when he tries to force her into an affair with Prezioso. The catalyst for her departure is the 'show down' on the pier in Trieste when Joyce accuses Preziso of 'fucking his wife'. Nora returns to Ireland, to Galway to live with her mother and uncle. Joyce comes to Galway to visit and she decides to return with him. *Nora* opens with the departure from Galway and in synchronic order, the film's closure is brought about also by a departure from Galway, this time with Joyce as their relationship restores itself to equality and therefore equilibrium. In visual terms, the penultimate scene shows the family departing Galway as a unit in a horse and cart, like a John

Hinde picture postcard, presumably en route to Dublin as they leave Ireland for good. The final scene is preserved for a sepia-toned shot of Nora and Joyce, she walks towards him with her back to the camera, they link arms and stroll off into the sunset, never looking back, a conventional romantic visual, to the tune of *The Lass of Aughrim*.⁵¹

A RELATIONSHIP OF EQUALITY

The complete form of the romance is the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero...the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict' (Frye, 1957: 187).

Central to this discussion and analysis has been an attempt to articulate what Murphy achieves in this film, that the fundamental narrative expression of the film is the story of a relationship of equality. While Murphy works within a convention of romantic narrative and Frye's stages within the *mythos* of romance are easily identifiable, it is her subversion alongside appropriation of convention that makes this film both complex and intriguing. Like her earlier work, she negates fixed positions so while formalism is a useful device to analyse the structure and is thus appropriated here, its shortcomings are revealed when attempting to explain points of conflict within the structure. In this chapter, a formalist analysis reveals how Murphy engages with the romance structure so common in the medium of film but in arguing for this film to be an expression of equality, the framework needs to expand to include philosophical ponderings.

Pat Murphy describes the film as 'lust – raw and real – rather than romance, and maudlin sentimentality doesn't get a look in'⁵² while Ewan McGregor, the actor who plays Joyce says 'people should be able to see this movie and not be obsessed with Joyce – and relate to it on a very core level as this love story'.⁵³ Susan Lynch, the actor who plays Nora says in an interview that

They labelled Nora a chambermaid from Galway, as if that was all there was to her...yet Joyce wouldn't have been with somebody who couldn't have stood up to

him. Nora and Joyce never stopped being in love. I think she did as much for him as he did for her. And that's what the film is saying. That they had equality in their relationship.⁵⁴

What makes this story particularly interesting is the way Murphy problematises both feminist narrative and classical narrative to articulate a modernist, humanist tale. In the *Volta Movie Magazine*, the film is described as 'a commendably modern and frank love story, *Nora* is a feminist take on the relationship between Joyce and Barnacle'.⁵⁵ As Murphy says, the previous films she made, 'like *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* were about politics and history, and I felt there never really had been a great love story to come out of Ireland, and that coincided with starting to work on this. That's what I wanted it to be because...the most striking thing for me about their lives together, [was] how much they loved each other.'⁵⁶ It is not a film about James Joyce but about his relationship (Ibid: 14) while at the same time 'it's not a feminist re-reading of Joyce[...]What it's saying is that her presence affected his work. And that they loved each other. His work was about daily life and that's one of his great contributions to twentieth century writing, that the ordinary is important.' (Ibid: 14).

Predictably Joycean scholars or leading literary academics when invited to comment on the film were less concerned with the narrative that espouses equality than the fact versus fiction debate. According to Declan Kiberd, '[t]he young Joyce saw a partnership with Nora Barnacle as a declaration of war on the Catholic Puritanism which disfigured life back in middle-class Ireland'⁵⁷ yet unconsciously providing a context for the pursuit of equality in a relationship Kiberd describes the 'great evil Joyce detected in most Irish marriages was what he called the spectre of "mutual tolerance". This was the local form of divorce, whereby two persons shared a house but not a life.'

Nora is not portrayed as a woman 'ahead of her time' or someone who rejects the patriarchal, bourgeois order of the day, thus setting it apart from *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*. Instead, she is constructed as a character that is driven by inner feelings rather than outside influence. While it can be argued that classical narrative relies on psychologically-driven characters to perpetuate the dominant ideology, which has been the main focus of criticism by feminist film theorists, this film does so for a different purpose. Nora is not ashamed of working as a chamber-maid in Finn's Hotel

and is well able to handle Joyce's friends, Gogarty and Cosgrave. Their actions are only relevant to the extent that they affect Joyce's behaviour. Ultimately she holds Joyce responsible for his emotional makeup and does not seek scape-goats. Through a discourse of humanism, Nora does not blame society or people, but is ultimately only concerned with the two parties to the relationship, herself and Joyce. While this can be read as myopic and romantic, naïve and innocent, Murphy's articulation is more than that, it is an attempt to tell a story that has not been told heretofore.

When you read about her first, you think that she was victimised, but I'm now convinced that she was Joyce's equal. She was extraordinary, heroic. I began to feel inadequate to show what she was really like, to do justice to her.⁵⁸

Analysing Nora's character contributes to the thesis that this narrative articulates a discourse of equality. However, probing Joyce's character potentially destabilises the argument given that the portrayal is often negative – obsessive, destructive and jealous. However if Bakhtin's theory of 'grotesque realism' is appropriated, how Joyce functions within the text can be revealed. The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation which Bakhtin insisted was not merely a negative process.

On the contrary, Bakhtin stresses the ambivalence of carnival imagery and its use in Rabelais. The degradation enacted in carnival and carnivalized writing – the incessant reminders that we are all creatures of flesh and thus of food and faeces also – this degradation is simultaneously an affirmation...linked to regeneration and renewal. (Dentith, 1995: 67)

Murphy does not shy away from the task of making sense of a relationship that appears from the outside to be highly destructive. Classical narrative all too often offers simple, conclusive solutions to romance stories.⁵⁹ By moving away from the mainstream devices of the romance genre, Murphy creates a challenge for the viewer to construct a positive image out of the construction of Nora and Joyce. As Mrs. Hushabye in George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* says 'people don't have their virtues and vices in sets: they have them anyhow: all mixed' (Shaw, 1983: 72). Classical narrative relies on binary oppositions to create conflict and dramatic tension which Murphy resists. By doing so, Murphy creates a story-world that draws on more complex and unpleasant human characteristics but as Bakhtin would suggest those that are linked to 'regeneration and renewal'.

Pat Murphy describes the film as a romance.⁶⁰ How she achieves this love story is by rejecting the narrational apparatus of oppositional characters generating conflict, refusing the dominant device of pitting Nora and Joyce against each other. When Joyce tells Nora that after he has been with her he goes to prostitutes, rather than having the expected effect of emotional hurt, she retorts that she doesn't believe him. 'When I met you, you knew nothing about women', to which he replies 'and you clearly knew a lot about men'. When he abandons her in a park on their first day in Italy, she suddenly realises that she is completely dependant, 'I need you for everything' Nora says to which Joyce replies 'I need you for everything also'. What makes this film rare is Murphy's ability to use what is generally portrayed as destructive and negative, jealousy, in an emotionally constructive way to achieve 'regeneration and renewal'.

Their privacy is one of the things that motors their erotic life together...[One] of the things that happens is that people grow into the habit and experience of each other and I think [Nora and Joyce] completely did this. It becomes part of the compost of their relationship, it enriches it, it's something they have done together and they've survived it (Pat Murphy quoted in Meaney, 2004: 24).

An interesting and complex scene illustrates what Murphy is attempting to do in articulating this relationship of equality. Is the sequence when Joyce questions Nora about whether she is pregnant one of betrayal or rejection? 'The land-lady thinks you are pregnant', Joyce says from the bed-room door as she lies in bed at the other side of the room. Nora doesn't know for sure and suggests that the food is making her sick. 'Maybe you should write to your mother', Joyce says. 'What for?', she asks 'For help'. 'I don't need her help' she replies. Concluding the scene she says, 'It'll be alright won't it, might not be, might just be the food, I can't keep it down' confirming her state while also looking for reassurance. At face value it appears that Joyce is rejecting Nora in this scene and trying to absolve himself of responsibility by suggesting she seek help from her mother. While the subsequent scenes show him as neglectful, absenting himself from her company and spending a lot of time drinking, it is still not a discourse of blame. While he may not be shown to be taking responsibility, like her he is just not dealing with it. While Joyce does not embrace Nora in this scene, he neither rejects her. His response it can be argued is a human one to something that was not planned. His subsequent relationship with his son, Giorgio,

as portrayed in the film, reinforces this. The following scene, when Joyce and Nora bring the piano into the court-yard and sing together visually asserts and re-establishes the relationship along the lines of equality.

Susan Mackey-Kallis details the tensions in Film Studies between ideological studies and myth-criticism and cites an article entitled “Integrating Archetype and Ideology in Rhetorical Criticism” by Rushing & Frenzt which challenges ‘the pre-eminence of the ideological turn in contemporary criticism, while rescuing the archetypal perspective from its current marginalized status’ (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 229), the latter position being closely aligned to the cultural humanism explored in this thesis.⁶¹ This stance can be summed up in Rushing and Frantz’s words, ‘while still maintaining their uniqueness, separate cultures would expand their identities outward into a more global, even universal, consciousness’ (quoted in Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 230). This text, it is argued, attempts to articulate a human, emotional discourse that nods in a global, even universal, direction, by rejecting an external rational explanation for plot events: instead character motivation, whether rational or irrational, comes from within the individual or through the agencies in the film. In some ways, this approach closely aligns to Claude Levi-Strauss’s aim, as Larrain suggests, which is ‘to discover a basic structure or logical pattern’ (Larrain, 1979: 146), a key research objective of this thesis. With reference to myth, which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, ‘the important thing for Levi-Strauss is not that myth may distort reality, but that myth makes sense from a logical point of view’ (Larrain, 1979: 146), a position in conflict with Larrain’s but one that can be appropriated here. As Larrain states, Levi-Strauss comes back to the ‘existence of innate cultural universals which are not dependent upon social reality’ (Ibid). Instead, the text must be true to itself and function by its own internal laws of logic. It is this unique structure and one that deviates from her earlier work that marks out *Nora* as a film epitomising much of the development and evolution within new Irish cinema, yet maintaining a link with Irish film’s past.

Yet again, this line of analysis leaves itself open to criticism along patriarchal, bourgeois lines. If any source of conflict is resolved by re-instating the equality discourse, then there is no real source of conflict, it could be argued. However the next scene negates such a reading. The source of conflict (drink, jealousy, obsessional

behaviour) has not disappeared. This scene reveals Nora facing into her pregnancy alone. When Joyce eventually arrives home one night after Nora sends a neighbour to find him, they lie in bed together and once again he suggests that she write to her mother for help. When he accuses her of not being interested in his writing, she recites, verbatim, something he has written.⁶² At no point is Nora portrayed as a victim, of Joyce, of circumstance or of her time. She constantly re-asserts herself as an equal in the relationship regardless of outside pressures or norms.⁶³

Martha Nussbaum (1999) attempts to articulate a discourse of feminism that combines elements often thought to be in tension: a discourse that is 'internationalist, humanist [and] liberal, concerned with social shaping of preferences and desire, and, finally, concerned with sympathetic understanding' (Nussbaum, 1999: 6). Murphy is clearly working within a liberal and humanist tradition, an area that has come under criticism by many feminists including Carol Quillen, who are 'wary of inherited concepts like human, individual, reason and autonomy' (Quillen, 2001: 88). Nussbaum argues that liberal humanism can be redeemed by being internationalist rather than Eurocentric 'and that its view of the human person can be both expanded to include women on equal terms with men and modified to account for the social shaping of preferences and the importance of empathy and care while still remaining primarily focussed on the individual as an autonomous chooser' (Ibid: 88). Quillen is keen to see under what conditions the term *human* or humanism can enable rather than obstruct the contemporary feminist quest (Ibid: 88-89). For Nussbaum, 'the modern liberal humanist tradition is founded on the intuition that all human beings are, simply by virtue of their humaneness, of equal dignity. All possess the capacity for moral choice' (Quillen, 1999:90).

What Murphy refuses through the film *Nora*, as poststructuralist critique would have it, is to subject the self to endless fragmentation and decentring (Quillen, 1999: 118). While the agency as articulated through the character Nora is constructed simply within the bounds of the relationship, it makes it a problematic area of identity from a feminist perspective. In social terms, Nora is not equal to her partner, Joyce: she does not have the same freedoms as he does. However, Murphy constructs the relationship in terms of agency, that Nora and Joyce govern their relationship according to their rules. Murphy does not suggest that Nora is at the mercy of larger ideological or

social structures through the story-world she creates. While the audience may deduce this through extra textual fact, for example what they know of Irish society at the time or of the relationship of Nora and Joyce from other sources, Murphy negates these points of entry to her story-world. While this inevitably is problematic for a contemporary and feminist audience, in terms of the humanist discourse, it opens up the way for 'emotional truth' and arguably creates a more radical text, than is first revealed.

From this perspective, authentic human relations are best understood not as those that form after an intellectual peeling away of our cultural or gender-based "misperceptions" and social myths but rather as those sustained among particularized selves through ongoing processes of identification, repudiation, misrecognition, and fantasy that remain dynamic, that insist on mutual subjectivity, and that resist reification even as they recognise their embeddedness in larger social and political structures (Quillen, 1999: 118-119).

By constructing the film in the way she does, Murphy articulates a discourse that is both contradictory and unifying. Through the moments of resistance Nora displays in the text, she is asserting the position of 'equal dignity' central to the philosophy of modern, liberal humanism.

Joyce's jealousy takes increasing control of him as the narrative progresses. When he returns to Ireland to open *The Volta* cinema in 1909, taking Giorgio with him and leaving Lucia with Nora in Trieste, he does not return. Although Nora does not follow him to Ireland, she does attempt to persuade him to come home, first by issuing him with a wedding invitation and secondly by threatening to have Lucia baptised, the former failing, the latter succeeding. However when he returns, relations do not improve. Joyce tries to force Nora into an affair so that he can write about it but she resists, finally leaving him when he accuses Roberto Prezioso in public of having sex with Nora. Joyce did everything he could to set it up but Nora refused to play along. Yet Joyce still uses it as a way of forcing a break up. 'Did you fuck my wife?' he shouts at Prezioso on the pier like somebody demented. It is after this incident that Nora returns to Galway. 'This is over now', she says as she displays the inner strength to walk away, returning to Ireland in 1912 an unmarried mother of two.

Despite having made the break, she visits Joyce's publisher in Dublin to discover why his book, *Dubliners*, has not yet been published. 'Mr. Roberts, my husband wants to know why you haven't published his book.' 'It's very complicated, Madame, I will write again to your husband in due course.' 'You tell me now', she says directly. 'Well, they are not things one would wish to discuss with a lady'. 'Oh, you don't have to be afraid, myself and my husband have no secrets' she says reinforcing, despite the break-up, the relationship of equality they share. 'Well are you aware that one of the stories concerns a pervert?' 'Yes, of course'. 'There are also hidden meanings in these stories that you madam may not be aware of. For example, the most recent one, *The Dead*, frankly there is something dirty going on in that story if you ask me'. This overt challenge to their personal and intimate relationship is revealed through a close-up shot of Nora. For a brief moment, what has been intensely private is revealed in public, sending Nora to a place she has heretofore resisted, separate from Joyce.

If the hero of a romance returns from a quest disguised, flings off his beggar's rags, and stands forth in the resplendent scarlet cloak of the prince, we do not have a theme which has necessarily descended from a solar myth; we have the literary device of displacement (Frye, 1957: 188).

In classical narrative style, the film ends by replacing the disequilibrium with equilibrium. Joyce visits Nora in Galway and finds her playing with the children on the beach. As Maeve Connolly points out, 'when they are together in her old bedroom, Nora's body language and appearance remains somewhat restrained. Instead of reacting to Joyce's provocations with her customary verbal outbursts she walks away from him, and stands outside on the street...But in sharp contrast to earlier scenes, her posture is upright and her subsequent return to the bedroom, and to the relationship, can be read as a deliberate choice' (Connolly, 2003 unpublished). Nora has shown that she has the strength to walk away but also to return to the relationship. It is not that her prince has returned to rescue her, rather, it is her choice to go back to Joyce. She does so as an equal, aware of what lies ahead. The final scene visually evokes the romantic tale whereby the two lovers, reunited walk off, hand in hand, into the sunset. Far from being a tacked on ending to satisfy the demands for closure, Murphy plays with the classical and feminist devices that make this film difficult to classify yet intriguing to experience.

CONCLUSION

Internally focalized in the opening sequence, the narrative does not portray Nora as a fallen woman but one who is in control of her own life. After a violent encounter with her uncle, she plans to run away with Michael but ends up alone. In a narratively confused scene, the audience learns later that Michael, Nora's former love from Galway, took ill and died without her knowing. While the story visually suggests that he may run away with her when she leaves Galway, it symbolically articulates her *aloneness* in the world. Later in the narrative Joyce suggests that Michael died of love for Nora, who then uses this story as the basis for the character Michael Furey in *The Dead*, a historical detail revealed in the film.⁶⁴

Reminiscent of the main female characters in Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *December Bride* (1990) and Gillies McKinnon's *Playboys* (1992), Nora is an independent, sexually active woman who lives life according to her own set of internal morals and emotional guidance. Unlike the characters in *Love and Rage* and *A Love Divided*, this narrative uses the inner dimension of the character as a blueprint for character construction rather than a perceived society norm. Pat Murphy manages to echo 1st wave features and characteristics by presenting a text that challenges at the level of form and content while also setting the film apart from her earlier work. By continuing in the general direction of 2nd wave film Murphy tells a story that speaks beyond national borders by addressing aspects of the *condition humaine*. She uses the conventional devices of the romance to narrate a radically-themed story.

Because Murphy has made the leap from 1st to 2nd wave in a way others have not, in order to analyse her work, one must depart from old models to new ones.

Appropriating one of Mikhail Bakhtin's basic principles of *utterance*, 'that communicative acts only have meaning, only take on their specific force and weight, in particular situations and contexts...the actual communicative interaction in its real situation' (Dentith, 1995: 3), it is argued here that Murphy's *Nora* is an account of that *utterance*, that it symbolises the development that has taken place in contemporary Irish cinema away from a pre-occupation with inward looking observances to an engagement with externally framed universal themes and conditions, however uneven that has been.

This film offers an immense challenge to the story analyst on many fronts. By rejecting the classical structure of equilibrium, upheaval and restoration for a structure that ebbs and flows at a much gentler pace, there is the danger that the film will appear devoid of narrative tensions. In classical narrative, the protagonist and antagonist are often pitted against each other along the lines of subordination and domination. While this presents an easily digestible drama in many instances, it precludes exploration of emotional depth. By rejecting this type of polarisation, Murphy creates scope in the narrative to complicate the material. Secondly, by departing from the ideological framework that characterised her earlier work in the direction of a universal, humanistic, arguably post-feminist narrative, Murphy cheats the viewer of simple, compartmentalised conclusions. Despite Joyce's destructive jealousy, he is not portrayed as a beast while Nora is not elevated to a position of glorification. This story commands more processing time by the audience after the initial hypothesis is put in place.

Although Murphy offers a complex narrative that adds significantly to the canon of contemporary Irish cinema, it is far from unproblematic. Humanism as philosophical enquiry is a useful device to reveal what is at work in *Nora*. However while it helps to uncover the structure and meaning underpinning the narrative, it also reveals the shortcomings of this type of created story-world. Like Murphy's earlier work, the narrative in *Nora* works at a theoretical level but fails to resonate at a metaphorical or allegorical level, which symbolises something above and beyond the story-world. While the narrative in *The Boy from Mercury* uses planet Mercury as a metaphorical device to explore Harry's development in overcoming fear and coming to terms with grief thus giving the audience an emotional experience, no such metaphor exists in *Nora*. In *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*, Eamonn's sexual prowess exists only as long as he hasn't achieved true love thus symbolising a lack that is inherent in his life. The agential constellation offered by the fictional world through 'deities, devils or spirits' or metaphor, allegory and symbolism is rejected in the narrative of *Nora*.

While it is not the task of this thesis to assess historical truth (or whatever guise this narrative embraces), this discussion suggests that stories functioning beyond the ideological can give expression to a different type of truth, in this instance 'emotional

truth' as it pertains to the story-world created. Because so much is known about James Joyce, there is always the pressure on any new text to represent him according to an accepted truth or as Katie Moylan suggests, 'to bring the facts to life'. However Pat Murphy says, 'facts aren't the truth. I'm in a strange position because I'm saying this is accurate, but then I'm saying [that] it's not chronologically accurate. So it gets into some weird inner area, where it can't be either/or. It's like a creative angle on their lives, which I think is a true angle on their lives, but it's still through the medium of a cinema feature film'.⁶⁵ For Murphy a kind of essential truth, as represented in cinema, transcends historical chronology, in this instance, 'emotional truth'.⁶⁶

This film reclaims Nora Barnacle from historical oblivion, although this is not necessarily the purpose or project behind the film. It presents her as much more than the wild, primitive girl from the west and debunks many of the myths behind the image that is Nora Barnacle, wife of James Joyce.⁶⁷ But it also offers a contemporary Irish love story articulating a modern discourse, one of equality. By moving beyond the constraints of national narratives, and the baggage of the 1st wave, Murphy tells a story that is equally global and local, drawing on what is simultaneously an Irish and universal story, thus firmly locating her as a writer/director within the 2nd wave of Irish cinema.

¹ Surprisingly it has not been examined within the context of 'Heritage', a discourse dominant within Film Studies in the 1990s whereby the aesthetics of the picturesque dominate, arguably because while visually through costumes and locations it subscribes to the 'Heritage' film, narratively it does not.

² Interview with Pat Murphy by Niamh Thornton, *Film and Film Culture*, Vol. 1: 7-10.

³ Joseph Moser in his article "Fighting within the rules: masculinity in the films of Jim Sheridan" (Rockett & Hill, 2004) quotes Jim Sheridan who states that there are 'no love stories in Irish literature....In repressed...broken cultures love stories have not prominence....It's very difficult to do' (Moser in Rockett & Hill, 2004: 89). Sheridan attempts to redress this, and 'reconstitute affirmative figures of masculinity' (Ibid). It appears, therefore that contemporary directors such as Sheridan and Murphy are concerned with changing the representations that have heretofore dominated Irish cultural texts and seek to offer progressive, more enlightened examples of national characters..

⁴ I am indebted to my students at the Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in the BA English, Media and Cultural Studies for their insights and discussions on Irish film. Often unaware of the ideological positions of critics and theorists on Irish film, they offer fresh readings of contemporary Irish film that have been invaluable to my research.

⁵ Central to Bakhtin's contribution to the debate is his theory of chronotope, which literally means time/space. Stretching from the 1920s to the 1973 conclusion of his work, Bakhtin's concern for space and time was reflected in 'a theory of value that had a double base: the different perceptual categories that are grounded in the self and all the other categories that are perceived as nonself' (Clark & Holquist, 1983: 278). Bakhtin's theory of chronotope lends itself to generic categorisation of works of art. One such chronotope he defines is the 'adventure time' and he uses the romance story or boy meets girl to illustrate how it works, from the Hellenistic world through to the emergence of the novel. What is interesting about the 'adventure time' chronotope is its decontextualised nature. There are no identifying traces of the historical period. 'Adventure time' has its own logic of random contingency. Thus both time and space are essentially abstract and non-specific. One reading of the idea of chronotope is that it is a 'bridge, not a wall' between the actual world as source of representation and the world represented. Some film analysts, for example, Paul Willemsen and Patricia Mellenkamp, have deployed it as a way to 'forge links and homologies between a "textualized" world of social discourses and the "world of the text"' (Stam et al, 1993: 217). This appropriation misses the intrinsic value of the theory, that it allows for a reading based on the notion of an independent and separate entity. 'Through the idea of chronotope, Bakhtin shows how concrete spatio-temporal structures in literature – the atemporal otherworldly forest of romance, the "nowhere" of fictional utopias, the roads and inns of the picaresque novel – limit narrative possibility, shape characterisation and mould a discursive image of life and the world.' (Ibid: 217).

⁶ Other films that draw on the tradition of European art cinema include *All Soul's Day* (Alan Gilsonan 1997), *When Harry Became a Tree* (Goran Paskaljevic 2001) and *I Could Read the Sky* (Nichola Bruce 1999)

⁷ John Carney and Tom Hall also directed *Park* (1999) which centred the narrative on the theme of child abuse in a complex and disturbing way.

⁸ The theme of incest stretches back to the classical world (*Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles) and is clearly associated with humanistic stories of the human condition.

⁹ In an article entitled "What's it all about?" by Brian Lynch, scriptwriter on *Love and Rage* in *The Irish Times* 9 Feb. 2002: 5 Lynch provocatively writes about the perceptions of the film as he awaits its release. 'Love and Rage was shot in 40 days on Achill Island, in the house where the real life events happened, and on the Isle of Man. The logistics of this island hop were horrible. And all the while the money was vanishing like snow off a tambourine'. The article reveals the clashing of factors when an art house movie is made along industrial lines. Inevitably budget dictates and creative input from financiers, although unwelcome, is a reality. 'All of [the Synge references] would have been plainer had Cathal Black been able to shoot the script as written' writes Lynch, revealing the tensions between the creative force of an art form and the inevitable industrial nature of film production.

¹⁰ JM Synge bases *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) on this historical character.

¹¹ In a pre-screening interview with Cathal Black (November 2002) the director expressed a preferred method of work that would maintain creative independence even if it compromised the budget. This stand-point is generally associated with directors of the 1st wave, notably Bob Quinn and Joe Comerford.

¹² The introduction of the Micro-budget scheme outlined in Chapter 1 facilitates a return to budgets enshrining greater autonomy, by virtue of their low-budget nature, a scheme that financed *Adam and Paul* (Lenny Abrahamson, 2004).

¹³ This rule demanded that in a mixed marriage between Catholics and Protestants, the couple would undertake to educate and raise their children in the Catholic faith and religion.

¹⁴ Gerry Gregg has made documentaries that explore life in socially deprived areas (*Today Tonight* - Finglas, 1981) and has explored subjects such as the Gardaí; the RUC; Conor Cruise O'Brien. Michael Ross writes that 'Gregg has spent years going against the political grain, first in RTE as a current affairs producer, latterly as an independent filmmaker. His politics are inseparable from his work, from *A Love Divided* to *Witness to Murder*, a Channel 4 documentary about massacre in Kosovo which won him an Emmy award', Michael Ross, *The Sunday Times* (Culture), 12 March 2000.

¹⁵ Quoted in an article by Kieran Owens, *Event Guide*, 12-15 May 1999.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ See Rockett and Rockett (2003) for a detailed analysis of Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins*.

¹⁸ See Colin McArthur and Colin McCabe for further analysis on this theme, particularly their exchange in *Screen on Days of Hope*.

¹⁹ It ranked 36 in the Top 100 performers of 1999 (*Waking Ned* (Kirk Jones, 1998) was at number 11 and *Dancing at Lughnasa* was at number 30). Furthermore, it ranked 2nd in its opening week, was screened in cinemas for 16 weeks and appeared in 30 screens in its opening week. Total gross £614,053, 0.84% share of box office total gross (source Irish Film Board).

²⁰ The main success for the Irish film industry from 1993 – 2003 has been the relative success at the box office of many recent Irish films. Despite failing to succeed internationally, many of these films (*About Adam*, *Intermission*, *When Brendan met Trudy*, *Adam and Paul*) enjoyed national success, in contrast to their 1st wave counterparts, arguably because they chose a more mainstream approach to narrative structure.

²¹ For the purpose of this chapter, humanism is defined as a philosophical stance that claims that the universe or nature is all that exists. It rejects the belief in deities, transcendental entities, miracles, life after death and the supernatural. It affirms that humans have the freedom and obligation to give meaning, value and purpose to their lives by their own independent thought, free inquiry and creative activity. This definition is sourced from <http://www.freeinquiry.com/humanism-uu.html>

²² Pat Murphy was born in Dublin but moved to Belfast with her family when she was fourteen years old. In 1969 at the outbreak of the 'Troubles' she was a student of Art in Belfast. She moved to London to study painting but soon began experimenting with video and slide photography. In 1977 she won a scholarship to study at the Whitney Museum of American Art and remained there until 1980 – apart from periods in London at the Royal College of Art Film School. At this time there was an 'underground' feminist filmmaking network operating in New York in which Lizzie Borden (*Born in Flames* 1983, *Working Girls* 1986) was involved. Although the New York experience influenced Murphy, as she says from the point of view of "getting things done", she was more interested in making a certain kind of politicised film, which didn't fit in with what was going on in New York at the time. The New York scene was particularly bound up with music and art, indeed the Whitney Museum of American Art houses one of the most renowned avant-garde show cases (O'Connell, 1992: 19). This period of her life influenced her greatly, particularly in creating *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*. While the script for *Maeve* was written in New York, the material was derived from experiences in Ireland and from studying media representations of Ireland. What became increasingly obvious to Pat Murphy was that the experience and stories of the people who actually lived in Northern Ireland were largely absent from these representations. One of the most obvious characteristics of *Maeve* is its openness. Pat Murphy says herself that the film is not a campaign, but rather "its meaning is deduced by the audience by connecting the different episodes" (Ibid: 20). This is both an attempt to counter the reductionist way Northern Ireland is generally represented and also the way bourgeois society itself speaks. *Maeve*, through its *mise-en-scene* and narrative is clearly a feminist film. Shot on a budget of IR£85,000 with a crew of ten people, it received an art house distribution. Part of the avant-garde and modernist movements which influenced many 1st wave directors, the narrative structure clearly challenges the mainstream. However, it differs from other avant-garde films by being both *formalist* and *political* and *abstract* and *representational*. Unlike other 1st wave avant-garde films (*On a Paving Stone Mounted*, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1978) this film manages to simultaneously merge the documentary with the abstract creating a multi-layered narrative that resonates for both the *realist* and the *abstractionist*. From this perspective it sets up the possibilities for 'feminine voices', not only challenging what Murphy could have perceived as bourgeois society but also patriarchal discourses, an ideological project of 1970s and 1980s feminist filmmaking.

²³ Other 1st wave directors are associated more with the beginning of the 2nd wave (Joe Comerford's *High Boot Benny*, 1994; Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *Nothing Personal*, 1995; *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, 1999).

²⁴ This film is the story of Anne Devlin, the woman who worked as a house-keeper in Butterfield Lane as a form of cover, when the 1803 rebellion against British rule in Ireland was being plotted. While filming *Maeve*, Pat Murphy read the prison journals of Anne Devlin. She, like most Irish people, had heard of Anne Devlin briefly as Robert Emmet's housekeeper or mistakenly as the woman who was in love with Robert Emmet. By explaining her in this way, historiography could *falsely* account for the torturous road she chose, *for the love of a man*. However on reading her journals, Murphy was struck by "how strong her voice was, and how simple and basic it was...how she saw things in a totally imagistic way, as a camera would" (O'Connell, 1992: 43).

²⁵ The narrative resembles Anne's journey from her involvement in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, through her imprisonment, until her release in 1806, when she was left homeless and starving. However, unlike mainstream narrative cinema whereby the spectator is clearly associated with the main character, hero or protagonist through identification, in *Anne Devlin*, the main character's journey is not the viewer's journey. The spectator is drawn in and out of the narrative through the use of unnaturalistic camera movements. Although close up shots traditionally function in mainstream cinema as a device to encourage emotional involvement, they are used here with a difference. A close up shot in *Anne Devlin* can resemble portrait art, similar to other art movement films. A long take draws attention to the 'constructed' nature of the text, an estrangement technique of art-house cinema of the time. Anne discovers Agnew, the rent collector left dead on the side of the road on her way to visit her father in prison. On arrival at the jail she reports the death. While she is being questioned by the prison officials she is posed in such a way as to resemble Vermeer's *Head of a Girl*. Both the colouring and the framing are un-naturalistic. Although she is reporting the death, she is framed as a convict. *Anne Devlin* marks a departure from radical feminist aesthetics to a narrative that is more accessible, displaying a *mise-en-scene* that echoes art history. *Anne Devlin* appropriates the three act structure and tells a story that at surface level displays a conventional narrative trajectory. Its radicalism is to be found, not in form, but through the appropriation of the feminist tool of 'silence' (Gibbons, 1996: 107-116).

²⁶ Johnny Gogan is another director who symbolises and evokes what the 1st wave stood for in his films *Last Bus Home* and *The Mapmaker* (2001) by resonating an ideological comment on the society from which his story-world is constructed principally through aestheticising of the landscape. Yet in keeping with the evolution of 2nd wave, he shifts focus in the direction of an emotionally-executed story that seeks to explore some aspect of being human. *The Mapmaker* explores the border region in post-ceasefire Ireland but concentrates on the emotional legacy of the war in the North of Ireland by placing a human perspective on the effects of the conflict and in Gogan's words, 'to give the dead a voice' (*The Sunday Tribune*, 12 May 2002: 6). While Gogan would not be considered a 1st wave direct, he would be sympathetic to the work of the 1st wave.

²⁷ *Film West*, Issue 40: 15-17. Interview with Pat Murphy by Katie Moylan.

²⁸ Ideology is taken here to be a way of thinking that is formed by adherence to a particular rational and political belief system for example, feminism or Marxism. Humanism, on the other hand, is a philosophy, based on the rational, that seeks to speak in a philosophical way for 'humans' as opposed to 'politics'. While humanism has been appropriated by ideologues both on the 'right' and the 'left', for the purpose of this chapter it is taken in its broadest definitional terms as mentioned above, devoid of ideological slant.

²⁹ "My Life with Nora" by Joanne Hayden in *The Sunday Business Post* – Agenda Section, 9 April 2000: 34-36.

³⁰ "Portrait of an Artist" by Michael Dwyer in *The Irish Times* – Weekend Section, 10 July 1999: 1-2.

³¹ What is interesting about the reception of this film is that, in general, the reviews were favourable and commendable of Pat Murphy in handling the material. Even Joycean scholars, who saw the film more in terms of Joyce than Nora, were fulsome in their praise (*The Irish Times*, 4 April 2000). Many of the reviewers identified the human tale that Murphy tells. In Michael Doherty's view (*RTE Guide*, 21 April 2000), the film 'shows that...these people were progressive and bohemian and all that, but at the end of the day they were very, very human'. Arguably more notable is the absence of an intellectual debate on the film, akin to that of *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin*, as mentioned already. Maybe this film has, unjustifiably, fallen victim to the antipathy that has greeted many 2nd wave films.

³² Declan Burke, "A not so fine romance", *The Sunday Times* (Culture supplement), Feb. 13, 2000: 8

³³ Post-feminism is associated with 'backlash' and is often deemed anti-feminist but as Ann Braithwaite states 'the major problem with defining backlash and post-feminism as 'anti' – either of feminism or women – then, is that it usually leads to a dismissal or rejection of the complexities and

nuances of both contemporary feminist theories and popular culture overall, rather than a critical engagement with the many changes in both these fields' (Braithwaite, 2004: 19).

³⁴ Humanism is defined as 'most generally, any philosophy concerned to emphasize human welfare and dignity, and optimistic about the powers of unaided human understanding' (Blackburn, 1996).

Humanism is seen as distinctive from the Renaissance and allied to the renewed study of Greek and Roman literature, 'a rediscovery of the unity of human beings and nature, and a renewed celebration of the pleasures of life, all supposed lost in the medieval world' (Ibid). Thus in the renaissance era, humanism was associated with God and consistent with religious belief. It was only later that the term was appropriated for anti-religious and non-religious purposes and has been used pejoratively by feminist and post-modernist writers, 'applied to philosophies such as that of Sartre, that rely upon the possibility of the autonomous, self-conscious, rational, single-self, and that are supposedly insensitive to the inevitable fragmentary, splintered, historically conditioned nature of personality and motivation' (Ibid). From the 1970s onwards, humanism has been critiqued by structuralists and deconstructionists (Foucault, Derrida, Barthes) by moving the human subject from the centre point of creativity. However more recently, particularly through feminist discourse, humanism has been re-appropriated, sometimes within the context of postmodernism as worthy of re-examination. In writing on human rights Fran Hosken argues that humanism is an inspiring philosophy, 'the belief that you can achieve your goals, that you can be all you want to be and make your life a positive contribution to make this world a better, freer and more democratic place to live for all' (Hosken, 1998). This individualistic position is what feminism has resisted, and accounts for the uneasy relationship between the two belief systems. However Hosken argues that the goals of feminism are closely related to humanism. She says that feminism shares the humanist goals of mutual support and that feminism does not want to simply become part of the group that dominates and controls, but wants to see fundamental change of existing systems (Hosken, 1998). Rather than seeing humanism as a philosophy that focuses on the individual at the expense of social and cultural factors, it can be argued that 'liberal societies' who negate choice for individual beings have failed in their objective of liberalism, it is not a failure of the philosophy but a failure of government. While this may be read as simply trying to justify re-centring the subject as self-determining without due regard to external influences, it is an interesting debate that appears to be emerging in feminism, in the arena of human rights in particular. It is also a response to the 'victim culture' of feminism that many women are resisting and turning their backs on, in a post-feminist way (Crawford, 1995). Marjory Odessky in 'The Feminist as Humanist' (1995) defines feminism as 'nothing more or less than the advocacy of equal rights for all – men as well as women' (Odessky, 1995). Quoting the words of Marilyn French in *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* she interprets humanity as something that values 'in life and actions love and compassion and sharing and nutritiveness equally with control and structure, possession and status'. Furthermore, she sees an essential unity between feminism and humanism, a commonality between the two movements that declare, in the words of Bell Hooks in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) a 'commitment to eradicating the domination that permeates Western culture on various levels – sex, race, and class, to name a few – and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society, so that the self development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.' However, some feminists remain to be convinced of the relationship between feminism and humanism as do many on the left. The notion of individualism as opposed to agency as being a central component of humanism is still problematic. However when seen within the context of other theoretical movements, it is not quite pre-feminist, as previously stated, but arguably post-feminist in its construction. Sara Ahmed states that 'post enlightenment thought, manifest most importantly in liberal ideology, constitutes an emphasis on the primacy of the subject over the "objective" world of social relations [...] Liberal humanism has a definite and important link with a universalist epistemology and ethics, insofar as it presupposes that universal rights have their foundation in the subject as a self-dignity that is prior to the contingent realms of history and culture. The humanist self is thus a disembodied and unitary category whose rights are guaranteed as natural and intrinsic properties.' (Ahmed, 1996: 73 – 74).

³⁵ Jean Grimshaw in her article "Autonomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking" (1988) as quoted by Ahmed (1996: 71-72), argues that feminism needs to engage with those theories which deconstruct the distinction between the 'individual' and the 'social', 'which recognizes the power of desire and fantasy and the problem of supposing any 'original' unity in the self, while at the same time preserving its concern with lived experience and the practical and material struggles of women to achieve more autonomy and control in their lives' (Grimshaw, 1988: 105).

³⁶ Quoted in <http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/40murphy.htm>.

³⁷ Interview with Pat Murphy by Katie Moylan, *Film West*, Issue 40

³⁸ See <http://indigo.ie/~obrienh/nora.htm>

³⁹ Such debates have preoccupied feminism in recent times. See "The Feminist as Humanist" by Marjory H. Odessky in *Humanist*, Jan./ Feb. 1995, Vol. 55 Issue 1. "Beyond Humanism and Postmodernism: Theorizing a Feminist Practice" by Sara Ahmed in *Hypatia*, 2001. "Feminism and Humanism" by Jill Crawford in *Freedom Review*, Sept. / Oct. 1995, Vol. 25 issue 5, as alluded to above.

⁴⁰ Pat Murphy explains how she came about the structural approach in *Nora*. Neither a 'broad historical scope' which would have resulted in a 'six hour movie' nor a flash-back structure looking back on their lives seemed appropriate. The latter was rejected because it would suggest something in the past whereas Murphy wanted the audience to experience 'what the characters were going through in the moment' (Meaney, 2004: 35). While Meaney suggests that *Nora* is much less formalist than her other films, Murphy's exploration of the process of narrative construction reveals that although she did not work within the avant-garde on this occasion, she is as much concerned with form now as ever. In Meaney's words 'the first concept of the script, organized around memory and reflection, was accordingly drastically revised by Murphy as it risked becoming 'too much of a bourgeois elegy – lost time, memory and this lost love story'' (Meaney, 2004: 35).

⁴¹ This opening contrasts with a seminal Irish narrative telling a story from the same era, the seven-part television drama *Strumpet City* (1981) when Mary, the main character, also moves to Dublin from the country. However, through the course of the seven episodes this character is portrayed as making the transition from Mary – servant – virgin to Mary – wife – mother without much conflict or obstacle (McLoone, 1984). This development is portrayed as a natural process whereby Mary's destiny lies with her future husband Fitz. The alternative to this path is to remain 'in service' until she is too old to carry out her duties whereby she will be put in the work-house like her colleague Mrs. Gilchrist.

⁴² The exception to this is the portrayal of female sexuality in the form of the 'Sheelnagig', stone carvings that appeared in religious grounds, in the early Christian period displaying female genitalia and thought to be linked to the fertility gods.

⁴³ Interview with Pat Murphy by Niamh Thornton, *Film & Film Culture*, Vol. 1: 7-10.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note here that humanist stories are different to Aristotelian narratives that rely on the combination of free will and fate in delivering the character to their 'destiny'. Humanist stories firmly locate the explanation of the state of affairs within the rational domain of the human. This conflicts with the tradition of universal storytelling that relies on the supernatural, miracles etc. for explanation. Choosing a humanist framework clearly has implications for the type of story told, that will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, no letters exist from Nora to Joyce but it is clear, by reading Joyce's letters to her, that they were written. 'Such commentary as there has been [on the letters] has tended to concentrate on their evidence of a variety of psychosexual obsessions on Joyce's part. Murphy's film reflects, however, a much more complex response. As she points out, Nora wrote back. While this is more than proven by Joyce's frequent references to her replies to him, Nora's letters themselves do not appear to be extant' (Meaney, 2004: 71).

⁴⁶ A basic assumption of humanism is the notion of individual free will. As a philosophy it places the individual as independent, often without social or civic responsibility. As a result, this philosophy has often been appropriated by the 'right' in America and Europe. However, the use of humanism here is a device that attempts to move beyond ideology. Cognisant of the uses this mental enquiry has been put to, it is used here at its most philosophical and 'pre-ideological', to explore a relationship bound only by the parties involved.

⁴⁷ Meaney highlights the poor parenting skills of Nora and Joyce despite their great attributes in other ways. Murphy's explanation of this is given as ultimately the 'exigencies of art'. Murphy states that 'the children of artists, they are never the primary focus. I can think of any number of children of artists that have had disastrous upbringings because their parents were focused on their painting or their writing or their film. I think Lucia is another example of that. Yes, I do think that is true' (quoted in Meaney, 2004: 26).

⁴⁸ Pat Murphy interviewed by Ruth Barton, "Portrait of a Lady" in *Film Ireland*, Issue 75, April/May 2000: 12-15.

⁴⁹ See <http://indigo.ie/~obrienh/nora.htm>

⁵⁰ While many recent Irish films have passed themselves off at a technical level, they have often been criticised at the level of script and story. *Separation Anxiety*, set on the day the first divorce is issued in Ireland, tells the story of Sally who is planning to divorce Kevin so that she can marry Brian. However Kevin and Sally still make love and on one such occasion he swallows her engagement ring. Sally takes him to the doctor. Brian and Kevin become friends and Sally leaves Brian for the doctor. This film is

just one example of poorly defined and developed characters that hinges its story on something too fragile to carry it. Similarly *Gold in the Streets* (Liz Gill, 1996) tells the story of a group of Irish people living as illegal immigrants in the Bronx, New York in the 1980s. Similarly flawed, what this narrative fails to construct are believable characters that engage at a deeper than superficial level and conduct relationships that are emotionally engaging. It is at this level that Pat Murphy triumphs with *Nora*.

⁵¹ Murphy's playing with the audience by presenting 'stereotypical' and 'archetypal' images to the audiences introduces an ironic tone that was absent from her earlier work.

⁵² Pat Murphy interviewed by Joanne Hayden, "My Life with Nora" in *The Sunday Business Post*, 9 April 2000.

⁵³ Ewan McGregor interviewed by Michael Dwyer, "Portrait of an Artist" in *The Irish Times*, 10 July 1999.

⁵⁴ Susan Lynch interviewed by Ciaran Carty, "A part that might have been written for her", in *The Sunday Tribune*, 16 April 2000: 3.

⁵⁵ *Volta Movie Magazine*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2000.

⁵⁶ Pat Murphy interviewed by Ruth Barton, "Portrait of a Lady", *Film Ireland* 75 (April-May 2000): 12.

⁵⁷ Declan Kiberd, "Nora in Bloom" in *The Sunday Tribune*, 13 June 1999: 1

⁵⁸ Pat Murphy quoted in Helen Meaney, "For Love of Music, Hats and Jimmy" in *The Irish Times*, 1 April 2000 (Dublin Film Festival supplement).

⁵⁹ As do many 2nd wave films (*The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*, Geraldine Creed 1995; *Separation Anxiety*, Mark Staunton 1996; *Peaches*, Nick Grosso 2000). Liz Gill's most recent film *Goldfish Memory* (2003), while stylish and quirky and one of the few recent Irish films to explore lesbian and gay relationships, fails to construct characters that plumb to any great depth or offer more complex explanations for human entanglement.

⁶⁰ Pat Murphy interviewed by Katie Moylan, *Film West*, Issue 40.

⁶¹ The term ideology has a complex and evolved history as detailed in Jorge Larraín's *The Concept of Ideology*. In short Larraín summarises four approaches, in historical terms, capturing the evolution of the term: the 'false consciousness' approach; subjective, psychological approach or objective social one; as a specific element within the superstructure of society or 'identical with the whole sphere of culture' and finally, how ideology relates to and is different from science (Larraín, 1979: 11). In terms of film studies, the principle use of ideology has been in its conception as a 'hidden structure in every discourse which is conveyed and received wrapped up in an external and opaque form' (Larraín, 1979: 133). According to Larraín, this ideological structure cannot be consciously noticed by the addressee. In short, 'ideology in a text is a relationship between the textual and the extra-textual, between the content and the conditions of its production, which are external and rooted in historical and social reality' (Larraín, 1979: 140). In analysing the film *Nora*, it is Mackey-Kallis' call for a wider humanistic approach to the examination of the story that this chapter appropriates. In doing so, this analysis takes a philosophical stance rather than an ideological one, the common method which suited the examination and discussion of Murphy's earlier work. All the same, in examining this film in this way, it will be revealed how Murphy's film *Nora* reflects changes taking place in new Irish cinema and hence nods to the external historical and social context of the film, even if this is not a central preoccupation of this thesis.

⁶² At least this is how it appears. Joyce's Estate refused permission for direct quotations which suggests that Murphy is playing with factual truth at this point also.

⁶³ Interestingly, this scene does conflict with Brenda Maddox's account of Joyce's reaction to Nora's pregnancy. Far from absolving himself of responsibility, on finding out that Nora was pregnant he wrote to his brother Stanislaus and asked him to sit down with Gogarty and study some books on midwifery. He told Stan that Nora was "adorably ignorant" about the facts of childbirth. He also requested his Aunt Josephine to write a letter to Nora of 'instruction' and pointed out that he hadn't left her like his cynical friends had predicted (Maddox, 2000: 57).

⁶⁴ This scene is interesting on two fronts, as a narrative and a historical detail. When Joyce accuses Nora in the film of not reading or taking an interest in his work, she replies that she doesn't want to see her life twisted. From a historical perspective, Brenda Maddox details how Nora lost two friends during her early years in Galway, Michael Bodkin and Michael Feeney. Both died young and it seems are fused together to make up the boy Michael Furey who Greta Conroy, from *The Dead*, knew when she was young. As Maddox says '[I]t hardly matters where he got the facts for "The Dead". Joyce rearranged and patterned his materials to suit his art and ear.' (Maddox, 2000: 17). Similarly, Murphy, as a filmmaker, must 'rearrange and pattern' her material to suit the art form of film. She does so by presenting the image of Michael Feeney or Michael Bodkin as the impetus for Nora running away, not

with him (both were deceased by this time). Just as Joyce did, Murphy is merging characters here to present a cause that leads to an effect, departing Galway, arriving Dublin.

⁶⁵ See <http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/40murphy.htm>

⁶⁶ This preoccupation with truth is central to the debate about 'Holocaust' films, and other subject matter that is highly emotive. See Kearney (2002: 50-57).

⁶⁷ For example, while it is assumed abroad that Nora never learned to speak Italian, Pat Murphy shows her as having a firm grasp on the language.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRAGIC POTENTIAL IN THE STORY OF *SONG FOR A RAGGY BOY*

INTRODUCTION

All the storyteller wants to do is to keep the attention of his audience to the end: once the end is reached, he has no further interest in his audience. (Frye, 1990: 165)

The view that Irish film embodies 'the holy trinity' of the Catholic Church, rural Ireland and the 'Troubles' had some relevancy in the early 1990s and has been established as one motivator for some 2nd wave directors and writers (Vinny Murphy & Gerry Stembridge) to branch out in new directions by exploring a more diverse range of subject matter. So even though this view is less befitting the contemporary arena because of those conscious changes, it still surfaces from time to time. As recently as 2003 David Gleeson, director of *Cowboys and Indians* states 'to be brutally honest, you could break the films we have been making into three categories: IRA movies; Conarama (sic) films, as I call them - that's films set in some remote corner of the countryside - and the inner-city downer films. But none of these things mean much to people now'.¹ In a similar way Vinny Murphy (*Accelerator*, 1999) suggests that his film is a reaction to what had gone before, 'a kicking against other Irish films' which were dominated by stories concerned with the Catholic Church, the North and rural Ireland, 'and a fear of dealing with the city'.² Despite the many diverse films that have been produced between 1993 and 2003 exploring a wide-range of subject matter, set in a diversity of locales and appropriating many different narrative styles, Donald Clarke (2004) says 'there still seems to be a belief that our screens are clogged-up with images of warty-faced peasants throwing potatoes at pigs'.

While few 2nd wave films have actually touched on the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish society (*A Love Divided*, Syd McCartney 1999), only two

films have centred on institutional abuse (*The Magdalene Sisters*, Peter Mullan 2002 and *Song for a Raggy Boy*, Aisling Walsh 2003) even though the unfolding of this story has been consistently prevalent in the public domain over the past ten years, notably through 'talk radio' and the Laffoy Commission, a Tribunal of Inquiry set up by the Irish government to investigate institutional abuse.³ Despite the *misperceptions*, the bulk of 2nd wave films have concerned themselves with contemporary, secular and urban Ireland. This is a notable shift generally welcomed by audiences and film critics who bemoaned the dominance of the 'holy trinity' as the dominant themes of earlier Irish film. Whether contemporary filmmakers are engaging with the 'national' at the same level as their predecessors is a central concern of this thesis.

This chapter, therefore, seeks to explore how subject matter that taps into recent or live history has been treated in 2nd wave films, notably in *Song for a Raggy Boy* and to a lesser extent *The Magdalene Sisters*, and also how these films relate to the national and post-national cinematic discourse. The budget for *Song for a Raggy Boy*, which for Geoffrey Nowell-Smith is a definitive factor of national cinema is indicative of an irreversible trend in film finance, its makeup being complex with contributions from four different countries (Ireland, Denmark, Spain and the UK)⁴ while *The Magdalene Sisters* may be regarded superficially as an 'Irish film', when it comes to what may be deemed official sources, it is not always regarded as an Irish film – it's director Peter Mullan is Scottish and most of the finance was raised in Britain.⁵ Trying to identify film by its nationality, although a useful descriptor and often necessary for marketing and publicity reasons alone, is hugely problematic particularly when cinema is considered a global medium. Thus the shift in the national cinema discourse towards what is termed 'post-national' goes some way in resolving these tensions.⁶ It is within this framework that this chapter will explore the narrative of *Song for a Raggy Boy*, principally, and *The Magdalene Sisters*. In doing so, an attempt will be made to situate 2nd wave films in a context of analysis similar to 1st wave films, that concentrates the discourse around national identity. In doing so, it is intended to break down the hierarchy between 1st and 2nd wave films that has resulted in elevating the 1st wave as more politically and thematically important to its chronological and institutional successor.

Finally, this chapter will focus on revealing how 2nd wave film treats subject matter that is clearly aligned to 'national consciousnesses' and central to the public and private domain of a society at a given time. One of the key ways to do this and to shift the discourse from the national to the post-national is to re-appraise the emphasis of 'realism' in film analysis and explore new ways of analysing the narrative.⁷ Central to this approach is the work of Northrop Frye and what is termed 'myth-criticism' in literary studies.⁸ While many contemporary critics regard Frye's theories as having 'distinguished obsolescence' particularly as the emphasis in critical theory (literature and film) has moved away from form, his work is relevant to a neo-formalist discourse.⁹ In 1964 Frye published a short book entitled *The Educated Imagination* which explored his ideas on the relevance of literature to life. His assertion that humans find themselves confronting 'a world of nature, which is oblivious to our values and desires' is particularly relevant in situating the critical practice of interpretation beyond national constraints without de-historicising totally. According to Frye, the purpose of literature (and latterly film) is to turn nature into a world humans discern, that is, one governed by the laws and morals humans comprehend in the western world. Instead of 're-creating physical reality in our own image, we invent fictional versions of reality that let us see a vision of the world as we imagine it and want it to be.'¹⁰ Rather than, for example acting as a representation of 'reality', stories perform the function of interpreting the world around us symbolically. This assertion is particularly relevant in attempting to challenge the emphasis film studies has placed on realism as a way of understanding cinema. Taking Frye's writings on literature and adapting and appropriating them to film allows the text be examined in a symbolic way. By attempting to control nature or physical reality, cinema creates simulations of reality which become not the world as it is, but a vision of the world transformed by the imagination.¹¹ It is this approach that may shed light on what Aisling Walsh was attempting with her film, *Song for a Raggy Boy*.¹²

REALISM VERSUS MYTH

Throughout this thesis a structural and formalist technique to the examination of myth has been evoked. Through the writings of Mackey-Kallis, Jung and Frye a particular approach to the concept of myth has been appropriated relevant to this study. Cognisant that the concept of myth has wide-ranging connotations for film and media

analysts, and not intending to negate the work of important theorists in this field, particularly Roland Barthes, myth is appropriated here in a specific context that makes it relevant to the study of narrative strategies in a formalist way. While this thesis does not deny Claude Levi-Strauss's definition of myth as a force generated to overcome contradiction, and in many ways this meaning is central to the way it is examined here, this thesis, linking to the art and craft of scriptwriting, is concerned with how a writer and director appropriated ancient forms in modern ways. While Barthes' definition that 'myth is a weapon of the bourgeoisie which it uses to regenerate its cultural dominance' (Watson & Hill, 1993: 122) has hugely influenced the direction Film Studies has taken since the early 1970s, it is an approach that is not central to this thesis. Yet, while this thesis does not necessarily subscribe to Barthes' statement that '[myth] abolishes the complexity of human acts', as explored and argued in previous chapters, to say that 'it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all the dialectics, without any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradiction because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves' (Barthes, 1973), suggests hugely negative attributes. Yet, these features are not necessarily all bad. Myth, as it is explored here, can present contradictions in a world that is more than superficial. Furthermore, for narrative to present clarity of focus is indeed an achievement in itself and often displays a mastering of narrative structure in all its complexity and varying levels, a feat of recent Irish film that this thesis is centrally concerned with uncovering. As has been suggested in earlier chapters and is explored closely here, a formalist and structural reading of myth can be useful in exploring narrative strategies and storytelling technique: it is a distinctive task and separate from the approach of Roland Barthes, without intending to negate it.

Although the work of Northrop Frye is concerned primarily with the classics of Western literature, his ideas and theories are highly applicable to more contemporary fictions, both low-tech and high-tech.¹³ This study has argued that the primary purpose of cinema in telling stories is a universal, global preoccupation. Just as the Irish novelist John McGahern claimed, all good writing is local, 'the definition of village life, rendered into art, attains a universal truth'¹⁴ this thesis argues how the local story can reveal universal truths. When Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh declared in

poetry that he 'lived in important places, times/When great events were decided' he was extolling the importance of parochialism over provincialism (Fallon & Mahon, 1990: xvii), whereby parochialism renders the expansive nature of humanity whereas the provincial restricts. In the sonnet *Epic*, Kavanagh 'gave single-handed permission for Irish poets to trust and cultivate their native ground and experience' (Ibid) but in the name of universalism, 'parochialism is universal; it deals with the fundamentals' (Ibid: xviii).

Ernst Cassirer argued that myth is a form of thought, that is, myth is a fundamental 'symbolic form' and like language, it is central to how we create our world. In creating a symbolic world, in literature or film, what is not at stake are representations of reality. Instead, stories work to comment on our world in symbolic form rather than simply recording events, documentary-like. Furthermore, according to Cassirer myth is non-intellectual, non-discursive and typically imagistic. It is primal and emotion-laden and when used in the creation of literature and film acts in a wholly symbolic way to give meaning to our world. In myth the story does not attempt to represent reality, but rather it works at a different level which appeals to the emotions rather than the intellect. While there has been a growing interest in the function of emotions in cinema (sometimes getting caught up in physiological debates) primarily by cognitivist theorists, myth criticism as Frederic Jameson would describe it, redirects the intellectual focus in a structural and formalist way, while at the same time accounting for the symbolic.

The French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss argues that 'the meaning of myths lies not in their manifest content but rather in their under-lying structure of relations, which typically works to mediate between polar extremes (raw and cooked, agriculture and warfare, life and death). In other words, the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.'¹⁵ While myth does not officiate to mask contradiction, it seeks to interpret the complex, human world that provides the raw material for stories.¹⁶ Jung believed that the preconditions for the formation of myths must be present within the structure of the psyche itself and furthermore, they are experienced by humans rather than invented (Hauke & Alister, 2001: 245). This approach can explain some of the apparent contradictions in classical narrative structure that have heretofore been labelled bourgeois and ideological by

functioning to simply reinforce the status quo. The structure of *Song for a Raggy Boy* reveals the tensions within a narrative based on the classical format. Whether the flaws in this film result from Colin McCabe's thesis that the classic realist text is a closed text simply reinforcing the status quo, or points to structural narrative flaws that are a consequence of rejecting the mythic structure is the central investigation in this chapter.

While Freudian psychoanalysis has played its part in the emergence and direction of film theory in the 1970s in particular, little has been made of the work of his colleague CS Jung until recently (Hockley, 2001; Hauke & Alister, 2001; Mackey-Kallis, 2001). Jung's theory of the 'collective unconscious' which contrasts with Freud's emphasis on the personal with regard to the unconscious, hinges on similar assumptions to myth-criticism. The notion of 'collective unconscious' lends some weight to Frye's theory of myth, that the resultant experience is inherently 'universal'. For Jung, while part of the unconscious is personal, the deeper, hence more significant part, is 'collective' because it is not individual but ubiquitous.

[I]n contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us. (Jung, 1959: 3-4).

For Jung, therefore, the contents of the collective unconscious are known as *archetypes*. While Jung has not achieved widespread currency within the *academe* arguably because of his reliance on 'non-rational' explanations and his appeal to the psychic-intuitive¹⁷ this theory is relevant so far as it challenges the way film has been explored heretofore.

To ask the right question is already half the solution of the problem. At any rate we know that the greatest danger threatening us comes from the unpredictability of the psyche's reactions. Discerning persons have realized for some time that external historical conditions, of whatever kind, are only occasions, jumping-off grounds, for the real dangers that threaten our lives. These are the present politico-social delusional systems. We should not regard them causally, as necessary consequences of external conditions, but as decisions precipitated by the collective unconscious. (Jung, 1959: 23).

Thus, according to Jung when stories are told in a local setting the expression resonates universally lending weight to the notion of the universal dimension of storytelling and challenging the emphasis of cultural determinism. Yet this position does not exclude questions of national identity. While there is the danger of going so far in the other direction as to negate any cultural or national influence, it is useful as a marker to shift the focus from social and political contextual studies to issues human and universal.¹⁸ As Kavanagh says in *Epic* 'Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind / He said: I made the Iliad from such / a local row. Gods make their own importance'. This study therefore seeks to reveal how the local gives rise to the global by considering Jung's 'collective unconscious' which functions as a 'racial memory' consisting of 'primordial images' or archetypes, finding expression in characteristic forms such as the earth mother, the divine child, the wise old man etc.¹⁹ The archetypes are then used at particular times and in specific places to give expression to aspects local, thus combining the global and the local.

In questioning how we assign meaning to our world, Jung argues that we use historical categories that reach back into the mists of time (Jung, 1959: 32-33), something that isn't given due recognition in psychology or psychoanalysis. In making sense of our world through constructing *archetypes*, of which myths and fairytales are expressions, 'we find ourselves confronted with the history of language, with images and motifs that lead straight back to the primitive under-world' (Ibid: 32-33). The primary purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to reach back into the history of myth creation and test whether it can be appropriated to the analysis of a contemporary Irish cinematic story, by seeking to reveal the universal story resonance within the local specific of the narrative.

FRYE'S THEORY OF MYTH

The four mythoi that we are dealing with, comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony, may now be seen as four aspects of a central unifying myth...conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance...catastrophe...is the archetypal theme of tragedy...the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme or irony and satire...recognising of a new born society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride, is the archetypal theme of comedy. (Frye, 1957: 192)

In contrast to Kristin Thompson's approach, Frye foregrounds theme rather than plot in analysing a work of fiction, all (plot) incidents are a manifestation of the theme. For Frye, 'theme...is the *mythos* or plot examined as a simultaneous unity, when the entire shape of it is clear in our minds' (Frye, 1963: 24). Consequently, structure is to the forefront of Frye's analysis because in fiction the reader and/or the audience is always aware that the *mythos* or sequence of events (plot) is being shaped into a unity. In line with cognitive theory, Frye argues that we are continuously trying to construct a larger pattern of what is significant out of what we have read or seen already. For this reason, it is impossible to actively engage in criticism without being exposed to the whole. More recently in film studies, formalist approaches (Thompson, 1999; Voytilla, 1999) have attempted to counteract the tendency in film criticism to concentrate commentary on 'isolated bits' rather than the whole and have presented templates of analysis that can shed light on story-world construction and, if appropriated, contribute to the pedagogy of scriptwriting. It is within this framework that *Song for a Raggy Boy* will be scrutinised to see how it functions along the lines of a structured whole.

As mentioned elsewhere, the dominant discourses in cinema have moved so far away from formalist analysis in the direction of representational meaning that there is little or no discussion of structure in relation to Irish cinema, which contrasts starkly with the defining point for critical theory of folk-tales, myth, poetry, music, architecture and many other art forms. According to Frye, 'writers are interested in folk-tales for the same reasons that painters are interested in still-life arrangements: because they illustrate essential principles of storytelling. The writer who then uses them has the technical problem of making them sufficiently plausible or credible to a sophisticated audience. When he succeeds, he produces, not realism, but distortion of realism in the interests of structure.' (Frye, 1963: 28). Frye's definition of myth as a certain type of story in which some of the main characters are gods or other beings larger and at a remove from humanity, suggests that the form doesn't take place in history but in a time above or prior to, and like the folk-tale, it is an abstract story pattern. The characters are free to do what the story-teller likes; they need only obey the internal rules of the story-world construction (Frye, 1963: 31). Myth therefore is useful to the writer by providing him or her with a structure or framework thus allowing them to

concentrate on design, story organisation and content, within their own cultural context and human experience.

Myth and literature have much in common, providing the 'main outlines and the circumference of a verbal universe' (Frye, 1963: 33) and now film has taken up this role, in an increasingly dominant way. But film and literature, it could be argued, are more flexible and pliable than myth, by lending themselves to a much more diverse range of situations. The latter can create more elaborate worlds without being confined to themes that concern the gods while film (and literature) can, and does explore the whole expanse of human nature. Working within the structure of myth can open up potential because the writer/director does not have to invent the structure: she or he designs the story-world in relation to the chosen pre-designed structure which due to its pliable nature can be moulded and shaped according to creative needs.

While structure has been used against Hollywood, to criticise what has been seen as its inherently ideological position and inflexibility, it can be turned around and viewed in a positive light. Structure is not intrinsically a negative constraint having facilitated the emergence of Hollywood through the studio system and the development of narrative form and consequent reactions to it culminating in new forms. Unlike Film Studies, the study of structure has been central to the development of art forms and their theories, such as architecture and music.²⁰ Structure presents a framework within which the artist and audience can roam freely and explore story potentials.

Similarly, the structural principles of a mythology, built up from analogy and identity, become in due course the structural principles of literature. The absorption of the natural cycle into mythology provides myth with two of these structures; the rising movement that we find in myths of spring or the dawn, of birth, marriage and resurrection, and the falling movement in myths of death, metamorphosis, or sacrifice. These movements reappear as the structural principles of comedy and tragedy in literature. Again, the dialectic in myth that projects a paradise or heaven above our world and a hell or place of shades below it reappears in literature as the idealized world of pastoral and romance and the absurd, suffering, or frustrated world or irony and satire. (Frye, 1963: 33-34).

When viewing a film, the spectator is taken through a process and on a narrative journey, subconsciously aware of the stages of set-up, exploration, development and resolution (Thompson, 1999). While the process has many dimensions as a consequence of and a factor in its completion – textual, contextual, extra-textual –

from a formalist perspective it can be argued that the viewing pattern is immediately conceived as a whole. When one engages in critical assessment, the text becomes fragmented into character and plot, isolating events and breaking up the coherent whole. Because in criticism it is very difficult to re-capture that initial experience of unity according to Frye, critical theory is generally fragmented. To counteract this problem the *mythoi* structure is a useful tool in facilitating an examination of the text along the lines of comedy, tragedy, satire or irony. For Phil Parker 'the single most important aspect, which underlies all aspects of style, is 'tone' – 'comedic', 'tragic', or 'dramatic'....Tone is expressed within a narrative by the nature of characterisation, the active questions, dialogue, cinematography, music, the type of action, and the climax and closure of the narrative' (Parker, 2000: 74). The writer/directors' relationship to the structure and to the medium can be explored and evaluated and in this way and the overall film can be discussed encapsulating the story-world idea, the concept central to the framework of this thesis. As Frye says, 'just as critical naturalism studies the counterpoint of literature and life, words and things, so myth criticism pulls us away from "life" toward a self-contained and autonomous literary [or film] universe.' (Frye, 1963: 38).

TRAGIC VISION

The phases of tragedy move from the heroic to the ironic, the first three corresponding to the first three phases of romance, the last three to the last three of irony. (Frye, 1957: 218).

One of Frye's four *mythoi* is tragedy, which can be employed as a useful structure to apply to *Song for a Raggy Boy*. While this method of constructing a story-world has a long history, dating back to the classical era of Ancient Greece, it resonates with many Hollywood cinematic tales (*Scarface*, Brian de Palma 1983; *Raging Bull*, Martin Scorsese 1980) and political cinematic movements (*The Bicycle Thief*, Vittorio de Sica 1948; *My Name is Joe*, Ken Loach 1998) by using the template in ideological and non-ideological ways. The main characters in these films are constructed along the lines of a tragic hero, that has a pre-destined fate either because of their fatal flaw (*Raging Bull*; *Scarface*) or because the card dealt to them in life by their position in society determines a particular outcome (*The Bicycle Thief*; *My Name is Joe*). While *Screen Theory* would see all examples as inherently ideological, the latter two are

constructed in the realm of 'political cinema' whereas the former two are constructed humanistically. Frye's theories, although constructed with literature in mind, can be applied in illuminating ways to cinema, revealing that the structure employed can shape and guide the world view being expressed.

In the comic vision, the human world is a community. In the tragic vision the human world is a tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or isolated man, the leader with his back to his followers. The harlot, witch and other varieties of Jung's 'terrible mother' belong to the tragic vision. (Frye, 1963: 21).

Frye calls on two reductive formulae to explain tragedy, neither offering a complete explanation but both offering something to advance with. One places the emphasis on external fate, something that is omnipotent, suggesting that human efforts are limitless and without real power. Accordingly, this is activated only after the tragic process has started and is not a pre-condition of existence within tragedy but rather a condition of the process once it has been started. The hero, therefore, is not tragic until the process of external fate has been activated. Furthermore, Frye argues that once the process has been started, what constitutes tragedy is a violation of moral law, 'that Aristotle's hamartia or "flaw" must have an essential connection with sin or wrongdoing' (Frye, 1957: 212). The tragic hero possesses a flaw, an *Achilles'* heel, which brings about destruction. He/she can take the form of a hero, possessing 'nobility of mind and spirit, a life attitude marked by action or purpose' (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 91) or an anti-hero who 'is often a reluctant saviour – the one that we follow and adore in spite of his own fallibility and his fundamentally flawed human nature' (Fitch, 2004). In addition, most tragic heroes possess a 'hybris, a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall' (Frye, 1957: 212). It is a combination of the flaw, which is often negative, with a passion which can be positive that sows the seeds of destruction and eventual downfall in the tragedy.

While Frye's extensive analysis of these *mythoi* applies to western mythology and literature, his notion of displacement is useful in making these models relevant to film. As Frye states, the presence of a mythical structure in realistic fiction poses certain technical problems, particularly in making it plausible. He sees myth as one extreme in literary design and naturalism as the other and in between lies romance.²¹ Romance here means the ability to *displace* myth in the human direction and yet, 'in

contrast to “realism” to conventionalize content in an idealized direction’ (Frye, 1957: 136). What this means is that in myth there may exist a sun-god or a tree-god but in romance a character may be associated with the sun or the trees as a symbolic act. The notion of displacement facilitates the reading of contemporary narratives along *mythic* lines and presents an opportunity to analyse story-world construction in a structural way. While Frye applied his theory to the classics of western literature, this study argues that contemporary screen stories can also be analysed for their structural construction and their symbolic meaning. Principally, and where relevant to this study, this framework releases film analysis from the bondage of representational studies and realism to reveal how ‘village life’, rendered as a story-world can articulate some generally accepted universal truths or simply shed light on aspects of the human condition.

SONG FOR A RAGGY BOY – STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Narrative structure, be it classical, conventional or alternative, presents the first phase of its progression as establishing the character, the scene or plot. This establishing phase corresponds to Kristin Thompson’s ‘set-up’ whereby the characters are introduced through the action of the plot. In tragedy the set up according to Frye, seeks to distinguish the main character from other characters, emotionally, physically or mentally. In doing so, they are accorded with traits that define them as different, unique or apart from their peers. Central to the tragic hero, therefore, is a combination of courage and innocence, often predominantly the latter, which is also revealed in the first phase. The classic tragic hero from Greek tragedy is Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* who displays the courage to seek the truth and an innocence that prevents him from seeing the truth. While this is the classical figure on which many tragic heroes have been modelled, particularly characters who sow the seeds of their own downfall, it is an idealised version from which to measure. While comparisons can be invidious, it serves the function of analysing a structure to reveal tensions and flaws and thus increase one’s narrative understanding.

Examining the structure of *Song for a Raggy Boy* along the lines of tragedy suggests that the main character, Mr. Franklin (Aidan Quinn) is constructed with the tragic hero in mind. The opening shots of the film, which are internally focalised, are shot in

flash-back and detail a memory Franklin has of the Spanish Civil War when his friend is shot for refusing to denounce communism. Franklin, in urging him to save his life by complying with his persecutor's demands, displays a combination of innocence and courage (Frye's 1st stage of tragedy), albeit in a contradictory way. In war situations which are based on conflicting and oppositional sides, one side is elevated over another along moral lines: courage is defined in terms of idealism. The moral high ground is often achieved through death when the 'martyr' refuses to denounce his or her beliefs.²² In Irish history martyrdom is established by being 'true to one's beliefs' regardless of what the outcome is, and even more so if it is death.²³ The opening sequence which sees Franklin encouraging his comrade to save his life by reneging on his beliefs establishes the hero in a certain light. While neither Frye nor Aristotle define the tragic hero in this way, central to the tragic hero is idealism. Oedipus remained true to his search for truth even though it brought about his downfall. While truth and beliefs are not necessarily the same thing, one holds beliefs as a form of truth; it is the belief in one's 'rightness' that allows martyrdom to emerge. This is not a distinctly Irish phenomenon of martyrdom but a universal trope in storytelling not just bound up with Hollywood narratives.

This opening sequence of *Song for a Raggy Boy* therefore signals a tension within the narrative structure of this film from the start that will re-emerge as the narrative progresses. Through the use of flash-back, the audience is presented with Franklin's emotional state of loss and sadness, close to tragedy. The choice of actor, Aidan Quinn, reinforces this by setting apart the main character from those around him. Arriving in rural Ireland in 1939, where he is to take up a new post as a teacher in an industrial school called St Jude's, he disembarks from the bus in the local town. In a scene visually reminiscent of a more romantic portrayal of Ireland's past, *Circle of Friends* (Pat O'Connor, 1995) Franklin walks through the town as a new arrival, clearly independent of and somewhat removed from his surrounding environment. This separateness embodies a combination of innocent courage, a trait that Frye defines for the tragic hero. His innocence is revealed when he is shown to his room in the school. Despite having experienced certain deprivations during his time in the Spanish Civil War, he is visibly taken aback when he sees his new 'home'. 'What part of the school is this?' he asks Brother Tom, the oldest and most compassionate brother in the film. 'This is the old cell block but we've little use for it now, thank

God...I hope you'll be very happy here, Mr. Franklin. You're the first lay teacher we've had, God knows, we could do with a change'. Thus the first phase (see Figure 1) of *Song for a Raggy Boy* conforms broadly to Frye's first phase of the *mythos* of tragedy. Franklin is established as emotionally and physically different from his peers. He symbolises something unique and therefore suggests the possibility of change, the heralding in of a new era. While this may not sit comfortably with the expectation of realism that often accompanies this type of film concerned with such subject matter, as a symbolic tale *displaced* on Frye's terms from the structure of tragedy, it fits albeit problematically.²⁴

Phase 1	Establish central character (Courage & Innocence) <i>Franklin arrives at his new posting, Reform School, rural Ireland.</i>
Phase 2	Symbolic Youth – Innocence – anticipates later action / anticipates greater maturity. <i>Franklin is cast in the 'inspirational teacher' mould whereby he believes education can save the boys.</i>
Phase 3	Hero's achievements or objectives – Heroic Phase <i>Franklin seeks to teach the students and give them dignity.</i>
Phase 4	Fall of the hero through <i>hybris</i> and <i>hamartia</i> <i>Franklin, through his actions, causes more difficulties for the boys.</i>
Phase 5	Tragic action of lost direction <i>Franklin is conflicted by his beliefs and the reality of the situation in which he finds himself.</i>
Phase 6	World of shock and horror, 'cannibalism, mutilation and torture'. <i>Franklin's actions lead to Mercer's death.</i>

Figure 1: Frye's Phases of Tragedy applied to the narrative

The second phase of tragedy constructs the presentation of 'symbolic youth', corresponding largely to innocence. William Blake in *Songs of Innocence* presents 'two contrary states of the human soul' as a kind of dialectic (Sander, 1994: 354), innocence and experience which create the tensions of incompatible opposites necessary to create energetic life-force. Neither one of the contraries should be allowed to triumph over the other, because it is their oppositional tension that releases their creative energy. Much of what is introduced in this phase, therefore according to Frye anticipates later action and plays out as a dialectic, tensions achieved through

opposites. In order to establish the tragic hero, he or she is equipped with the characteristics that define their motivation and execution with regard to the story events. This is established once the character has been formally introduced in the first phase. The 'inspirational teacher', which Aisling Walsh uses as a device for the central character in *Song for a Raggy Boy*, is a common device in film and literature (*Dead Poet's Society*, Peter Weir 1989; *Good Will Hunting*, Gus Van Sant 1997) as a way of bringing the other film characters from a position of despair to hope under the leadership and inspiration of the main character.²⁵

The challenge presented to a writer and director in appropriating a common device such as this is to use it *archetypally* rather than stereotypically. According to Jung the 'impact of an archetype...stirs us because it summons up a voice...stronger than our own' while McKee states that the 'archetypal story unearths human experience, then wraps itself inside a unique, culture-specific expression. A stereotypical story reverses this pattern' (1999: 4).²⁶ The achievement of cinematic story-telling is to reveal a world the audience does not necessarily know with devices they are familiar with from story repertoire. Once inside this world the audience discovers *humanity* or aspects of the *condition humaine* (Ibid: 4-5) which can be accomplished through the combination of the local or cultural with the global or universal.

The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping the image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. [Art] is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking (Quoted from Jung in Hauke & Alister, 2001: 49).

Similarly to the Robin Williams character in *Dead Poets Society*, Franklin seeks to humanise the boys in the reform school. In his first class, he dispenses with the practice of calling the boys by numbers.²⁷ 'What's your name?' he says to a boy, picked randomly from the class. '458, Peters, sir', he replies. 'Stand up, Mr Peters', he responds. By re-introducing the boys' names to the class-room, Franklin reveals a naivety and innocence about the world he has to deal with. This is re-enforced when one of the boys asks him 'Why are you here?' 'Cause he couldn't get a job anywhere else' another boy replies, revealing narrationally the truth which Franklin seeks to

cover up. He carries with him from his past a flaw that will impact widely as the narrative progresses. Franklin replies, 'I'm here because I'm a teacher and I think I'm a good one', further reinforcing an idealism that is more romantic than realistic.²⁸ Through the agency of Franklin, the narrative complicates the relationship between romanticism and classical narrative and realism as it applies to the original story source.

Franklin's innocence is further revealed when he instructs Mr. Peters to stand up, open his book and to start reading. The other boys respond in chorus, 'he can't read'. In this phase, Franklin is revealed as innocent and idealistic, thus setting a tone for the film that suggests tragic elements. For Fitch 'the hero/heroine is usually depicted as the one who delivers salvation, enacts positive change, and brings relief from suffering or oppression...usually [possessing] the positive traits common to the traditional notion of a hero: emotional, physical, and moral strength as well as charity and fortitude' (Fitch, 2004). Walsh avoids descending to stereotype in this instance by appropriating an archetype, that is a universally-understood symbol, the innocent idealist, and situating it (him) in a local, culturally-recognisable environment. By setting the scene in this way, the director presents the audience with the option to anticipate later action.

In the third phase as outlined by Frye, the hero displays his objectives and achievements, in this instance to teach the students and give them dignity. Franklin encourages the students to ask questions, promising them that he will answer anything they ask if he is able to. In an attempt to break down the hierarchy and code between oppressor and oppressed he sets about teaching all the children to read and introduces the opportunity to rise to a creative challenge by making the crib for the local church at Christmas, bringing the boys out of the institution into the community in a productive way. Franklin is not intimidated by his first encounter with Brother John, the school prefect and his story antithesis who views the children as animals and 'good for nothing', a strict disciplinarian who rules using the weapon of physical abuse. When Franklin first challenges Brother John in private after he has assaulted one of the boys, and secondly in public he reveals the first indicator of innocent hero. 'There is no need for that' he says as he grabs Brother John's wrist in mid-flight as it is about to deal another blow to one of the boys. 'How dare you, Mr. Franklin...you

have made a very big mistake' Brother John replies as he withdraws. In classical tragic hero mode, Franklin sows the seeds of his own (and the boys) destruction, by openly challenging Brother John. His innocence which it could be argued is clearly a result of lacking experience (Frye's tragic *mythoi*) could be interpreted as his *Achilles'* heel. While it is what makes him identify with the boys and facilitates his construction as the idealistic teacher, his 'flaw' means that the institution will triumph as he ignores the 'reality'.

From phase four on, 'fall of the hero through *hybris* and *hamartia*', rather than making the boys' lives easier, Franklin inadvertently inflicts more harm. Following his public challenge to Brother John in which the latter is forced to recede, the boys are woken in the middle of the night, forced to stand in the yard, arms out-stretched wearing only their under-pants. 'Remember, you have Mr. Franklin to thank for this mid-night assembly' Brother John informs them. This phase incorporates Aristotle's *hamartia* or flaw which connects to 'sin' or wrongdoing (Frye, 1957: 212) and *hybris*, the heroes passion and obsession, the combination which will bring about the fall of the hero. In *Song for a Raggy Boy*, it is his unresolved past, his inability to come to terms with what happened in the Spanish Civil War, the loss of his wife and friend that resembles and results in a narrative blemish. It manifests itself in the narrative when he gets drunk and returns to the school late at night, ranting and raving and ringing the school bell. His flaw combined with his passion presents an opportunity for Brother John to target his vulnerability.

In classical terms, for the narrative to progress and advance the character needs to go through change, in order not only to contribute to the advancement of the narrative in story terms but also for the creation of characters that impact at a psychological level or embody subtext. One of the weak spots in recent Irish cinema has been the absence of complex, psychological characters (Linehan, 1999) that neither go through change or resonate beyond the surface.²⁹ Frye's fourth phase of tragedy sees the boundary line moving from innocence to experience. The fifth phase resembles the second phase by playing out the action, or tragic action of lost direction (Frye, 1957: 222). Whereas the second phase is defined by youthful innocence, the fifth phase sees the hero firmly located in the adult-world. By now, Franklin has been exposed to the reality of the world he now inhabits. Father Damian, the superior at St. Jude's takes

Franklin aside and says 'I'll speak plainly, you've made an enemy in Brother John, questioning his authority in front of the boys was a very unwise thing to do'. 'Did he tell you why?' replies Franklin. 'That's not the issue. He's the prefect here, he is in charge of discipline.' 'What should I do? Stand by while he batters another defenceless child across the face with a strap' Franklin replies forcefully. Fr. Damian, however has his own way of dealing with the situation. 'Mr. Franklin, I've been trying for many years to make significant changes at St. Jude's, it has not been easy but we are making progress. I didn't appoint Brother John as prefect. I wanted Brother Tom but the Bishop dictated otherwise. I have to live with that, so do you.' In this exchange, the reality of how the school operates is presented to Franklin. While he can cling onto his *hybris*, his passage from 'innocence' in the direction of 'experience' presents the opportunity for the story to re-direct. However, the presence of *hamartia* would suggest, in a *Blakian* way that the playing out of subsequent action is predetermined towards a tragic end.

Franklin, from the outset, is cast as a more complex emotional being than his peers at St. Jude's, setting him aside as heroic character. He is struggling with his past (his internal struggle) and his role as English teacher in an industrial school that does not value academic education (his external struggle) but due to his flaw (his own predisposition to violence) and his obsession that blinkers his vision, he will not be able to effect change. In this type of construction, Aisling Walsh's narrative displays many aspects of tragedy.³⁰ The absence of resolution for either the internal or external struggle suggests that the only direction for the narrative is toward a tragic end. In stories like this, it is not the resolution of a problem or the attainment of a goal that hinges the narrative but the process of reattainment which is achieved by learning lessons along the way. According to mythologist Joseph Campbell, the journey for the hero 'is a labor not of attainment but of reattainment, not of discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time' (Campbell, 1949: 39).

The 'demonic epiphany', glimpsing the inferno, a world of shock and horror (Frye, 1957: 222) which characterises the sixth phase is activated in *Song for a Raggy Boy* in the scene when Liam Mercier (John Travers), the boy that Franklin takes under his wing as showing the most potential to break away from his pre-determined fate, is led

to the refectory by Brother Tom under false pretences. When he gets there, Brother John is waiting. 'Mercier, I've been looking forward to this chat for some time, ever since your display of heroics in the yard. You must be very proud of that Mercier...Has Mr. Franklin ever told you what he did before he came here?' When Mercier replies negatively, Brother John responds accusingly - 'Liar' - while hitting him across the face with a strap thus enacting phase six of the tragedy, the 'demonic epiphany'. Brother John, in a rage of violence, beats Mercier while foaming at the mouth, clearly sadistically enjoying the experience, until Mercier is beaten to death. This penultimate sequence of violence fits the story-world created which resembles Frye's description of tragedy. Unknowingly, Franklin sets up Mercier for this end through a combination of *hybris* and *hamartia*, his innocence and obsession which prevents him from detecting real danger. He exposes the boys to the ideals of his past world, without protecting them from the realities of the present, a similar narrative device appropriated in Peter Weir's *Dead Poet's Society*.

The narrative structure of *Song for a Raggy Boy* lends itself to analysis along the lines of Frye's *mythos* of tragedy. Structurally it adheres, in a general way, to the six phases. However, where it negates the achievement of tragedy in the classical sense is in the ending. While the film has proved problematic for some viewers and has been accused of being 'heavy-handed' and unsubtle, the main structural flaw or tension is in the ending. According to an inductive reading of Frye's phases the apt and fitting ending for the film would have followed the scene where Franklin meets violence with violence by attacking Brother John in the Superior's office and delivering him violent punches as an act of vengeance for how he treated Mercier. However the film continues in a classical or Hollywood mode to present a resolution that is inappropriate for the expectations of tragedy. While this point will be elaborated later, it suffices to say now that it presents an ending which conflicts with Frye's model and is in danger of sitting uncomfortably and awkwardly with the audience.

Why it would be appropriate to end the film at this point is principally because it marks a resolution of *hybris* and *hamartia*, when Franklin, through his actions, abandons his ideals, his passion and obsession characteristic of the 'inspirational teacher' for the realities of the world in which he now lives. Abandoning the potential of words as salvation, he meets violence with violence, the only language Brother

John understands. The subsequent scene seeks to redress this but has the effect of contradicting what went before. Mercier's coffin is laid out in the refectory, the location of his death and the first place Franklin encounters the boys: all the boys are seated as if at a funeral. Franklin goes to the corpse, pays his respects and addresses the congregation...

Liam Mercier was battered and abused all his life, firstly by his own family, then by those in this school into whose care he had been placed by the Church and the State. There are those that will tell you that Liam Mercier died of an illness. They are lying. Liam Mercier was murdered and that's the truth of it.³¹

One last attempt at idealism, Franklin reveals the truth about the circumstances of Mercier's death. In classical heroic fashion, through a speech exposing how Mercier really died, Franklin clings to his role as 'inspirational figure' yet ultimately is ineffectual and therefore tragic.³² When the narrative continues with a scene revealing the demolition of the wall symbolising the tyranny of Brother John, the story-world departs from the structural norms of tragedy. Demolishing the wall symbolises hope and future, a misplaced sentiment in this context. While 'hope' can form a part of tragedy, it does so at the expense of the 'tragic hero'. The destruction of the hero, as in the case of *Oedipus Rex* is what saves the people of Thebes and thus brings about hope. When Franklin sets out to leave only to change his mind when the boys appeal to him in a non-verbal way, the narrative further reveals an aberration from tragedy. By not adhering to the structural rules of tragedy, the narrative ultimately hinders its sense of unity. A 'happy ending' in tragedy is not only misplaced, but questions the credibility of the constructed world preceding it. This point will be elaborated on later in the chapter.

The application of Frye's *mythos* of tragedy is useful in facilitating a structural reading of the narrative and revealing points of compliance as well as aberration within the story-world created. It could be argued that tragedy lends itself well to this type of story that seeks to deal with an aspect of the past that is difficult and shameless to a nation-state.³³ Equally, it presents a structure that avoids the depiction of national traumas as little more than a 'testimony to the way the human spirit can survive even the most appalling hardships' (quoted in Murray in Rockett & Hill, 2004: 155), viewed as a drawback in *The Magdalene Sisters* (ibid). While Aisling

Walsh's narrative complies with the phases as outlined by Frye, it still remains a problematic structure. The significance and explanation for these tensions will be proffered further in the discussion.

STYLISING HISTORY

In literature, as in painting, the traditional emphasis in both theory and practice has been on representation or "lifelikeness". (Frye, 1957: 134)

The approach to film criticism that focuses on questions of realism has had an overly influential impact on film analysis, arguably at the expense of style and structure. Intellectual approaches to other art forms, such as music and architecture, have taken a wholly different approach, which, if explored, could contribute to new directions for film analysis. For example, Frye notes that when perspective was discovered in painting, music may well have taken a similar path. While composers who imitate 'real sounds', for example sounds from nature, they are acknowledged, praised, interpreted etc. But nobody accuses the composer of being decadent or a charlatan if he fails to produce such imitations (Frye, 1957: 132) and a hierarchy is not placed on music that is 'realistic' or 'representational' over abstract for example. As a consequence, the structural principles of music are clearly understood and shape the way music is taught to children and adults. Film analysis, arguably because it is a mimetic art form has not developed in a similar way and consequently the teaching of film has largely ignored structural principles. While I have analysed *Song for a Raggy Boy* along structural lines by using Frye's *mythos* of tragedy, the analysis of style can shed further light on this film, from a structural perspective.

The Egyptian tale has acquired, then, in mythical episode, an abstractly literary quality; and, as the story-teller could just as easily have solved his problems in a more "realistic" way, it appears that literature in Egypt, like the other arts, preferred a certain degree on stylization. (Frye, 1957: 135).

The subject matter of *Song for a Raggy Boy* is difficult, complex and highly emotional. The public out-pouring of stories in the media directly from people who experienced their child-hood in the industrial and reform school system of Ireland serves a function of healing through telling and recounting stories. Telling these stories in film narratives poses challenges in solving structural problems for the

writer/director. Appropriating 'realism' does not necessarily accommodate the deeper resonances of the story that are difficult to articulate, such as the legacy left for the individual or the society as a result of a prolonged period of abuse. These stories emanate from historical events and are consequential of a given society suggesting that social realism as a filmic model would fit comfortably as a narrative structure. But in accessing the interior, complex, human dimension to the story, other approaches are required.

According to Frye, in 'myths we see the structural principles of literature isolated, in realism we see the same structural principles (not similar ones) fitting into a context of plausibility' (Frye, 1957: 136). Thus in these types of story plausibility works because the audience knows the story to be historically 'true': very often the material is closely aligned to real life events. The stories that shape the narrative of *The Magdalene Sisters* for example are drawn from a Channel 4 documentary entitled *Sex in a Cold Climate* (Steve Humphries, 1998). The post script, which is a common device of these films (*Song for a Raggy Boy*, *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Philip Noyce 2002) functions to further reinforce the 'realistic' nature of these stories, by suggesting a social and historical accuracy. Furthermore, it could be argued that the events portrayed in these films are so abhorrent to a modern, progressive society that they can only be 'believed' by knowing that they are based on true stories. More revealing about these three films is their problematic relationship with 'realism'. In many respects, Peter Mullan's film works at the level of satire and makes reference to European art movements at the level of style. Likewise, *Rabbit Proof Fence* is highly stylised using the landscape as a central participant in the narrative. Could this tension with issues of realism account in some way for Aisling Walsh's choice to shoot *Song for a Raggy Boy* in what could be deemed, a highly stylised way?

The presence of a mythical structure in realistic fiction, however, poses certain technical problems for making it plausible, and the devices used in solving these problems may be given the general name of *displacement*. Myth, then, is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance...the tendency...to displace myth in a human direction and yet in contrast to "realism", to conventionalize content in an idealized direction. (Frye, 1957: 136).

Key to understanding what is at work in *Song for a Raggy Boy* is the relationship of myth to reality. It accounts for many stories that combine a plausible story from

reality with a 'mythical' one with the purpose of making it resonate at a deeper level. Common to this structure is the contrasting worlds of good and evil, 'generally concerned with gods and demons', accounting for two states of metaphorical identification, one desirable, the other objectionable. It is this structure of story that Walsh uses in telling the story of abuse in an industrial school in Ireland of the 1930s.

Realism poses further problems for film interpretation by negating the function of the imagination in the narrative process. The cognitive theorists' approach, which is gaining ground in film theory (Smith, 1995; Currie, 1995; Plantinga & Smith, 1999) asserts that 'in comprehending, interpreting, and otherwise appreciating fictional narratives, we make inferences, formulate hypotheses, categorize representations, and utilize many other cognitive skills and strategies which go well beyond a mere registration or mirroring of the narrative material. Secondly, fictions prompt and enrich our 'quasi-experience', that is, our efforts to grasp, through mental hypotheses, situations, persons, and values which are alien to us' (Smith, 1995: 74). This is achieved, not through devices of realism (which are a set of conventions continuously changing) and referring to an 'other' world but through the use of imagination to fill in the gaps of the 'story' world conveyed through the film process. In attempting to make the story comprehensible for the audience, in *Song for a Raggy Boy* Walsh uses a highly conventional narrative structure combined with a degree of stylisation which attempts to resonate beyond 'realism'. Thus, the discussion of the film in public discourse was not concerned with levels of 'truth', which often dominates post-film analysis of historically-based films (*Michael Collins*, Neil Jordan 1996; *In the Name of the Father*, Jim Sheridan 1993) but rather with questions of style.

Aisling Walsh directed the television drama, *Sinners* (BBC, 2000), a co-production between RTE and BBC, which told the story of life in a Magdalene Laundry. Made for television, its visual style evokes the sense of 'prison drama',³⁴ a predominance of greys and blues to create a cold, distant aesthetic. In contrast to Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters*,³⁵ Walsh's *Song for a Raggy Boy* adopts a similar aesthetic. From the start, the audience is positioned to expect a conventional style that is already televisually familiar. What this achieves in story-world terms is the provision of a well-versed style that does not detract from the content, an expectation of genre

narratives. However, the formulaic nature of the approach cheats the audience of an aesthetic experience that contributes to the contextualising of this story in a new and interesting way, a common problem of 2nd wave films.³⁶

When compared to other visual narratives exploring similar subject matter and evoking the Ireland of repression (*Broken Harvest*, Maurice O'Callaghan 1994; *Amongst Women*, Tom Cairns 1998; *The Magdalene Sisters*)³⁷ *Song for a Raggy Boy* appropriates a visual style that seeks to distance the narrative from the contemporary world. The sense of space and place in this film is non-identifiable compared to other Irish films evoking this era. While it is more 'conservative' compared to *Amongst Women* which was one of the first visual explorations of the 1950s that attempted to provide a pleasing aesthetic experience without detracting from the 'emotional truth' of the story³⁸, it negates the potential for the aesthetic to 'speak', in a way, for example, achieved in *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Peter Mullan uses the visual style in *The Magdalene Sisters* to contrast the two worlds, inside the laundry and the world beyond, the latter is brighter and the colours are stronger. The visual style undisputedly indicates oppositional worlds. On the other hand, there are no counter motifs or visualisations, no register of a 'deep story' in the narrative of *Song for a Raggy Boy*.³⁹

The Spanish Civil War sequences in this film offer a degree of stylisation that is absent from the rest of the narrative. The purpose they serve is to internally focalize the narrative, to give the audience access to the inner turmoil of Franklin's character. Like Sean Thornton in *The Quite Man* (John Ford, 1952) Franklin has some ghost from the past that is shaping his character in the present and determining how he reacts. Through internal focalization, the audience is presented with a key to the interior struggle of the character either in an empathetic or imaginal way.

It is when we are able, in imagination, to feel as the character feels that fictions of character take hold of us. This process of empathetic re-enactment of the character's situation is what I call secondary imagining. As a result of putting myself, in imagination, in the character's position, I come to have imaginary versions of the thoughts, feelings and attitudes I would have were I in that situation. Having identified those thoughts, feelings and attitudes ostensibly, I am then able to imagine that the character felt *that* way. (Currie, 1995: 153-154).

Currie's approach to the cognitive aspect of fiction goes some way in explaining the function of the Spanish Civil War sequences in this film. At one level, it provides story information (back story) about Franklin, principally how he came to take the teaching post. Secondly, it accounts for his 'difference' among his peers or his deeper resonance (sub-text), which is important for a heroic figure in the film. The audience, therefore, is given a point of recognition through these sequences, level one of Murray Smith's 'imaginative engagement with characters'. Secondly, the audience is provided with visual and aural information more or less congruent with that available to the character, and so are placed in a certain *alignment* with the hero (Smith, 1995: 75). The audience, through the Spanish Civil War sequences told in flash-back, experience Franklin's horror when his wife and friend are executed. Finally, the audience, according to Smith, evaluates the character based on the values they embody, 'and hence form more-or-less sympathetic or more-or-less antipathetic *allegiances* with them' (Smith, 1995: 75). So while there is the danger that these sequences appear 'tacked on', out of place and superfluous in terms of narrative cognitive processes they serve a particular function. Why would Franklin be any different to the other teachers in the industrial school regime and why would he have a different moral fabric to the apparent norm in his society? This is explained through the Spanish Civil War sequences and the audience is given an opportunity to recognise, align and support the hero in the story. As Smith states, '[a]s the ultimate 'organizer' of the text, the narration is the force which generates recognition, alignment and allegiance, the basic components of the structure of sympathy' (Smith, 1995: 75).

Stylistically and narratively Peter Mullan tells a similar story in a contrasting way. *The Magdalene Sisters* tells an episodic tale of life in a Magdalene Laundry institution in 1960s Ireland. The film opens with a highly stylised sequence that marks it as one of the most memorable scenes of Irish cinema in recent years. According to Luke Hockley 'the image of the labyrinth suggests much of what is going to happen in the film. It alerts viewers to expect a narrative of twists and turns, or concealed alleys and hidden horrors' (Hockley, 2001: 94). The opening shot of *The Magdalene Sisters* focuses on the visual of a bodhrán being hit with the soundtrack of a man singing a ballad, revealed to be a priest when the camera pulls back to a wider shot.⁴⁰ The camera cuts to the face of a bride, followed by a shot of her holding hands with her groom followed by a shot of the bodhrán. A montage sequence of faces enjoying the

wedding banquet follows. As the beat of the bodhrán increases by getting faster and louder a young man, Kevin addresses a young woman, Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff). As the singing and beating of the bodhrán reach a climax Margaret and Kevin leave the party, going to an upstairs room where Kevin rapes Margaret, later revealed as his cousin. Meanwhile the wedding celebrations continue. When Margaret returns downstairs, although no words are spoken through a series of exchanged looks and whispers, she conveys what has happened to another female character who then confronts Kevin. The scene ends when Kevin is escorted out of the wedding venue and Margaret's father and the priest exchange looks that are accusatory rather than consoling. This scene takes place without any words spoken, just a musical soundtrack and a series of labyrinthine images that suggest 'concealed alleys and hidden horrors' to emerge. The next day, Margaret is packed off by her father to a Magdalene Laundry. The drama of the event is played out through a series of looks and a powerful traditional music soundtrack reminiscent of a scene in the film *Some Mother's Son* (Terry George, 1996) which uses the images of Irish dancers and a soundtrack of *Riverdance* music cross cutting with shots of an IRA attack on a British army post. In both films, aspects of Irish traditional culture of music and dance are used to either mask or parallel the reality of what is going on within the scene, in the case of *The Magdalene Sisters* highlighting the dualities at work within Irish society and the schizophrenic nature of the past when more than one reality was clearly in operation.

The ensuing narrative of *The Magdalene Sisters* is structured around the story of three girls, Margaret, Rose (Dorothy Duffy) and Bernadette (Nora Jane Noone), who were sent to a Magdalene Laundry in 1964, a tragic tale of stolen years.⁴¹ While the title suggests some relationship among the characters, this is never fleshed out, either as allies, friends or symbolic sisters. Instead of giving the actors complex characterisation to explore, the narrative presents action sequences for the characters to play out. These characters are principally externally focalised. Because the audience rarely glimpses their story from an internally focalised position, or from the characters' own point of view, the story experience is kept to the surface. The audience's encounter, therefore, of this film is to view the characters' lives from a distance. The only possibility for connection with the characters is as cyphers that represent the social injustice and cruelty of the time, in a highly stylised way. What

this requires is not emotional involvement but intellectual engagement, in marked contrast to Walsh's approach.

The Magdalene Sisters is a film that is episodic in style and littered with statements. The Mother Superior counting her money and the nuns eating a 'full Irish breakfast' behind a lattice-like partition while the girls make do with bread and water are scenes that display the injustices and double-standards of the church that an Irish audience is no longer surprised at. While a similar scene exists in *Song for a Raggy Boy* demonstrating the hierarchical structure within the Institution, it is integrated into the story-world, is less self-conscious in style and does not function in the same overt way. A series of episodes strung together in *The Magdalene Sisters* displays an anger that is very real and valid as revelation after revelation is made in Ireland with regard to the past. But in terms of the film, this structure hinders the story by allowing it to degenerate into farce at one level (in the out-door Mass scene) and implausibility, at another level, when the two remaining characters, Bernadette and Rose, finally decide to escape. Because the characters do not serve any distinct or key role within the story-world of the film, the focus of responsibility and blame is sometimes blurred. It is difficult not to see Margaret as some way culpable in hastening Crispina's (Eileen Walsh) journey to the 'lunatic asylum', thus presenting a narrative glitch that leaves a very uneasy feeling in the viewer. While the director Peter Mullan may be playing with the 'culpability of insiders' device familiar to films dealing with the Jewish experience in German concentration camps during the second world war have done, it thus suggests that this film functions politically and intellectually rather than symbolically or metaphorically and emotionally. Inferring inter-textual inferences to Fellini, Brecht, Sirk and Tarkovsky demands an intellectual engagement with this film, which contrasts with Aisling Walsh's approach in *Song for a Raggy Boy*.⁴²

Style and emotion are closely aligned in film. It is at the level of style that emotional impact of film can work. Ed S. Tan, the cognitive theorist makes a distinction between two types of emotion, "fiction emotions" and "artifact emotions". According to Tan, fiction emotions are tied to the diegetic effect of the film, which is the illusion of being present in the fictional world. These types of emotions describe the empathetic response to emotional or physical states within the narrative. By comparison, artifact emotions are achieved through the recognition of a film's construction or artistry

which can also incorporate aesthetic emotions (Plantinga & Smith, 1999: 76). This distinction is useful in illuminating the main difference between the narrative thrust of *Song for a Raggy Boy* and *The Magdalene Sisters*. While the former clearly works at the level of fictional emotions, the latter impacts on the audience at the level of artifact emotions. The problematic nature of *The Magdalene Sisters* approach is that artifact emotions rely on the recognition of cinematic style, 'awe at great acting, wonder at cinematography, and so on' (Plantinga & Smith, 1999: 76). This might be only available to some viewers, artifact emotions as Tan hints are linked to the factor of *cinephilia*.

As a way of avoiding 'realism', Aisling Walsh appropriates a highly stylised structure of conventional narrative and working in archetypal mythic fashion, constructs a narrative that at times descends to levels of sentimentality. *The Magdalene Sisters*, similarly negates 'realism' as a narrative style and structure, but works by attempting to, in the words of Plantinga and Smith, 'awe' the audience through its tendency towards artifact emotions. What is evident from both films is that style is intrinsically linked to narrative structure in creating emotional positions for the audience.

CLOSURE AND ENDING

While fictions do not cause us to believe in the reality of the fictional story, they can engage us to the extent of causing within us the sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant bodily states we associate with being emotionally moved by events. If fictions encourage simulations, and simulated beliefs and desires retain their internal connections to our bodily states, that is exactly what we would expect. (Currie, 1995: 156).

The emotional response elicited by these two films has already been explored, one at the level of artifact emotion, the other arousing fiction emotions. While *The Magdalene Sisters* often achieved the effect of laughter, *Song for a Raggy Boy* moved the audience to tears,⁴³ responses and cognitive reactions elicited through narrative construction and style, conventions familiar to the audience. Theorising on the notion of story-world construction is central to the work of this thesis culminating in an attempt to re-focus structural analysis as a way of proffering new insights into the broad pedagogy of scriptwriting. While the conventional modes of characterisation and plot development have been evaluated in both films as a study of narratology, it

remains to see how each film functions at the level of a 'hermetically-sealed world'. Clearly working in a European art cinema mode of stylisation, Mullan creates a world that obeys its own internal laws of construction. An 'angrier' film, it works within the discursive parameters of political film in a way that *Song for a Raggy Boy* does not. The latter, a more conventional and earnest yet also a stylised film plays to the fiction emotions of the audience and while at times verging on the overtly sentimental, it ultimately conveys the horrors of this story. However *Song for a Raggy Boy* becomes problematic in the way it resolves and wraps up the narrative events, conforming to what may be considered out-dated literary and dramatic conventions, which is an aspect of the narrative that cannot be ignored in criticism.

In full tragedy the main characters are emancipated from dream, an emancipation which is at the same time a restriction, because the order of nature is present. However thickly strewn a tragedy may be with ghosts, portents, witches, or oracles, we know that the tragic hero cannot simply rub a lamp and summon a genie to get him out of his trouble. (Frye, 1957: 206-207)

According to Frye, in tragedy the character must face the full consequences of their actions. This begs the question is the potential for tragedy in this film undermined by the structured narrative closure and 'happy ending'? Does Walsh fail ultimately to create in Franklin the tragic hero that was set up and developed throughout the narrative? As mentioned earlier, according to the rules of tragedy, the film's tendency for closure occurs at a particular point, when Franklin meets violence with violence by taking on Brother John after the killing of Liam Mercier. However, the subsequent dismantling of the wall and Franklin's decision to stay rather than leave the industrial school appears to be 'rubbing a lamp' or 'summoning a genie' to resolve his trouble. As the post-script tells the audience and history informs us, the industrial school system continued right up until the 1990s in Ireland,⁴⁴ and the levels of abuse enacted on the inmates is still unravelling in the public domain.

Anyone accustomed to think archetypally of literature will recognise in tragedy a mimesis of sacrifice. Tragedy is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls) (Frye, 1957: 214).

In Walsh's film, Franklin falls but by tacking on the ending as she does, the opportunity for a 'pitying sense of wrongness' that this story deserves is missed.

There are two possible explanations for this approach to the ending. Firstly, that the *Screen Theory* position of the 1970s remains valid to this day, that mainstream classical narrative has an inability to challenge the status quo and that ultimately the narrative decides that all loose ends must be wrapped up in a 'happy ending'. The widespread antipathy to Hollywood within certain branches of film studies and criticism which views it as patriarchal and bourgeois is, in this context valid. Hollywood structure has not learnt itself to political film and is problematic in dealing with the injustices of the Western world.

On the other hand, before writing off the 'happy ending' as 'selling out', there are very real human reasons for the dominance of a happy ending, and they are not only ideologically determined. Desire in film and drama is an authentic human emotion central to the purpose of storytelling; the need to achieve a better world is an aspiration for utopia that Hollywood has capitalised on for over a hundred years and its success must justify this approach in some way. This has been given further currency by cognitive theorists in recent times. According to George Currie fictions provoke imaginary desires and the need to simulate the mental states of others. According to this notion of desire, there is a need for the hero to succeed (Currie, 1995: 150) and archetypal stories down through the ages have hinged on and promoted this.

However this approach is not appropriate in all instances. Tragedy, for example, is a way of telling stories of world events that happened in society yet are not particularly palatable. To this extent, according to Frye 'it is a moral and plausible displacement of the bitter resentments that humanity feels against all obstacles to its desires' (Frye, 1957: 157). Tragedy, therefore, is one *mythos* of dealing with aspects of injustice, unfairness and cruelty in the imaginative and 'real' world that also require expression. These stories and their emotional consequences are as much part of the world as the desires that act as motivators and lead to happy endings. Consequently, this suggests that the ending as it stands in Walsh's narrative negates all the tragic elements that went before it, and ultimately weakens the film. If the film is to follow Frye's *mythos* of tragedy, the 'happy ending' is inappropriate and negates the possibility of achieving emotional truth.

The key to the ending of this film may lie, therefore in a Jungian analysis. Jung uses the term archetype to refer to the structuring potentials that are latent within the unconscious objective psyche. According to Hockley 'these archetypal patterns wait to be released in the psyche. One of the ways they can be released is as a result of creative activities such as storytelling, dreaming, painting and filmmaking' (Hockley, 2001: 31). Jung develops the concept of archetype further, 'archetypes serve as the models or patterns for *everything* within the human realm. Thus all enduring ideas – be they creative, scientific, political or mathematical – give expression to the deep structures of the psyche, namely the archetypal forces and patterns' (Hockley, 2001: 32). This position ties in with the cultural studies approach to film that facilitates the reading of a text in order to reveal aspects of a culturally specific nature yet it departs from previous discourses by combining a universal reading with a local explanation. Film analysis along these lines facilitates a reading that reveals the universal aspect of the film, that is how it uses archetypes to reflect on the 'objective psyche' or 'collective unconscious' while also revealing 'in some instances...the repetition or stylization of certain such devices and techniques in popular films of a nation [that] may reveal important psychological tendencies' (Hockley, 2001: 32). A Jungian analysis of *Song for a Raggy Boy* is appropriate in revealing that combination of universal address with the culturally-specific location. Archetypes can be divided into patterns and images, the patterns linking in with the psychological condition of the culture. These archetypes (patterns) possess 'depth, collectivity, autonomy and universality'. While archetypes transcend historical and cultural boundaries, the patterns are expressed in a variety of images that can reveal, through film for example, what is specific to a time and place.

In *Song for a Raggy Boy*, Franklin embodies the archetypal pattern of hero. His persona is one of teacher, that is what he projects about himself to the outside world. This film sits within a long tradition of 'inspirational teacher' films that position the teacher as a form of 'saviour' (*Stand and Deliver*, Ramon Mendendez 1988; *Dangerous Minds*, John N. Smith 1995; *Dead Poet's Society*; *To Sir, With Love*, James Clavell, 1967; *Renaissance Man*, Penny Marshall 1994; *Music of the Heart*, Wes Craven 1999) whereby the hero (teacher) brings salvation in the form of education. Like most of the teachers in these films, Franklin is not without his faults or in Jungian terms possesses the shadow (the part of the psyche we dislike).

According to Hockley 'the shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly – for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies' (Hockley, 2001: 65-66). In the character of Franklin it is his predisposition towards violence that takes the form of shadow and trips him up, getting in his way as hero.

The contra-sexual archetype which embodies the anima and animus can further reveal the relationship between Brother John and Franklin. According to Jung humans embody the masculine and feminine but it is culture which prevents both asserting themselves and instead, emphasis is placed on one or the other. Franklin's character however, like Eamonn in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and Alfie in *A Man of No Importance*, reveals aspects of the anima and animus, archetypally rather than ideologically. As nurturer to the boys in the reform school he displays 'feminine' characteristics but as defender of them against Brother John's violence, his animus comes to the fore. Drawing together and expressing tensions in the film while 'mediating between consciousness and the unconscious, [these] symbols represent oppositions and apparent contradictions in a film' (Hockley, 2001: 94). The violence of Franklin in *Song for a Raggy Boy* is a contradiction therefore that is never resolved. According to Levi-Strauss myth functions as a way of hiding contradictions in beliefs in western society, for example 'we approve of violence in our need to keep order. But the contradiction is overcome in film when the violence is evacuated from civilization after its occurrence: hence the need for the hero to leave after he saves the family in *Shane*, *The Searchers*, and innumerable other westerns' (Quoted in Lyden, 1997). The discourse of violence in this film is unresolved in a way that it is not in other Irish films (*Michael Collins*, Neil Jordan 1996)⁴⁵ which potentially leaves the ending of the film open to subversion. While the narrative ties the loose ends up in a way that the viewer expects of Hollywood, the absence of a resolution to Franklin's violent tendencies suggests that this story is far from resolved. At a universal level, the sense of closure is achieved but at a cultural level it remains wide open thus suggesting that these stories still remain unresolved emotionally in Irish society with the ending as yet unwritten.

CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to explain how the portrayal of the village can give rise to universal truths, concentrating on a story that is both intrinsically and historically 'Irish' while potentially reverberating further afield. Applying Northrop Frye's *mythos* of tragedy to structurally analyse *Song for a Raggy Boy*, it was revealed how the story is ultimately hindered by negating the potential of a form chosen by the writer / director. This film is particularly pivotal in exploring 2nd wave films because it offers the potential for analysing along the lines of national cinema and hence placing it in a similar critical context to 1st wave films. However, the old methodologies of national identity discourse do not facilitate a reading of this film or other 2nd wave narratives, for that matter, as they operate within a wider, arguably more global narrative structure than their 1st wave predecessors. What Walsh's film reveals is that national cinema in the twenty-first century owes as much to international (and Hollywood) forms as it does to national counter-parts. This is echoed in the route the discourse has taken more recently, particularly in the direction of the post-national. It is no longer possible to view Irish cinema as a vehicle that simply tells stories 'to ourselves about ourselves'. The narrative address of contemporary Irish cinema, whether achieved or evaded, is clearly directed beyond the confines of national borders. In the international medium that is film, it could be suggested that this indeed is the way it should be given the potential of the apparatus. The tension with these stories is whether they ought to fulfil story requirements that deliver a hero or an antihero or is their role as a collective counsellor that facilitates the past to speak in the present. Cinema, by its nature, strives to be international in form and to tell stories that resonate beyond national borders despite the charge of cultural imperialism. According to John Fitch, in film, stories take on a fluidity of time, 'for the details must reflect a changing cultural landscape – in this era, fit the multiplex and its patrons. Regardless of the proliferating variations, the perennial and abiding significance of the leading man or woman borrows heavily from a pattern set down long ago: a pattern born of myth, scripture and enduring narrative form' (Fitch, 2004).

The story of institutional abuse in Ireland is one that lends itself to national discourse, fits well as subject matter into the national identity debate yet can resonate at a more

universal level by shedding light on key themes such as injustice, courage and innocence. However, the two films produced within the defined territory of the 2nd wave falls short of that objective. While *The Magdalene Sisters* is problematic as an 'Irish' film as already mentioned, its overtly political motivation negates the tendency towards 'emotional truth', a pre-requisite of universal storytelling that speaks archetypally in a common human 'emotional speak'. *Song for a Raggy Boy*, on the other hand, strives for emotional truth, but through the internal narrative structure, abrogates the justice of this story.

What both films confirm is the need to redefine the discourse of 'national cinema'. The 2nd wave of Irish film is characterised by a move in the direction of the global and the international while keeping a keen eye on the local and the national. All aspects of the cinematic process – budget, narrative, audience – at a national level are moving in a direction that is not defined by national or specific cultural boundaries.⁴⁶ In order to assess the impact of 2nd wave films on cinema, the parameters of the discourse needs to be widened to take account of the universal nature of story-telling, to explore narrative form as an expression of key human concerns with the principle aim of projecting emotional truths.

¹ "Rude Awakenings" by Donald Clarke in *the Irish Times*, 31 January 2004: 12-13.

² Interview by Ted Sheehy with Vinny Murphy, *Film Ireland*, Issue 75, April/May 2000.

³ There have been a number of documentaries exploring this theme such as *Dear Daughter* (Louis Lentin, 1996) and *States of Fear* (Mary Raftery, 1999) as well as a number of publications including *Suffer Little Children* (2001) by Mary Raftery & Eoin O'Sullivan and *Banished Babies* (1997) by Mike Milotte. This story has been unfolding on public radio which has acted as a confessional and counsellor for many people in telling their personal stories. There has also been a state tribunal of inquiry into institutional abuse, the Laffoy Commission and a board set up to deal with compensation. Cathal Black's short film *Our Boys* (1981), a 1st wave film exploring Catholic repression within the industrial school system is interesting given that RTE helped finance the film but refused to show it for ten years as its 'representation of religious education in Ireland was deemed too controversial in the wake of the recent papal visit [in 1979]' (McLoone, 2000: 138). This act of censorship was a condition of the 1st wave context, unlikely to be repeated in the 2nd wave in the same guise.

⁴ *The Irish Times*, 10 October 2003, Michael Dwyer.

⁵ While Board Scannan na hÉireann supported the film, its Irish identity is problematic. *Film Ireland*, the only Irish film publication at the time, took an editorial decision to regard this film as a British film.

⁶ *The Concept of National Cinema* by Andrew Higson, *Film and Nationalism* (ed.) Alan Williams, *Australian Cinema as National Cinema* by Tom O'Regan and *Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s* by Stephen Croft are concerned with teasing out national cinema in a post-national world.

⁷ Realism refers to the use of representational devices (signs, conventions, narrative strategies, and so on), to depict or portray a world that exists beyond the representation. In this definition it is regarded as the 'arbiter of the truth of the representation' (O'Sullivan et al, 1994: 257). Realism is often linked to naturalism and verisimilitude but does not have to be. In film studies, realism has been used to explore instruments of ideology.

⁸ Frederic Jameson would identify this approach as myth-criticism and although it is generally associated with literary criticism, it can be appropriated to the study of story-world construction in film. In fact it is a discourse gaining ground in film studies (Mackey-Kallis, 2001).

⁹ Northrop Frye was born in 1912, Quebec, Canada. In 1929 he began his studies at the University of Canada where he remained as a student and teacher for most of his life. The Northrop Frye Centre was established in 1988 in Victoria University, part of University of Toronto. Frye is best known for his study of symbolism and structure with his influential publication *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). He has written many books on Western literature, culture, myth and archetypal theory, religion and social thought.

¹⁰ <http://www.transparencynow.com/intro fry2.htm>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Aisling Walsh is an interesting 2nd wave writer/director given that she has not lived in Ireland for many years. Following graduation from the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (then the Dun Laoghaire College of Art), Walsh studied film at the National Film School at Beaconsfield, England. British Screen provided funding for her first feature after seeing her graduation film *Hostage*. In 1988 she directed her first feature, *Joyriders*, a film that is reminiscent of the 1st wave film *Reefer and the Model* (Joe Comerford, 1988), at the level of style and content. For more than ten years she has based herself in London and has made her career in directing television drama (*The Bill*; *Doctor Finlay*; *Roughnecks*; *Trial and Retribution* and *Sinners*). The experience garnered in television drama, working with people like Linda La Plante and the strict, narrative rules that govern TV drama are evident in her second feature, *Song for a Raggy Boy*.

¹³ For other readings of Frye on film see Fitch, John, "Archetypes on the American Screen: Heroes and Anti-Heroes" in *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. VII: Summer 2004.

¹⁴ Quoted in Belinda McKeown's review of Eamon Maher's book (2003) on John McGahern, *The Irish Times*, 31 January 2004.

¹⁵ http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/myth_theory_and_crit...

¹⁶ The study of myth has been tied to ideological readings, whereby it is taken that society makes sense of itself and its dominant ideology, masks contradictions by perpetuating myths (Barthes, Levi-Strauss). While this study does not challenge this interpretation of myth, it seeks to push the boundaries of myth-interpretation to encompass aspects of humanity and therefore move beyond ideology. Mackey-Kallis highlights two opposing and 'competing theoretical assessments of myth as ideological/false consciousness and myth as liberating/enlightened consciousness' (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 3) and situates her own study as middle ground somewhere in between.

¹⁷ By this I refer to his use of dreams for explanations to mental and physical states, as one example of his non-rational approach.

¹⁸ Noam Chomsky's theory of 'universal language' is another way that seeks to explore the universal, the biological in relation to human expression and is an attempt to reveal what is innate to the human condition while not negating social, political and cultural contexts totally. I offer these perspectives simply to deflect anticipated criticism that I am simply promoting a bourgeois notion of universalism.

¹⁹ http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/myth_theory_and_crit...

²⁰ David Mamet recalls being a student in the 1960s in Vermont at a counter-cultural college where the school of Countercultural Architecture flourished. Traditional architecture was being viewed as too stifling and so a trend in counterculture buildings emerged. However, according to Mamet 'these buildings proved unlivable. Their design didn't begin with the idea of that building's purpose; it began with the idea of how the architect 'felt'. As those architects looked at their countercultural buildings over the years, they may have reflected that there's a reason for traditional design. There's a reason that doors are placed in a certain way, there's a reason that sills are made a certain way.' (Mamet, 1994 : 381). By negating the rules of structure, the buildings fell down.

²¹ Much has been made of the avant-garde nature of 1st wave films but equally realism and naturalism have played a significant role in fashioning narratives. For wider discussion see Gibbons (1987) and Barton (2004).

²² Pat Brereton (2004) argues that *Veronica Guerin* (Joel Schumacher 2003) portrays the journalist of the title in 'mythic and heroic sacrificial Irish fantasy' mode reminiscent of political nationalism.

²³ The republican cause, that is the fight for Irish freedom, has relied on 'martyrs' as part of its ideological defence throughout Irish history, for example, Wolfe Tone (1798 rebellion), Robert Emmet (1803 rebellion), James Connolly, Padraig Pearse *et al* (1916 Rebellion) and Bobby Sands *et al* (1981 H-Block hunger strikes) to name but a few. In all cases, it is death for one's beliefs that elevated these historical figures to 'martyr' status.

²⁴ While the reviews of this film have been quite positive in general and the film was seen as more complex than its thematic counter-part *The Magdalene Sisters*, anecdotal evidence would suggest that many viewers found it problematic, in some cases derivative, in dealing with this subject matter.

²⁵ *Dead Poet's Society*, it could be argued, is a modern day tragedy. The tragic character appears in the form of Neil Perry, who commits suicide as a result of the tensions between his controlling, conservative father and a new found liberal lifestyle introduced to him by his 'inspirational teacher'. The outcome of his 'knowledge' can either be one of well-being or the opposite according to Aristotle (*Poetics*: 11). In this instance, and like Oedipus, knowledge does not bring about his salvation but his damnation. Similarly, although Franklin believed education and reading could save the boys, it contributed to Mercer's death.

²⁶ This approach to characterisation may account for the 'national' success at the box-office of many Irish films with the contrasting international failure (*I Went Down*; *About Adam*; *Intermission*) whereby the culturally-specific aspect of the characters triumphed at the expense of a more humanistic development. It could be argued that stories which resonate across borders strike a fine balance of cultural humanism.

²⁷ Mary Raftery's documentary *States of Fear* (1999) reveals the common practice throughout the industrial and reform school system in Ireland that de-humanised the children on arrival, by taking their name from them and assigning a number instead. In the Magdalene Laundry institutions which confined girls, very often the girl's name was changed to one of a saint, another way of 'institutionalising' the girls on arrival at the schools.

²⁸ The relationship between romanticism and realism is an interesting sub-discourse in this film. Luke Gibbons (1987: 221-234) explores realism in Irish film only to reveal that very often it is simply romanticism in disguise. Romanticism is generally associated with being free from the pressures and constraints of the modern world whereas realism is seen as a powerful, demystifying force, 'tearing away the veils of deception which distort or obscure the more unpalatable social truths.' (Gibbons, 1987). In realism, poverty, hardship and other forms of human suffering are brought to the fore, demonstrating that all is not sweetness and light in the countryside or in society in general. However, Gibbons goes on to argue that romanticism is not necessarily devoid of realism and that romanticism can be used to evoke harsher realities. He says that 'it is this desire to redeem hardship and squalor in the interests of aesthetic experience which runs through *Man of Aran* and *Ryan's Daughter*, rather than the realist imperatives' ascribed by other writers. It is this approach to romanticism that suggests what Walsh is attempting in *Song for a Raggy Boy*. In telling a universal story in classical narrative format, the relationship between romanticism and realism is problematic.

²⁹ In *I Went Down* (Paddy Breathnach, 1996), for example, Git Hynes who narratively is required to carry out a job involving a journey on his release from prison operates at one level, that of plot. The film works at a comic level and was relatively successful in Ireland but failed to travel, a feature of 2nd wave films. Arguably one of the reasons for this is that the narrative worked at a local (humourous) level but failed to resonate universally by omitting another layer to the character, that of subtext, a failure to achieve cultural humanism.

³⁰ The gendering of narrative has been a pre-occupation of feminist theorists since the late 60s / early 70s culminating in Laura Mulvey's seminal paper "Visual Pleasures" in 1976. Aisling Walsh chooses to locate her story in a boys' reform school whereas Peter Mullan locates his story in a Magdalene laundry, an institution for girls.

³¹ In Kevin Rockett's book *Irish Film Censorship: A Cultural Journey from Silent Cinema to Internet Pornography* he describes the brutality of the reform institutions in Ireland in the twentieth century and how it was depicted in films such as *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Song for a Raggy Boy*. 'The latter, passed with a 15PG (over 15s on video/DVD) certificate, features... a brother brutally kicking a boy to death. However, when the detailed horror as re-constructed from state records and personal testimony of those abused were published in 2004, these graphic cinematic testimonies may also seem somewhat mild.' (Rockett, 2004: 246).

³² Franklin's closing speech comes across like a contemporary commentary on events of the past. Just like many films that display the ideology of the present (production time) rather than the past (fiction time), *Song for a Raggy Boy* ends with a contradictory apologetic and accusatory tone albeit with a hint of complacency. Franklin expresses no doubt in the final sequences as to who is to blame. The strength of his conviction suggests a contemporary smugness that the past has been dealt with and such wrongs could not happen in the present. The scene is revelatory and symbolic of 2nd wave that seeks to silence the past by heralding the present as divorced completely from it.

³³ Of course it is not the only *mythos* that could be appropriated for this type of story. Similar types of stories, such as *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Rabbit Proof Fence* show how satire and romance can work in different ways in telling these types of stories.

³⁴ 'Ideological criticism sometimes operates with the model of a passive audience absorbing the appropriate social and political values, and this contrasts with ritual-myth analysis in which the genre system is construed as expressive of deep-seated beliefs and desires 'whose function is the ritualisation of collective ideals, the celebration of temporarily resolved social and cultural conflicts behind the guise of entertainment' (Schatz, in Grant 1986: 97)' (Hill & Church Gibbons, 1998: 330).

³⁵ Although Jonathan Murray (in Rockett & Hill, 2004: 149-160) argues that *The Magdalene Sisters* refers generically to the 'prison drama' also.

³⁶ What is notable about the 2nd wave films produced between 1993 and 2003 is that a distinctive national narrative structure and/or visual style has not emerged. While Rod Stoneman's professed objective was towards 'radical pluralism', it appears to have been achieved at the expense of distinctive and identifiable style.

³⁷ While *Amongst Women* (Tom Cairns, 1998) and *Broken Harvest* (Maurice O'Callaghan, 1994) are set in the 1950s, they tell stories that evoke a 'pre-modern' Ireland of repression, dominated by the influence of the Catholic Church.

³⁸ See O'Connell, D, Review of *Amongst Women* in *Film Ireland*, June/July 1998.

³⁹ Brereton, Pat. Notes on *Song for a Raggy Boy*, (unpublished).

⁴⁰ See Murray in Hill & Rockett (2004: 149-160) for a detailed analysis of the ballad in this sequence.

⁴¹ Jonathan Murray (Hill & Rockett, 2004: 149-160) argues that '*The Magdalene Sisters*' Hollywood intertext works in ways that are not only commercially astute in an international arena but also politically radical in a domestic context', suggesting that the national identity debate can broaden its conceptualisation of cinema to detect points of subversion that otherwise go unnoticed.

⁴² In Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage, editing can take the form of dialectic (which evokes an emotional or physiological response) and intellectual (which evokes an abstract idea), both forms surviving in cinematic expression today.

⁴³ Watching *The Magdalene Sisters* twice in the cinema with an audience composed of mainly middle-aged women, I was struck by the audiences' response, which was predominantly laughter. While empirical audience research is beyond the scope of this thesis, it points to the central role audience research ought to play in Film Studies.

⁴⁴ The Magdalene Laundry system continued in Ireland until 1996.

⁴⁵ The message emanating from Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* is that violence does not work. While this is an ideological position that facilitated the current Peace Process in Northern Ireland to emerge and continue, it would not have been a widespread position at the time of the Civil War in the 1920s,

thus revealing that a film often reveals more about the time in which it is made than set. For further discussion see Rockett & Rockett (2003).

⁴⁶ The audience for Irish film is constantly changing, it can be assumed given the expanding multi-cultural nature of Irish society.

CONCLUSION

If myths then can be both functional or dysfunction[al], if they can either move an audience toward cultural individuation or away from it, what mythic visions do we need as humanity moves into the next millennium?....Rushing and Frenz assert that such myths would invite cultures, while “still maintaining their uniqueness,” to “expand their identities outward into a more global, even universal consciousness.” [Joseph] Campbell reaches a similar conclusion regarding the shape of myths in the future. As he explains, “When you come to the end of one time and the beginning of a new one, it’s a period of tremendous pain and turmoil. The threat we feel, and everybody feels – well, there is the notion of Armageddon coming, you know” and this requires “myths that will identify the individual not with his local group but with his planet.” (Mackey-Kallis, 2001: 238).

This thesis set out to explore narrative strategies in contemporary Irish cinema by means of a formalist address while studying the relationship between local and global resonances through myth-criticism, cognitive theory and a Jungian interpretation.

The principle theoretical framework appropriated is narratology which has proved useful in shifting the debate in a new direction with the story-telling approach being the focus of study. Irish filmmakers are examined here within the context of their art form, narrative creation and construction. By scrutinising the filmic story-telling devices of this era, this study focussed on how the apparatus of plot and character in particular facilitates the exploration of key human emotional states. Selecting films corresponding to the range of human endeavour from childhood through adolescence into adulthood (*The Boy from Mercury*; *Disco Pigs*; *A Man of No Importance*) as well as those that represent the dominant tropes of love, sex and criminal activity (*Accelerator*; *About Adam*; *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*; *When Brendan met Trudy*), this thesis concentrates on revealing the universal and humanistic aspect of the narratives created within an idiosyncratic local milieu.

Those narratives using the full range of devices and layers available in the creation of their story-worlds have the potential to resonate at a deeper, emotional level by commenting on the complex nature of humanity. By analysing *About Adam* and *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* along structural lines, the different approaches to representing masculinity, femininity and sexuality is revealed in all its complexity, illustrating how interior and exterior action relates to characters that ‘say and do’ and characters that ‘see and hear’. Similarly the plots and characters of *Accelerator* and *Disco Pigs* were examined as a method of establishing the narrative emphasis within

these films while the emotional journey espoused in *The Boy from Mercury* was revealed through a similar appropriation of narratology. These films illustrate an address within the narratives exploring aspects of humanity extending beyond national and cultural boundaries, yet rooted within a specific time and place. It is argued that through recognisable domestic iconography and idiosyncratic humour when combined with broader humanistic tales, Proppian-like, these films mark out the 2nd wave.

By linking with Ireland's cinematic history through an examination of Pat Murphy's work and *Nora* in particular, the evolutionary, developmental and teleological nature of an emerging cinema is established, illustrating that the shift in direction is not confined to 'new writers and directors' but also to those, like Murphy who were defining filmmakers of the 1st wave yet developed and evolved to impact contemporaneously. While Pat Murphy's earlier narrative appropriations were more avant-garde, through *Nora*, she displays an artistic expression that plays with appropriating and challenging conventional and mainstream devices. Through her aesthetic, she often appropriates highly stylised conventions yet her discourse is radical and liberating.

While the films of the 2nd wave are often clearly structured within classical and mainstream forms of story-telling, echoing recent trends in Britain and America, in her film *Song for a Raggy Boy*, Aisling Walsh demonstrates the relevance of ancient forms such as tragedy to the twenty-first century yet, through a structural analysis the narrative tensions within individual texts are revealed particularly when universal forms negotiate with cultural specificities. In this film, the analysis revealed how Walsh worked within a structure that is firmly rooted within classical Greek mythology yet at key moments of structural fissures, appropriates a more recent mythic approach, principally through the Hollywood ending. This inevitably captures a tension between the local and the universal aspects of story-telling.

Through this narratological study further aspects of the Irish film industry between 1993 and 2003 can be deduced. While narratology concentrates on the text, it can open up interesting details that spill over into the contextual arena. The key feature of this decade is its developmental and evolutionary aspect. Contrasting *Accelerator* with

Intermission and *Disco Pigs* with *Adam and Paul*, for example, suggests nuances of style and structure that evolve as the decade progresses. The earlier part was pre-occupied by remnants of 1st wave approaches to subject matter with the ‘holy trinity’ of the 1950s, the Catholic Church and the ‘Troubles’ dominating and although the narrative structures and styles were creeping into the mainstream (*Circle of Friends*, Pat O’Connor 1994; *Nothing Personal*, Thaddeus O’Sullivan 1995; *This is the Sea*, Mary McGuckian 1996), there is evidence of European art cinema still influencing some writers and directors (*Ailsa*, Paddy Breathnach 1994; *November Afternoon*, John Carney & Tom Hall 1996; *All Souls Day*, Alan Gilsenan 1997), a trend that diminishes as the decade progresses. Furthermore, the earlier period was characterised by an ‘auteurist’ style of cinema whereby the ‘writer-director’ approach to cinema was favoured, particularly by Rod Stoneman (*The Boy from Mercury*, Martin Duffy 1996; *Drinking Crude*, Owen McPolin 1997; *The Last Bus Home*, Johnny Gogan 1997; *Guiltrip*, Gerry Stembridge 1995; *All Things Bright & Beautiful*, Barry Devlin 1994), reflecting an approach to cinema that characterises emerging national cinemas and was a feature of the 1st wave. Most of the productions analysed in this thesis were produced within the medium-budget range (£3-£5 million), another feature of this period, which is reflected narratively and aesthetically within the films’ structures. Neither big budget (industry) nor low budget (artisanal), these financial packages were often a burden to those trying to produce films within their framework. More recently there has been a policy shift toward low-budgets (1 million euro) and micro-budgets (100,000 euro), a development already impacting on the films emerging, particularly since 2004.

During the first half of the decade under investigation, the writing phase of the production process was under-resourced – there was limited development funding, restricted training opportunities and few practicing script editors. Many directors opted to write their own scripts (rather than adopting the script of a professional writer) as a method of generating stories to direct. It is only later that the ‘professionalisation’ of the script writing process takes place: by creating a new position within the Bord charged specifically with assessing and then developing the scripts - Development Manager; by increasing script development funding; and finally, assigning script editors to each project in development. These changes are reflected in the increase in ‘writer and director’ teams producing Irish films in the

post-1998 period (*Dead Bodies*, Robert Quinn 2003; *How Harry Became a Tree*, Goran Paskaljevic 2002; *The Mystics*, David Blair 2003) although Stoneman's 'auteurist' approach is still evident, albeit in a more limited way (*The Halo Effect*, Lance Daly 2003; *Headrush*, Shimmy Marcus 2003). Future research will reveal what long-term impact these changes have on the process and output, at script level in particular. For now, it can be established that the collaborative nature of film production in Ireland is being exploited more fully than before with scriptwriters generating scripts for directors to direct. Scripts are reaching a more developed stage before going into production having been put through numerous writing drafts in the pre-production phase. This is evident in the recent story-worlds which, in the main, embody fully rounded characters and focussed plots. The narrative foibles detected in the first phase from the mid to late-1990s (*The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*; *Snakes & Ladders*; *Separation Anxiety*; *Gold in the Streets*) are less frequent in recent years, suggesting nuances of artistic development (*Intermission*; *Adam & Paul*; *Man About Dog*) as the decade advanced.

However, the most notable points of tension in recent productions are the limited range of story scenarios, a deliberate rejection of dominant tropes of the past in favour of a narrow thematic range. What occurred towards the end of the 1990s and post-2000 was a shift in subject matter explored in these films towards more contemporary, urban tales, often concerned with the pursuit of love (*Intermission*; *Cowboys & Angels*, David Gleeson 2003), the pursuit of drugs (*Adam & Paul*; *Headrush*) or 'innocent' criminal caper (*The Actors*, Conor McPherson 2003; *The Mystics*), reflecting trends in British cinema, Australian film and independent American film of the 1990s. More recently and since the dawn of the new millennium in particular, the gap between 1st and 2nd wave has been growing, at both levels of narrative form and thematic exploration. The effect of this on Irish cinema has been Janus-like. On the one hand, by shaping the narratives into a mainstream and conventional approach to telling the story, the promotion of diversity and variety or Stoneman's 'radical pluralism', as explored in Chapter 1, is negated. This occurs not only at a formal level but also thematically with the old *national* 'trinity' of the 1950s, rural Ireland and the 'Troubles' being replaced by a new *international* 'trinity' – sex, drugs and petty thieves. Maybe Irish films need to neither reject the past nor return to obsessional

portrayals of it, but re-visit themes and styles with a contemporary approach that is fresh and modern without being superficial and vacuous.

The most obvious feat during this period is the volume of cinematic harvest with over eighty features reaching completion between 1993 and 2003. In ten years audiences with a keen interest in Irish film have shifted from possessing a dutiful response towards the launch of a new Irish film to treating these productions as one would any other film - word of mouth, the star system and film reviews influencing and guiding attendance. Contemporary Irish filmmakers are less protected from market forces than their predecessors, having to consider the audience and the market from the outset while at the same time being afforded more distribution options (Clarence Pictures; Abbey Films; Buena Vista International (Ireland)). The main achievement of these filmmakers therefore has been establishing local connections with subject matter, oral and visual expression and the audience whereby Irish film is now viewed as something one wants to see rather than what one ought to see. Far from being the preserve of *cinéastes*, new Irish cinema's habitat is more likely the omniplexes of suburban Ireland than the art-house cinemas of the metropolis.

Despite the perceptions abroad to the contrary, this thesis argues that Irish cinema in recent times has enjoyed domestic success with the local audience by increasingly achieving 'respectable' box office returns (see Appendix 1) and significant audience share when screened on national television (Barton, 2004: 191-192)¹. While measuring audience response in crude box office terms tends to yield subjective results, this thesis suggests that the picture is not as glum as generally assumed. Tracking audience figures for cinema and television, I argue, reveals that there is an appetite for Irish films, evident in the amount of people watching these films, either on television or in the cinema. According to Rod Stoneman '[new] Irish cinema established a good relationship with its home audience, good returns for most theatrical releases, high levels of video hire and purchase and strong ratings on television' (2005: 257)² and interestingly argues that the attrition rates in film production is similar across big budget and independent films, thus suggesting that focussing on success/failure at the box office should not be any different when examining studio productions or smaller scale national cinemas. Furthermore, through my own experience as a lecturer of Irish Cinema over a ten year period, the level of

exposure to Irish films by the student body (and BSE films in particular) is much higher at the end of the decade than it was at the beginning. Despite the dominance of American film in Irish cinemas, students will often opt for an Irish film when presented with a choice.

However, the counter side to this picture is that many of these films founder on the international stage. Productions which were well received in Ireland (*I Went Down*; *About Adam*; *Intermission*) fail to attract audiences abroad, arguably because the narratives, aesthetics and productions function on a small-scale. In Chapter 2, a structural analysis of *I Went Down* is presented arguing why this may be the case. While there have been some notable exceptions (*The Magdalene Sisters*), the pattern whereby Irish films released to a local Irish audience hold their own at the box office at least sufficiently to recoup marketing and distribution costs, was not an arrangement repeated in the international arena. Ireland is not unique in producing small-scale films, an observation made by Martin McLoone with regard to British film in the mid-1990s (McLoone, 1996: 76-107) and while the connection between text and local audience is established quite readily in the domestic sphere, the leap appears to be unassailable in a global context.

So while contemporary Irish filmmakers tell more global, universal stories now than they did before (principally because, as this thesis has argued, the writers and directors are less concerned with issues national) and Irish audiences respond favourably to this when they support the films at the box office, the narratives, aesthetics and productions appear not to be universal or global enough for the wider international audience. A film like *Accelerator*, which the director proclaimed was a reaction to perceived notions of Irish cinema (see Chapter 3) had a successful run at the suburban Omniplex in Tallaght, an area of Dublin experiencing many of the social problems the film explores. This combination of local story within global narrative is characteristic of 2nd wave film.³ Aside from *Adam and Paul* which received positive reviews recently in the British press and some isolated examples of foreign success, by and large Irish films emerging indigenously fail to travel and impact on the international stage. The question remains what dimension appeals to the local audience? Are they attracted by the local inflections or the universal address, or a combination of both? The universal nature of these stories appears to appeal to the

domestic audience which is exposed to (mainly) American films if the box office figures cited are to be read positively: but the cultural-specificity within the narratives, which is often idiosyncratically Irish humour (*I Went Down*; *Intermission*), identifiable local actors (*The General*; *Dead Bodies*) and recognisable locations (*About Adam*; *Accelerator*), while identifying with a domestic audience, it could to argued is too provincial to travel.

Although many would claim that Ireland is a country with more affinity to the literary than the visual, accomplishments within the medium of film over the past ten years is evidence that this is changing. New Irish scriptwriters are influenced by the visual medium, by fractured narratives and by the changes brought about technologically. At the same time, the work of Bord Scannán na hÉireann reveals that storytellers are still concerned with themes that seek to answer, or at least explore, key and fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of humanity, subject matter that is not the preserve of national boundaries and therefore does not just speak to a national audience but has the potential to cross borders and impact on a global and international, fragmented nationally yet united culturally, viewing public. The narrative forms are sometimes variegated and influenced by current or recent international trends, the content often re-imagines ancient myths and tales.⁴

While this study has been concerned primarily with contemporary Irish cinema, it takes place within the context of Film Studies. I have sought to engage critically with the prevailing discourses while seeking out new directions. This approach did not develop in a vacuum but rather reflects key concerns within Film Studies and Irish cinema as the new millennium dawned and as the 2nd wave bedded down. The purpose of searching for and developing new methodological approaches was to facilitate the analysis of a different era in a new light. This thesis combines narratology (in its various formations of formalism, neo-formalism, structuralism, neo-structuralism and cognitive theory), myth-criticism and humanism to reveal key moments and developmental, evolutionary and teleological phases of recent Irish cinema.

The 2nd wave continues to consolidate yet is developing in different ways: the most notable changes include the launch of the micro-budget (*Deadmeat*, Conor McMahon

2004; *Starfish*, Stephen Kane 2004) and low- budget schemes (*Goldfish Memory*; *Dead Bodies*; *Adam & Paul*; *Headrush*). 2004 saw the release of eleven Irish feature films at the box office with *Man About Dog* (Paddy Breathnach, 2004) being the highest grossing Bord Scannán film since its re-activation, a key success factor that will ensure the continued existence of the Bord.⁵ Arguably the most noteworthy accomplishment of this period is the increased level of distribution. While many Irish films throughout the 1990s failed to get a theatrical release (*Separation Anxiety*, Mark Staunton 1997; *November Afternoon*, John Carney and Tom Hall 1996; *My Friend Joe*, Chris Bould 1996; *Spaghetti Slow*, Valerio Jolango 1996; *Sunset Heights*, Colm Villa 1998; *High Boot Benny*, Joe Comerford 1993; *Frankie Starlight*, Michael Linsey-Hogg 1995; *Night Train*, John Lynch 1999), more recent 2nd wave films have been exhibited in the multiplexes of Ireland (*Circle of Friends*; *Accelerator*; *Intermission*; *Adam & Paul*; *About Adam*; *Man About Dog*; *Dead Bodies*; *The General*; *I Went Down*; *The Magdalene Sisters*) and thus have reached larger and more diverse audiences than their 1st wave predecessor, due to a combination of more accessible forms and the developing distribution stage of the process. All films being produced now can expect at least to screen in the cinema-houses of Ireland followed by a DVD/Video distribution.

The period between 1993 and 2003 is distinctive historically as a phase in Irish cinema that sought to put distance between itself and its predecessor by approaching the medium of film in a new light, formally and thematically. The re-activation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann in 1993 presented the Irish film industry with an opportunity to 'catch up' with other national cinemas which it has achieved in many aspects of the production process. The aesthetics, the narratives and the stories emerging in the period between 1993 and 2003 reveal that Irish cinema functions within a medium that combines an international shape with national elements – principally by integrating universal, global approaches to narrative and theme while firmly rooting their elemental expression in a local and often idiosyncratic milieu – thus knitting Irish film into the fabric of Irish culture more so than before.⁶ While Irish cinema has developed in a positive way, shaped by an approach to film that was wide-ranging as opposed to specialist, it has not remained immune from international trends and practices. Most of the challenges facing Irish film are not unique to this country but are common to all national cinemas that seek to exist in what is a global

entertainment industry, competing with block-buster movies that often have marketing budgets exceeding the spend on production. With the effects of technological change lodging permanently into the filmic process and the audience continually fragmenting, the Bord has responded by initiating new schemes that have already launched the next phase of Irish film. While this study has revealed the narrative tensions within contemporary Irish cinema hinging on the relationship between the local and the global, how these approaches to story-telling are negotiated in the future within emerging structures driven by new technology and organised under different budgetary strategies introduced by the Bord, will influence the shape of this next phase of Irish cinema.

¹ These films took in over IR£2.2 million at the Irish box office. Clarence Pictures, Buena Vista International and Abbey pictures accounted for the release of eight of the films funded by the Bord. Source - Bord Scannán na hÉireann newsletter, Issue 1, Dec. 2001. See Barton (2004: 191–192) for viewing figures, where available for Irish films of this period. Ruth Barton includes viewing figures, where available, for Irish films with part or complete Irish financing (not all are Bord Scannán films) in the appendix of her book *Irish National Cinema* (2004: 191). While she is correct in pointing out that few films made any impact on the international stage, she is a little unjust when she says that ‘their performance in the home market has also been in many instances unremarkable’ (Barton, 2004: 179). Of 61 films listed 52 received a theatrical release and while some had very few viewers (*Ailsa* – 429; *Words Upon the Window Pane* – 693; *A Further Gesture* – 953), 20 received almost 100,000 viewers (*Last of the High Kings*; *Accelerator*) with some receiving 250,000 (*The Boxer*; *When Brendan met Trudy*; *Some Mother’s Son*) and others around half a million (*The General*; *Angela’s Ashes*; *Circle of Friends*). While this study is not undertaking a political-economic analysis of the period, it does argue that the key ‘success’ of this period is the relationship between the films and the local, domestic Irish audience whom, when given the opportunity, sought out these films in the cinema-houses. Furthermore, the failure in foreign markets of Irish films of this period may be explained by Rebecca O’Flanagan who states that once distributors had recouped their costs in Ireland, they were less inclined to embark on a costly marketing campaign in an unknown foreign territory where they were unsure of the success potential (O’Connell, 2004: unpublished). The films did not necessarily fail, rather they were not given the opportunity to succeed.

² Stoneman states that ‘fifty per cent of the Irish population had watched *The General* and twenty-five per cent *The Magdalene Sisters*, at a point when it was only available theatrically’ (Stoneman, 2005: 257).

³ The work of Debbie Ging (2002; 2004; forthcoming) which explores audience reaction and issues around masculinity in new Irish cinema supports this assertion that Irish youth (males in particular) favour Irish films that embody narrative structures that links with dominant US and British forms.

⁴ *Trojan Eddie* (Gillies McKinnon, 1996), for example, re-works the ancient tale of the Fianna – *Toraíocht Diarmuid agus Gráinne* into a modern, contemporary drama situated within the settled and travelling communities in Ireland.

⁵ It had grossed 2.4 million euros by the end of 2004 (http://www.filmboard.ie/stop_press.php?press+286 (accessed 3 February 2005)).

⁶ While Ireland’s national theatre, the Abbey, stumbled through its centenary celebrations in 2004 amid internal bickering and poor box office returns, *Adam & Paul*, an Irish film, was seen by 80,000 people at the cinema. The implications of this contrast must lie with the current population’s response to what it deems national cultural matter, choosing a story that is not hindered by issues national but resonating locally all the same.

APPENDIX 1

Box office figures (gross returns from Irish screens) for Bord Scannán na hÉireann supported films from 1993 to 2003 (Sourced from *In Production*, October 2003, *In Production*, Jan. 2005: 25-27, Barton (2001) and Barton (2004)).

1994	Punts
A Man of No Importance	60,000
1995	
Broken Harvest	80,000
1996	
Circle of Friends	1,400,000
Last of the High Kings	240,000
Korea	40,000
Trojan Eddie	30,000
The Boy from Mercury	6,457
Ailsa	3,328
The Sun, the Moon and the Stars	2,899
Words Upon a Window Pane	2,100
1997	
I Went Down	600,000
Some Mother's Son	750,000
The Disappearance of Finbarr	17,296
Gold in the Streets	10,387
A Further Gesture	3,048
All Soul's Day	3,328
1998	
The General	1,370,000
The Boxer	800,000
Snakes & Ladders	9,054
1999	
Dancing at Lughnasa	659,548
Sweetie Barrett	57,195
Crushproof	10,449
The Fifth Province	6,060
Bogwoman	4,704
Last Bus Home	996

2000	
A Love Divided	614,930
Agnes Browne	661,603
When the Sky Falls	319,492
Ordinary Decent Criminal	229,833
Nora	201,571
Borstal Boy	89,017
Saltwater	78,065
The Last September	23,956
Country	15,547
Flick	12,675
2001	
When Brendan met Trudy	744,478
About Adam	534,177
The Most Fertile Man in Ireland	188,881
Accelerator	177,845
H3	122,912
Peaches	108,677
Disco Pigs	101,753
On the Edge	44,265
2002	Euros
Mapmaker	34,415
How Harry became a Tree	16,776
Last Days in Dublin	10,296
Love and Rage	9,330
2003	
Intermission	1,768,779
The Magdalene Sisters	1,391,909
Song for a Raggy Boy	659,878
The Actors	246,575
Dead Bodies	108,074
Goldfish Memory	70,841
Mystics	16,353
2004	
Man About Dog	1,993,871
Inside I'm Dancing	587,492
Adam & Paul	489,693
Cowboys and Angels	140,754

Blind Fight	98,415
The Honeymooners	33,143
Freeze Frame	20,000
The Halo Effect	15,240
Bloom	11,900
Dead Meat	5,545

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