

Representing Ireland: Literary Adaptation and Irish Cinema

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Abstract

This paper looks at certain patterns of 'translation' which have tended to occur when Irish literary works are adapted for Hollywood-style cinema. In particular, it argues that in such films as *The Quiet Man*, *The Field* and *The Commitments*, Ireland is inevitably translated into some version of modernity's 'Other'. In so doing, these films jettison the local, historical, culturally-specific meanings which were generated by the literary texts, and replace them with supposedly universal, ahistorical meanings, which actually reflect the quite specific ideological values of a US-dominated transnational capitalism. In this way, Ireland's identity is subsumed into such a transnational symbolic order, and its possibilities as a site of challenge or resistance to that order are defused, even though such possibilities are provided by the literary originals on which these films are based.

"Hey, is that real? She couldn't be ..."—so the unmistakable voice of John Wayne as the 'Quiet Man' is inspired to ask, after stumbling upon an idyllic vision of Maureen O'Hara herding her sheep through a sunlit glade in John Ford's 1952 film. Incredibly, for him and for us viewers, the romantic and the real seem to coincide in Innisfree. The subsequent events in the film somewhat temper the Quiet Man's rosy-spectacled view of Ireland, but his early question is one which is central to the viewer's experience of this film and indeed most films about Ireland. In fact the question of how to distinguish the romantic from the real in one's perception of Ireland has been central to debates about Irish cinema from its beginnings, just as it has been central to debates about Irish literature since the nineteenth century. How 'real' is the Ireland we see on screen? Put crudely, does it reflect the true conditions and features of Irish life, or does it more often reflect the preoccupations of the filmmakers, who construct Irelands in the image of their own requirements, particularly of a 'romantic' kind?

In another way, of course, the question itself is misleading, since it presumes that the 'real' and the 'romantic' are fundamentally opposed. In fact any representation is by its nature a fabrication, a construction: it selects particular details rather than others, it presents them in a particular order, it privileges certain meanings and disables others. 'Realism' is as much a construction as 'romanticism'; both offer different truths, but neither represents absolute and unmediated 'Truth'. Thus, rather than simply asking which representation is true and which is false, the more interesting and useful question to ask is *why* certain meanings are considered true or realistic, while others are considered false or romanticised. This question enables us to see representation as not merely a static form of depiction, but as a complicated process in which meanings are made, circulated

and deployed, and have political and ideological effects, without reference to some fixed and transcendent truth 'out there'.

To examine this in a specific context, this paper looks at certain patterns of 'translation' which have tended to occur when Irish literary works have been adapted for mainstream (Hollywood-style) cinema. In particular, it argues that in such film adaptations certain local and historical meanings produced by the literary texts tend to be replaced by supposedly ahistorical, universal meanings which actually reflect the values and demands of a US-dominated transnational capitalist film industry. The problem is not simply one of realism versus romanticism; the meanings which the literary texts represent are not simply 'the truth' as opposed to Hollywood's falsehoods. Rather it is a matter of the way alternate—and what might riskily be called 'native'—ways of understanding Ireland are entirely obscured by these films in the interest of making Ireland fit comfortably into a very specific narrative and symbolic system; a system which in fact characterises the culture of modern transnational capitalism. In such narratives, Ireland becomes always a representative of modernity's 'Other', a position which tends to fix Irish identity in very reductive ways. The films I have chosen to exemplify this are *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952), *The Field* (Jim Sheridan, 1990) and *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991), all of which were literary texts before becoming films. Significantly, the literary texts on which the films are based owed little to the modernist, experimental style of the internationally-known Irish writers like Joyce or Beckett. The authors of these three works—Maurice Walsh, John B. Keane and Roddy Doyle—were instead working firmly within more populist traditions of twentieth-century Irish writing, and point to values which do not entirely accord with the supposedly 'universal' values of a modern, urban capitalist culture.

Just as the point of this essay is not simply to criticise these films for being 'unrealistic', so too I wish to avoid their simplistic dismissal on the basis that they are 'unfaithful to the text'—in many ways these movies expand and modify the literary texts in very interesting and appealing ways, and they certainly have gained an international audience that the books have not. Again, the question is not simply whether these films represent 'accurate' translations of the original work; it is rather a question of why certain crucial alterations have been made at the level of narrative and characterisation, and what this might tell us both about modern film culture and about how Ireland has been put to use within the symbolic system of transnational capitalism.

I

"The Quiet Man" was first published as a short story by Kerry writer Maurice Walsh in the popular American magazine, the *Saturday Evening Post*, in February 1933. He slightly expanded and revised the story when he included it in the book *Green Rushes*, published in 1935. In the story, the protagonist Paddy Bawn Enright (named "Shawn Kelvin" in the first publication) had left Ireland "to seek his fortune" at the age of seventeen, working in the steel mills of Pittsburgh and becoming a professional boxer. Returning home to north Kerry after fifteen years, he buys a farm and attempts to forget

his unhappy memories of America. After some five years, a marriage is arranged between himself and a woman named Ellen O'Danaher, whose unsavoury guardian and elder brother, Red Will, had underhandedly purchased the Enright lands while Paddy Bawn had been in America. True to his bullying character, Red Will delays the payment of her dowry and seeks to humiliate Paddy Bawn. Although he is initially unconcerned with the dowry himself, and is reluctant to engage Red Will in spite of being publicly taunted, Paddy Bawn is eventually goaded into action by Ellen. In a dramatic and very public gesture he returns Ellen to Red Will on the basis that the marriage bargain has not been honoured. The latter, stunned and publicly embarrassed, reluctantly hands over the money. Paddy Bawn and Ellen immediately burn the dowry in front of him, precipitating a fistfight between the two men, from which Paddy Bawn emerges as victor, having at last proved his manliness, won the respect of his wife, and confirmed his honour among the community.

When John Ford, the American director, came to make his film version of the story in 1952, he made some very significant alterations to Walsh's narrative. For one thing, he transformed the nature of the love between Paddy Bawn and Ellen. In Walsh's story, Paddy Bawn had retired to his hillside cottage after the War of Independence in search of "quiet". According to the story, "not once did he think of bringing a wife into the place, though often enough, his friends, half in fun, half in earnest, hinted his needs and obligations" (129). It is only after some months that he becomes quietly attracted to Ellen, whom he sees at Mass every Sunday. The demure Ellen is initially unaware of his attentions, but her brother Red Will senses them and arranges a marriage between the couple, though he does so purely from a selfish motive, hoping that it will facilitate a marriage which he himself wants to make to a local widow. Ellen is thus merely a pawn between two men who dislike each other intensely, a fact which enables the story's narrator to comment on the sordid nature of "bargained" marriages—"the Irish way" as he cynically puts it. Fortunately, in this case, the bride does come to admire and even to love her new husband, but only after a period of several months. In fact it is her growing admiration for him which causes her to worry about his honour, and to urge him to demand the dowry which Red Will has been deliberately withholding.

As well as Walsh's commentary on matchmaking, his reference to the communal and religious "obligations" of marriage highlights the complex social dimension to marriage and sexuality in rural Ireland. Ford abandons these subtleties in order to define the relationship more simply as a tempestuous romance between Sean Thornton (as Paddy Bawn is renamed) and the feisty Mary Kate, who bears little resemblance to the faintly-sketched Ellen of Walsh's story. Theirs is a very physical and even erotically-charged relationship, irresistible and powerful, the centrepiece of the narrative. It is a disruptive force to the community and to the communally-directed values of rural society. In generalised narrative terms, their love represents a challenge by the new to the old, like the challenge of adolescence to age.

In this way, the film manages to assimilate the story's centrepiece—the love story—into a narrative structure based on the conflict between the 'modern' and the

'traditional'. Such a conflict is a structuring matrix of capitalist ideology itself, which privileges a dynamic of continual novelty, innovation, exchange, and improvement. This fundamental re-structuring of the story in accordance with the modernity/tradition dynamic is evident elsewhere in the film. The love of Sean for Mary Kate, for instance, is bound up with his romantic emigrant's search for home, an aspect absent from Walsh's narrative. Ford's Sean Thornton, unlike Paddy Bawn, is actually a product of the culture of modernity, having been brought up in America, and his sense of 'home' is thus radically divided between two opposite worlds: an imagined Ireland, the supposed source of traditional and humanist values, and an actual Pittsburgh, where individuals are dehumanised and reduced to the status of pure exchange-value. The film crucially depends on the fact that Sean is an alien in both places; a representative of the disaffected modern individual suspended between opposing poles. This transformation from Paddy Bawn to Sean Thornton also involves a major process of dehistoricisation of narrative. In Walsh's *Green Rushes*, the story of Ellen and Paddy Bawn is merely one part of a web of stories concerning a common set of characters and events in north Kerry during the Irish War of Independence (1919-21). Thus the reader meets Paddy Bawn in other tales, where his character takes on additional attributes that have nothing to do with either his marriage or his return from the United States. Most often, for instance, he appears as the taciturn but stalwart member of an IRA guerrilla band—in fact Walsh describes him at the start of the book as “an ex prize-fighter, known as ‘the Quiet Man’ because he hoped to end his days ‘in a quiet, small little place on a hillside’, and was more likely to end them in a Black-and-Tan ambush” (Walsh 1992, 4). Such political and historical aspects of Paddy's identity of course severely complicate the modernity/tradition structure upon which Ford wishes to hang his character—and are dispensed with in the film.

Some of this can be explained by Ford's own complicated relationship to America. Himself the son of Irish emigrants, Ford tended to see mainstream America from a certain critical distance, which enabled him to analyse rather than merely reproduce standard versions of, for example, the myth of the American West. Explaining his unorthodox sympathy for the Indian in movies like *The Searchers*, for instance, Ford remarked: “Perhaps it's my Irish atavism, my sense of reality, of the beauty of clans, in contrast to the modern world, the masses, the collective irresponsibility” (quoted in Curran 1989, 84). The irony is that the dehistoricised anti-modern values which he then locates in Ireland—the values of the atavistic clannish community of Innisfree—are themselves implicated in the very system Ford is trying to criticise. The very polarisation of these values—the tendency to think in a binary way about the so-called modern and traditional—itself betrays Ford's position within the perspective of modernity. Indeed the idealistic appeals to generalised family values, to community life, to traditions, are a central feature of capitalist ideology, especially mobilised in times of crisis. With extraordinary irony, capitalism actually idealises and mythologises these values at the very same time as it makes their realisation impossible; after all, the alienating, modernising and commodifying forces of the capitalist economy depend on the values of exchangeability rather than permanence, mobility rather than rootedness, and individualism

rather than communalism.

Thus, a film like *The Quiet Man* remains at a deep level firmly dependent on the value-system of modernity, even though its “soft primitivism”, to use Luke Gibbons’s phrase, appears superficially to offer a critique of those values (see Gibbons 1987, 200). Sean Thornton is reconstructed as a prototypical alienated modern hero, made guilty by capitalist modernity (he has killed a boxer in a prizefight); in search of a personal fulfillment which will be at once an expiation of his sin and a reunification with a pre-modern traditional society. An important readjustment of the social and cultural values found in Walsh’s story has occurred whereby narrative motivation which is strongly attached to the social values and codes of an historical rural community has been replaced by one driven by the values of modern ‘romantic love’ and individualistic personal fulfillment. As recent theories about the relation between modernity and imperialism have argued, this kind of narrative is basic to modernised cultures like the United States, but is not as fundamental or appropriate to postcolonial cultures such as Ireland, in which narratives of modernity and progress seem less sustainable and convincing, and where alternative kinds of narrative remain powerful (see for instance Lloyd 1993 and Gibbons 1996). For Ford, Ireland is ultimately part of a story about the idealised redemption of the modern individual: it’s a place you’re rewarded with when you’ve paid your dues to capitalism.

II

Like Maurice Walsh, John B. Keane was born in north Kerry. His plays and comic prose have been enormously popular in Ireland since the 1960s, though little known outside the country. His play *The Field* has always been a favourite with Irish amateur dramatic societies, though latterly Keane’s work has also found recognition among professional critics, and in the national professional theatre. Like all of Keane’s work, *The Field* describes and speaks to a rural, Catholic Ireland of farmers, shopkeepers, publicans, priests and politicians. The play describes a conflict over a small field which has been rented by ‘The Bull’ McCabe and his son Tadhg for several years. When the field’s owner, a local widow, puts the field up for sale Bull feels that he has a certain right to it, having improved the land; but he is outbid at auction by an outsider, William Dee (an Irishman living in England), who wishes to set up a concrete block factory on the site. Intending merely to frighten Dee, Bull and Tadhg end up beating him to death the night before the auction. Sworn to secrecy, the local auctioneer and publican, his family, and a local character Bird O’Donnell all maintain silence in the face of church and police inquiries, though the McCabes’ guilt is known by all. McCabe successfully purchases the field at the subsequent auction. The play particularly focuses on Bull’s rationalisation of his crime, and on the effects of complicity on the family of the auctioneer.

Keane’s play is a subtle exploration of the social as well as individual significance of murder, and attempts to sympathetically analyse the competing claims of commerce, custom, family loyalty, state law and church law. Keane’s characters are not merely discrete individuals, but individuals constrained by relations with family,

community, church and state—relations which are both enabling and disabling in various ways. A character like Leamy Flanagan, the auctioneer's son, for example, is torn between the moral demands of church and state, and the loyalty he owes to his family, who have agreed to remain silent about the crime. They themselves are shown to be torn between horror at the crime of murder, and sympathy for the McCabe's moral right to the land. Jim Sheridan's film of the play, on the other hand, forgoes subtlety for passion and spectacle, and substitutes an investigation of extreme psychological struggle for Keane's analysis of communal behaviour. In ways which link it to *The Quiet Man*, it constructs an Ireland which is distinctly mythic and pre-modern, though in a much more negative and disturbing way than Ford's movie.

Among the many alterations which exemplify this shift, the reshaping of the main characters is perhaps most interesting. Sheridan's Ireland, unlike Keane's, is populated by the bizarre and extreme: dysfunctional families, village idiots, sullen townspeople, an inexplicably-obtuse foreigner and a kind of postcolonial King Lear. Tadhg is transformed from a clever, shifty boy in Keane's play to a repressive psychotic in Sheridan's film. The Bird O'Donnell is alarmingly transformed from a subtle and interesting eccentric into a village idiot straight from the traditions of stage Irishry. In fact, in its treatment of Bird and the other villagers Sheridan's movie less resembles Keane's play than the British director David Lean's Irish film *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), which is severely marred by a stereotypical display of the 'idiocy of rural life', to use Marx's phrase. Lean's romantic vision of Ireland in that movie is predicated upon a view of Ireland as essentially premodern, with this premodernity alternatively taking shape as a backward, benighted rural populace, or, more attractively but equally destructively, as wild, emotional, tragic excess.

Sheridan shares both this vision of benighted community and, in the character of Bull himself, the vision of excess. The Bull is no longer the bullying, but very human and vulnerable character of Keane's play; for Sheridan (assisted by Richard Harris's powerful acting) he becomes a figure of heroic proportions, even a symbol of a fundamental and unresolved psychic struggle within Ireland itself. In particular, the film's final image of Bull McCabe raging fruitlessly against the waves recalls a similar image of Yeats's Celtic hero Cuchullain, whom Yeats recreated to fit the values of tragic madness in Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. It makes for powerful spectacle, which, in the modernist symbolic order, it is evidently Ireland's role to provide.

The outsider who bids against Bull is also reworked significantly by Sheridan. By changing him from an Irishman into an American, Sheridan is able to hire an American film star (Tom Berenger) and to elaborate a conflict between the profit-hunger of American capitalism versus the atavistic land hunger of the postcolonial Irish peasant, which ends up stereotyping both Irish and American values. The narrative becomes centred on the struggle between two individual wills. The two antagonists are equally stubborn in their land-hunger: Bull McCabe out of ancestral passion, the Yank out of more financially-driven motives. And although our sympathies with Bull encourage us to value Bull's passionate obsession over the Yank relative heartlessness, the very extremity of

Bull's rage and violence, and our realisation of the dark secret of his son's suicide (an element absent from the play), mean that he becomes more like a tragic figure, whom we view with fear as well as understanding.

In its narrative construction Sheridan's film, like his other films (he directed *In the Name of the Father* and wrote *Into the West*), is especially concerned with the relations between fathers and sons. In his version of *The Field*, this obsession enables him to transform Keane's story into the stuff of Greek myth. Bull McCabe as father-tyrant has disrupted the natural order by effectively killing his son, and with tragic irony kills another son in an effort to atone for the death of the first. This mythic scenario is far removed from Keane's attempt to display the confusion, desperation, accident and pathos of murder, and to demonstrate the social meaning of individual action by displaying the culpability of the entire community in the murder of William Dee. Sheridan's mythologising allows him to reproduce the generalising modernity/tradition dichotomy which pits the individual against the communal, the forces of reason and enlightenment against superstition and emotion, and tragic passion against calculating avarice. Though Sheridan evaluates these qualities in somewhat different ways to Ford, he nevertheless accepts the basic validity of these binary oppositions as a means of understanding Irish culture. Keane's play avoids such polarisations: his William Dee, for instance, unlike Sheridan's 'Yank', cannot be read simply as a representative of a cold foreign modernity—his wife's family came from the locality, and he himself is an Irishman from Galway. In an important sense, Keane's play is written from *within* the community life he dramatises, with a feeling for its nuances and complications; Sheridan, on the other hand, sees that same life from the schematic and often uncomprehending eye of the modern metropolitan.

III

Roddy Doyle published his first novel, *The Commitments*, in 1988. The novel draws upon his experience as a schoolteacher in the northside Dublin suburb of Kilbarrack, an area of relative poverty, high unemployment and attendant social problems. Doyle's novel is written almost entirely in dialogue, which facilitated its adaptation to cinema, and the film proved immensely popular with Irish audiences as well as American ones on its release in 1991. Both film and novel describe the brief rise and fall of a soul band from the northside of Dublin. Although apparently depicting an urban identity, usually a sign of modernity as opposed to the rural world of tradition and conservatism, this film, like many others of an urban Irish mould, turns out to rely on much the same myths and stereotypes that pervade the cinema of rural Irish life.

On the surface, of course, the film frequently seems to depict Ireland as a place where stereotypes and fixed cultural identities no longer apply. One of the most memorable sequences in the film shows the teenage band manager Jimmy Rabbitte auditioning prospective band members. A long series of musicians and groups show up at the door of Jimmy's house, all representing different musical styles and traditions. All of the aspiring musicians are Irish, yet their musical identities are a kaleidoscope of

multinational popular traditions, from the sublime to the ridiculous: they include traditional Irish music and dancing, American blues, South African gospel, Cajun music, early Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, Barry Manilow, heavy metal, British punk, new romantics, The Smiths. Irish musical identity seemingly crosses national boundaries and time periods. Jimmy's father even offers to sing Elvis numbers: "Elvis is God", he announces, and sure enough we see Elvis's picture hanging beside the Pope's on the kitchen wall.

In one way the sequence illustrates the hybridity of contemporary Irish identity. It implies that modern Irish culture is plural and open to influence, a place where various unrelated cultural forms happily sit side by side, seemingly beyond differences of space and time in a new culture of mutual enrichment. In other words, Ireland seems to have become a quintessentially postmodern culture—released from the old, narrow and single-minded definitions of Gaelic identity which stultified and oppressed, but having also managed to avoid the destructiveness of a single-minded modernity which would sweep away the past altogether, effectively throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Ireland seems to represent an interesting and non-combative commerce between the old and the new, the native and the foreign—a postmodern transcendence of the opposition 'modern versus traditional'.

But, as critics of the postmodern condition have argued, the supposed pluralism of the postmodern can also be understood in a more alarming way as merely an unprecedented intensification of transnational capitalism, and one which shows yet again the force of American cultural values in constructing this 'new' Ireland for the screen. Under this economy, everything is reduced to the level of commodity, of exchange-value—even images and musical styles. At a notable moment in the film, when the band are having their poster photographs taken, Jimmy demands images of "urban decay" rather than "picture postcards"—a deft but typically postmodern translation of politics into style options. A similar translation occurs at meta-filmic level, too—the video packaging for the movie has a photograph on its cover of the band giving a 'two-fingers' gesture at the camera (and by extension, viewer). What has happened is that a peculiarly Irish gesture signifying an exaggerated 'fuck off' has become merely a kind of designer cheekiness, with the venom of such a gesture in Irish society completely diffused by its absorption into the conventions of the publicity poster, and by being incongruously juxtaposed with the band's exuberant, gleeful facial expressions.

From this perspective, cultural hybridity seems but the by-product of global capitalism, which has commodified everything as styles, and created new global markets in which to exchange them. Detached from their original contexts, these commodified styles, like the two-fingers gesture, actually signify an absence of meaning. By the logic of such unproblematic pluralism anyone can 'be' a Cajun in this world simply by imitating the gestures, miming the role, wearing the style. The fact that styles and traditions carry historical and cultural baggage is merely a distraction. This seems less evidence of a genuine pluralism than merely an empty playing with surfaces, which masks a deeper cultural and economic homogenisation.

Interestingly, Doyle's novel seems to illustrate a different possibility for hybridity, in which a more genuine exchange of cultural value takes place. For instance, even though Jimmy exhorts the band not to sing in their Dublin accents, it is clearly the band's ability to adapt American soul music to their local identity that makes them successful—when Deco starts singing out Dublin place-names instead of American cities in James Brown's "Night Train", the local audience goes wild. This element is entirely cut from the film. A genuinely productive process whereby Dubliners appropriate and transform American soul to speak to their own conditions and in their own language is not of interest to Parker. His *Commitments* are purely imitative; they forgo the creative hybridity employed by Roddy Doyle's. This seems less a liberatory postmodernism than an imperialist modernism at its most powerful and hegemonic.

Visually, the sense of Dublin as an actual place does not extend much beyond cheerful and traditional images of the hordes of happy-go-lucky children, horses and bicycles, set unproblematically against images of modernist urban decay, accompanied by a thumping upbeat soundtrack. Even Dublin's contemporary drug scourge is merely the occasion for a joke. Thus Ireland is, yet again, a quaint, amusing, exuberant culture which somehow retains the values of family, imagination and tradition even in a modern urban setting. Where, in *The Quiet Man*, Ireland is a place where modernity hasn't fully arrived, in *The Commitments* modernity has indeed arrived, but just hasn't worked properly—a fortunate failure, in Parker's view.

As with the other films, the 'internationalisation' of the adaptation works at a more fundamental level in terms of the narrative itself. Here too the film significantly departs from the tenor of the novel. At the end of Doyle's book, the *Commitments* have broken up because of personal jealousies and immaturity, just on the night when Jimmy has secured them their first recording deal. In the final scene of the book, a slimmed-down but undeterred cohort of Jimmy, Derek, Outspan and Mickah are planning to have another try at the music business, this time as a 'Dublin country' band called The Brassers!

But this wry ending is entirely altered in the film. Parker's version has added a 'Wilson Pickett' subplot, whereby the band has broken up just before the legendary American soul singer arrives at the club to jam with them. 'Success', even though it finally eludes them, is nevertheless very strongly defined in terms of being endorsed, not merely by a local audience, but by a living symbol of the multinational capitalist music industry, with its stars, its vast profits, its limousines and chauffeurs. As Jimmy, realising the lost opportunity, disconsolately walks through the Dublin night, he is given a platitudinous pep-talk by Joey the Lips: even though material success eluded them, Joey tells him, "you raised their expectations of life ... you lifted their horizons". These comments are clearly central to Parker's own vision of the film; in a documentary on the making of *The Commitments* he remarked that the film was "about kids who use music to get out of the world they're in ... that's pretty relevant wherever you are in the world, I think". In fact, Parker's comments in general are alarmingly stereotyped: if you want to get out of that working-class world, he says, "you're going to have to be a professional boxer, a professional football player, or get into music" (given his own claim to working-

class credentials, one wonders by this formula how he managed to become a successful film director).

By the last concert the band have become a successful commodity, an identity which is emphasised by the way Parker films them through the filmic conventions of 'real-life' concert movies and advertisements. Their musicianship is outstanding, they are smooth and professional, the three girls have donned short black dresses and become a visual commodity in the style of a pop video. Interestingly, for a short time after the success of the movie the actor playing Deco, Andrew Strong, starred in a glossy Coca-Cola ad singing the company's jingle in the style of *The Commitments*, a transition which seemed astonishingly 'natural'.

Where the ending of Doyle's book confirms it as an affectionate and humorous depiction of adolescent naivety and immaturity, Parker's film turns the story into a kind of 1990s teenage update of Horatio Alger. Its conclusion, unlike Doyle's, is permeated with unproblematic assumptions about the ability to transcend one's environment through sheer perseverance, about international wealth and fame being the pinnacle of success, about real achievement consisting of successful commodity production in a multinational capitalist society. In the most clichéd way, Joey the Lips articulates the typical obfuscation of capitalism whereby the spiritual and moral is held to be 'what really counts', while in fact it is material value and exchangeability which are directly rewarded in capitalist society. This fact is (probably unconsciously) pointed up by the series of vignettes which conclude the film. In these vignettes, it is suggested that for most of the band members, their experience as a Commitment has been a springboard to a musical career. Contrary to what Joey's 'soul talk' might imply, what really matters is not the moral or artistic quality of what they are now doing—what counts is that they are producing music in the acceptable, commodified form: Dean is a jazz musician, Natalie a pop star, Bernie a country singer, Mickah fronts a punk band. Those who do not go on to a musical career—James and Imelda—both take their places within the bourgeois economy as, on the one hand, a surgeon who sings, and on the other, a respectable aspiring middle-class wife. All have, thankfully, found productive rather than parasitical places in the economy. The only potentially jarring note is provided by Outspan and Derek, the kernel of the original band, who remain uncommercialised and unemployed, buskers on Grafton Street; but this is clearly their 'choice', one connected to their naivety which has been emphasised during the film. They, like children, are simply not ready yet.

Of course, there is a similar dream of success presented in Doyle's book—Jimmy asks the band early on "Yis want to be different, isn't tha' it? Yis want to do somethin' with yourselves, isn't tha' it?" (1992, 11). But, crucially, the book's ending provides a humorously ironic perspective on such sentiments; as readers we don't expect the new band *The Brassers* to be any more successful than *The Commitments* were. Parker's film, on the other hand, doesn't want to explore such an unsettling possibility. Instead of modernity's narrative of progress, which is what Parker and Hollywood and capital require, Doyle's book suggests a counter-narrative of (traditional Irish?) circularity.

IV

What I have been arguing is that many of the aspects of the three literary works which are most challenging for a reader or an audience are elided or transformed in their cinematic adaptations, where these adaptations have been aimed at, and largely financed by, a mainstream transnational film industry. Viewed together, these three films produce particular variants on 'romantic' myths of the pre-modern and the postmodern, myths which underwrite global capitalism in general and American mainstream cinema in particular. The challenges posed by the historical, the local, the culturally-specific—all those elements which might prove difficult or opaque to the international viewer by disrupting such mythology—are foregone in the interests of mass appeal. It is true that the literary works on which these films are based are not well-known or popular outside Ireland, but this ought not to mean that they have nothing to say to a non-Irish audience. On the contrary, in a postmodern Western world where the homogenization of national cultures proceeds apace, the production of a mass global audience (especially through cinema) threatens to accelerate the destruction of alternative, the disappearance of shock, the vanishing of the truly different, the impossibility of learning anything new. As the modernists knew, in contemporary culture the 'traditional' can sometimes be an instrument of radical challenge.

Ironically Ireland is celebrated within the international cinematic frame as a place 'different' to America and its analogues, a refreshing alternative to the worst of modern capitalist society; but in a deeper sense the Ireland we see on screen is merely a reflection of the very myths which underpin that society—the myths upon which Western capitalism has built itself, and through which it obscures its own contradictions and illogicality. From a position within that culture, such myths appear natural, ahistorical and universal. Thus, instead of being a place which might make an audience question the 'universality' of the values which capitalism cherishes—for example, the values of the nuclear family, individualism, self-improvement, and so on—Ireland on the screen turns out to be a place where those 'universal' values may be reassuringly observed, ultimately emerging intact against a background of the atavistic, the stultified, the backward-looking and immature, however charming such a premodern world might sometimes be. Thus the international audiences of these films can experience the thrill of encountering an alien 'other', while feeling, in the end, safely at home. Perhaps, to return to the Quiet Man's question at the start of this essay, what we are watching is all too real—not as an image of Ireland, but of the hegemony of the values of transnational capital.

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