



The Representation of Celtic Tiger
Irish Masculinity in Hollywood Cinema:
1994-2008

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SUMMARY

By analysing the careers of three Irish actors in the U.S. during the Celtic Tiger period—Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers—this thesis explores the representation of Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity in Hollywood cinema. It considers the “Celtic Tiger” as an economic phenomenon that had cultural ramifications and affected the meanings attached to Irishness at a local and global level. Each chapter takes a trope or stereotype connected to the representation of Irish masculinity in cinema. Chapter One, “Tiger Celts”: Irishness, Whiteness, and Masculinity, considers the way that Irishness registers as a form of enriched whiteness in popular culture while still laying claim to a victim status that has extended from Ireland’s former colonization. It argues that as both film stars and characters, Farrell, Murphy, and Meyers avail of the cultural currency of whiteness, but remain inseparable from their ethnicity. They are seldom cast as actors but as *Irish* actors in Hollywood, and the contention that the Irishness of Farrell, Murphy, and Meyers lingers as a watermark that remains present regardless of the accent or ethnicity of the characters they play underlies the arguments made throughout the thesis as a whole. Chapter Two, “Gael Gore”: Hollywood Representations of Irish Violence, considers the extent to which the stereotype of Irish violence continues to guide discourses of Irish masculinity in Hollywood. Chapter Three, Fathers, Sons, and Irish Masculinity, looks comparatively at Irish masculinity by considering the characters played by two successive generations of Irish actors. Finally, Chapter Four, Sexuality and the City: The Irish Metrosexual, looks retrospectively at the careers of Farrell, Murphy, and Meyers to argue that the type of metrosexual characters they have represented can be traced to the shifting emphasis between rural and urban Ireland that formed the bedrock of discourses pertaining to the Celtic Tiger.

INTRODUCTION

In Joel Schumacher's *Phone Booth* (2002), New York publicist Stu Shepherd experiences the worst day of his life when he becomes the target for a sniper with a God complex. After ringing an actress he hopes to have an affair with from a telephone box off Times Square, Stu answers an impromptu phone call from an anonymous "caller" who proceeds to terrorize him for his sins by revealing detailed information about Stu's life and threatening to kill him, those he loves, as well as innocent by-standers, if Stu hangs up or tries to leave the booth. As described by Daniel Orlandi, the Costume Designer for the film, Stu is "young and hip and a little aggressive" "kind of vain," "very upscale ... and kind of a dandy" ("The Making of 'Phone Booth' Featurette"), but, as a result of the extreme pressure placed on him by the caller, where Stu is broken down and reduced to a pitiful state, he is ultimately redeemed. To this extent, for Ruth Barton "the film is most interesting for its dialogue with opposing models of masculinity" (*Acting Irish* 214). Barton makes a cogent point here, but the film becomes of further interest when viewed in tandem with Schumacher's audio commentary, insofar as it also raises an unforeseen question that is of particular relevance for the thesis to follow, specifically, why, in an independent Hollywood movie about a "smug [and American] advertising executive," brought "to a symbolic point of rebirth" (*Acting Irish* 214), is Ireland, or Irishness referenced four times within the first seventeen minutes? To be sure, one of these occasions is a manoeuvre on the part of Stu within the movie to placate a flu-ridden gossip columnist by sending her a bottle of Jameson whiskey with a note attached saying "Irish chicken soup. Love Stu." But on two other occasions before Schumacher has been talking for twenty minutes about the film, Ireland is mentioned specifically in relation to the—later to be—star who plays Stu: Irish actor Colin Farrell. We will return to the final reference below, but with Schumacher's recurring allusion to Farrell as "from Ireland" *Phone*

Booth encapsulates several of the main arguments developed throughout this thesis, namely, that Irishness is as fundamental to Farrell's identity as a star in Hollywood, as vanity and superficiality are to Stu's identity in the film, and that Farrell, along with some other Irish actors of his generation, have repeatedly been upheld as representative of a particular type of metrosexual masculinity within Hollywood cinema.

This thesis considers the careers of three Irish actors, Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers, who, during an unparalleled phase in Irish history referred to as the "Celtic Tiger" period, came to embody a kind of masculinity notable for its volatile combination of hedonism, narcissism, and traditional and cosmopolitan Irishness. Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been chosen for the way that the development of their careers—their transition from indigenous film actor to Hollywood star—corresponds with the arc of Ireland's Celtic Tiger "boom period," approximately 1994-2008. More significantly, it argues these three actors came to personify a particular kind of Irish masculinity that reconciled certain narratives of Irishness, both old and new, in response to the phenomenon of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Emerging at an unprecedented period in Irish history, Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy made assimilable a globalized formation of Irishness by embodying a mode of metrosexual masculinity that dips into countercultural lifestyles, but draws on well-established "traditional" versions of Irishness.

Choice of Actors

An immediate question to address then, is, why these three actors? Or perhaps more to the point, why not others? In addition to Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, it would seem equally possible to include some recognisable Irish actors such as Liam Neeson, Colm Meaney, Gabriel Byrne, Brendan Gleeson, or indeed Daniel Day-Lewis, Pierce Brosnan, Michael Fassbender, and Stuart Townsend. Structurally, it was apparent that the inclusion of a large

number of actors would ultimately detract from the thematic element of the inquiry. But more to the point, certain actors, specifically Gleeson, Meaney, Neeson, Byrne, Day-Lewis or Brosnan, belong to an earlier generation and, as an older age group their careers date to the decades prior to the Celtic Tiger. The opposite is the case with Michael Fassbender. Fassbender's career did not register in American popular media until after his appearance in U.S. blockbusters such as Zack Snyder's graphically violent epic *300* (2006), or the later Quentin Tarantino war-film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), nor did he fully acquire local stardom within the cinemas of Ireland or Britain until his outstanding performance in *Hunger* (2008), the Steve McQueen film on the Republican hunger-striker, Bobby Sands.

Stuart Townsend's career is slightly different, insofar as Townsend can be said to have exemplified certain aspects of the Celtic Tiger in Irish cinema, specifically with his role in Gerry Stembridge's *About Adam*. But Townsend's move to Hollywood was not as successful as that of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy. Unlike them, Townsend's career in Hollywood, with the exception of *Queen of the Damned* in 2002 and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* in 2003, neither of which was successful, was mostly limited to minor roles. When he was cast as the male lead in the supernatural detective series *Night Stalker* (2005-2006), the programme was cancelled after six episodes due to poor ratings. Townsend was predominantly associated with his long-term girlfriend Charlize Theron, an Australian actress who was highly successful in her own right, and by the time their relationship came to an end in 2010, Theron had starred in several highly successful movies, while Townsend, had faded into Hollywood obscurity.

Indeed, if Hollywood likes to promote the idea that there is a certain "charisma" or "x-factor" that makes one actor a star while another remains unemployed, the critical remarks Townsend did receive during his career offer some possible insight as to why he, though in many ways placed, ethnically framed, and as physically attractive as Farrell, Meyers, and

Murphy, did not make it as an Irish actor in Hollywood during the period in question. To be sure “Irish-born” (Handelman E6) and an “Irish actor” (Harvey, “Battle in Seattle” 28) who “grew up in a small fishing village outside of Dublin” (Neumaier 47) were just some of the ways that Townsend, like Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, was marked as Irish in reviews of his films. Similarly, like Farrell, Townsend was noted for a “cockiness” (D. Kimmel), while in *About Adam*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Queen of the Damned* he seemed to project a campness that critics found pleasing, and a metrosexuality that, as we shall see, has been a crucial factor in the star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy.

If critics did find fault with Townsend’s acting skills —his character was described on one occasion as a “bloodless lump”(Clark 14B)—, a far more fatal flaw appeared to be that, unlike the three actors of this study, Townsend’s metrosexuality was not balanced by more traditional traits of masculinity. For Steve Parsifal, “Townsend slinks around doing a wan impression of malevolence” in *Queen of the Damned*. For Calvin Wilson in a review of *Head in the Clouds*, Townsend lacked “a certain gravity” and Wilson found it hard to believe that Townsend’s character Guy “would actually shoot anyone.” Eleanor Ringel Gillespie was not so kind, and while she praised him as an “exceedingly handsome—magnetic actor” in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, in *Head in the Clouds* “it’s as if he’s been neutered—never a good look for a leading man.”

Such criticisms might arguable explain the way that Townsend’s career was by all accounts eclipsed by his actor partner Theron. While for many Hollywood couples (Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston or Angelina Jolie come to mind), a male actor’s ability to pair himself with a beautiful actress is confirmation of his virility, it was not Townsend’s Irishness, but his relationship with Theron which became the defining aspect of his star persona. In a list of potential up-and-coming actors compiled in the *New York Post* in 2004 for example, Kerry Washington, Gael Garcia Bernal, Mathew Gubler and Diane Kruger were categorized as “the

Bronx bombshell,” “the Poet”, “the Intern” and “the Face” respectively. Townsend by contrast was “the Boyfriend”—“the one always standing next to his girlfriend, Charlize Theron” (Scott Smith 84).

Other possible actors of Irish birth who have not been included here are Aiden Gillen, Domhnall Gleeson, and Jack Reynor. To start with Gillen, his work during the Celtic Tiger period has mostly involved character roles in small, or once-off parts, in British or Irish made-for-TV movies and television serials. The exception here would be substantial parts in two British series, *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000) and *Dice* (2001), (the latter lasted only six episodes), until being cast as Tommy Carcetti in the gritty HBO crime series *The Wire* in 2004 (-2008). This is not to say that Gillen is not an Irish actor of note, but that his career could be considered sporadic at best from an American/Hollywood perspective, at least until more recent years.

A similar argument could be made in the cases of Domhnall Gleeson and Jack Reynor, largely due to their age (both are substantially younger than Farrell, Meyers, Murphy, Townsend, Fassbender or Gillen). Gleeson’s career began with roles in indigenous film and television, and, while typical for many young actors at the outset of their career, any significant parts in film or television beyond an Irish domain were not forthcoming until 2010. Reynor on the other hand, was not born until 1992, and, with the exception of an unnamed role as an altar boy in the year 2000, did not begin his acting career until 2010, two years after the purview of this thesis.

In direct comparison with all the aforementioned actors, the careers of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy were selected for the way that they developed in parallel to Ireland’s Celtic Tiger period. As Christine Gledhill reminds us in her introduction to *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, “[a]ctors become stars when their off-screen life-styles and personalities equal or

surpass acting ability in importance” (xiv). In this respect, and as will become apparent in the chapters to follow, the attention afforded to the “personal lives” of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy confirms their consideration within the Hollywood film industry as not only stars, but Irish stars. Most specifically, it is their association with a specific kind of Celtic Tiger Irishness that has both contributed to the interest that has surrounded their star personae during the period in question, and has determined their inclusion here.

Watermark

To this extent, it is useful, to consider the Irishness of the indigenous actor in Hollywood in terms of a watermark: as something which is discernible irrespective of character or accent. A discussion of ethnicity as a type of “watermark” indicates the way that the Irishness of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy manifests in cinema and its surrounding discourses in terms of a trace, or residue that figures regardless of ethnic characterization, or whether or not these actors are playing Irish characters. As Jacques Derrida argues, “there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the ‘real’ supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement” (159). Here, the trace is the first point of contact between the reader and the text, and a sign for the production of meaning. In a similar sense, considering ethnicity in terms of a watermark offers scope for thinking of something which is produced rather than essential. Alexandra Widmer makes the point that “a watermark on a money note is not openly visible, but if legitimacy is in question, it can be held up to the light or looked at from a different angle to show that it is present” (540) and, in this sense, considering ethnicity as a watermark conveys the way that Irishness serves as a level of distinction that does not impinge on the body of the actor, or the character he is portraying, but is nevertheless latent. That is not to say that Farrell, Meyers, or

Murphy “look” particularly Irish, but that their Irishness is still present irrespective of characterization.

This amalgamation occurs by various discrete and/or integrated means that range from the simple identification of “Irish” in the reviews, interviews, or publicity surrounding a particular film (and as we shall see repeatedly in the chapters to come, identifying these actors as Irish is widespread in film reviews), to the in-depth biographies on actors that are broadcast, and published, via promotional media before, after, and in-between film releases, to sustain the level of public interest in an actor. As with any body of information, awareness is heightened, or diminished, in keeping with the amount of knowledge the viewer possesses. An avid fan, for instance, will be familiar with Farrell’s off-screen reputation that connects his Irishness to his alcohol and drug addiction (and this aspect of his star persona will be dealt with in greater detail throughout the thesis), while another viewer may only be vaguely aware of his Irishness, through the film’s early reviews, previews, or promotional material. Either way, the majority of viewers have at least some foreknowledge of the starring actors concerned before going to see a movie in the cinema or watching a DVD, where, as Martin Barker et al. have noted,

It might be for ten minutes, a week a month, or twenty years, but audiences generally know in advance that they are going to see a film. And learn things about it. With greater or lesser intensity, these processes prepare and shape our expectation: What can I expect from this film? What do I hope for? Who should I go with and perhaps to which cinema? What do I want to know about reviews, about the film’s story, its production, its stars, their stories, gossip, and so on? (15)

Thinking of a watermark in terms of a trace, or imprint, communicates the idea of indigenous Irishness as a “supplementary and adjectival detail” that “cannot disrupt clarity, because [it] cannot obstruct the overall image” (Halder 105). Irishness exists, and affects, how Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy are received, and in this respect, it can be thought of as part

of the “cumulative cultural product” that is the star. But that is not to say that their Irishness is visible *on* the body. In this sense it is contained: it is hidden, but also always there, and capable of being made visible. Using the metaphor of a watermark to explain the significance of their ethnicity to the careers of these three actors draws attention to Irishness, not only as an emblem hovering below the surface of the particular actor’s on- and off-screen persona, but also as a symbol that calls to mind a collection of characteristics, traits, or stereotypes that accumulate with the passing of time.

Agency

This does, however, raise the question of agency. To what extent are Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy marketed or framed as Irish by Hollywood in its capacity as a publicity or “cinematic machine” (Dyer, *Stars* 63), or do they perform their Irishness, and as such make it a crucial aspect of their persona or off-screen self? The former perspective constructs stardom as a process of manipulation. Graeme Turner, for example, states that “celebrity is not only a discursive effect. The celebrity is also a commodity: produced, traded and marketed by the media and publicity industries” (9). It is possible to see Turner’s argument in operation in the film *Phone Booth* quoted above, where the director Joel Schumacher intervenes between the viewer and the text to explicitly mark Farrell out as Irish. As will become apparent throughout the following chapters, Schumacher is not the only director to make such an intervention where the actors of this thesis are concerned, but that is not to say that ethnic framing of this sort is the prerogative of the director alone. An article/interview published several years into Farrell’s career entitled, “A User’s Guide to Colin Farrell” is another example in which his image is “produced, traded and marketed” in this case, by Caryn James, a journalist for the *New York Times*: “while Mr. Farrell sprinkles his conversation with ‘babe’ and unprintable adjectives, there’s also a streak of Irish lyricism when he talks about his work. He is, after all, not some street thug but a well-bred boy from a middle-class suburb of

Dublin, who has already had some intriguing artistic high points.” Much like Schumacher’s discussion, James selects particular aspects of her engagement with Farrell to present a specific kind of Irishness, one that is both cultured and laddish:

Gentle Reader, assume that his favorite bleeped word appears once or twice in every sentence he utters from now on; that much of his reputation is true. He has cultivated a stylishly scruffy look -- he was unshaven and wore a denim shirt unbuttoned to his waist when we met a little more than a week ago -- and "Carpe Diem" is tattooed on his forearm; but he is far from the oaf of the tabloids' dreams. He was unfailingly charming and polite over dinner. He ordered steak; he chewed with his mouth closed.

The interview, particularly when taken alongside Schumacher’s remarks in the audio commentary (that also includes the quip on the part of Schumacher that “Colin enjoys the night-life”) would appear to corroborate Turner’s argument of the celebrity as the epitome of media construction. But as Richard Dyer notes, “if the drift of the image emanates from Hollywood, and with some consistency within Hollywood, still the whole image-making process within and without Hollywood, allows for variation, inflection, and contradiction” (*Heavenly Bodies* 4). For Dyer, star images exist in a “structured polysemy” insofar as they are composed of many different discourses that work together to make the persona of a specific star (*Stars* 63). His observation that “how much of a determining role the person has in the manufacture of her or his image and films varies enormously from case to case and this is part of the interest” (*Heavenly Bodies* 5) affords the star an agency absent from Turner’s argument, which is of particular interest in light of the Farrell examples. Certainly, it is apparent in both the commentary and interview that Farrell’s ethnicity is emphasized, but that is not to say that Farrell has no hand, act, or part in this construction. To prove this point, it is useful to take account of the fourth occasion that Farrell’s Irishness is raised within the first seventeen minutes of the audio commentary for *Phone Booth* where Schumacher relates an incident during filming in which Farrell referred to himself as Irish when making a joke on

set. A similar contribution is evident in the *New York Times* article, when the interviewer reminds Farrell of his brother's observation that his accent became more pronounced once he became a Hollywood star. James states,

His real-life accent is faint but distinctly Irish, and his own brother has told reporters that it has become thicker and coarser since his success. "It may have at times, when I've been afraid of losing myself" in a different place, Mr. Farrell says. "But my brother forgets to understand, and I've told him so many times," he says -- and he goes on to explain that while he grew up in Castleknock, which he calls a "posh" Dublin neighborhood, when he was 14 he started playing soccer with kids on the unposh side of town and began talking tougher. He adds a more likely explanation: "It's just a romantic thing as well, a missing-home thing."

Rather than the way Turner (and a lot of academic writing on stardom) prefers to deal with the "production" of celebrity as "a fundamental structural component of how the media operates" (4), Dyer's perspective allows for the way that stars mediate in the making of their own image, albeit to varying degrees, and in ways that can both corroborate or contradict the wider media view. In this respect, Lorraine York's argument is useful insofar as it appears to encompass both positions, where, for her "celebrity agency may involve conceding to the demands of various industrial players, while potentially inflecting them with individual celebrity agendas" (1341).

The theory of the watermark referred to throughout this thesis makes reference to a process in which, as a result of both deliberate and incidental Irish framing of these actors in the discourses surrounding their performances in film (and in certain cases television), the particular Irishness of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy is a significant and constant aspect of what these actors signify. But what will become evident in later chapters of this thesis is that to various degrees throughout their careers, Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have actively engaged in this signification process to shape the kind of Irish masculinity they are seen to embody.

This thesis argues that Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy are the most internationally visible examples of a kind of masculinity that surfaced during an unparalleled period of growth in the Irish economy. To this extent, the Celtic Tiger can be understood to reference a combination of extraordinary historical and economic factors on the one hand, and distinctive sociocultural factors on the other. From an economic perspective, Ireland found itself advantageously placed to meet the needs of the U.S. multinationals, who, having revolutionised business and trading practices in the West with developments in information technology during the 1990s, required a base from which to approach European markets (Donovan and Murphy 24). Ireland possessed an English-speaking workforce (25), and, since joining the European Economic Community in 1973 (later to be called the European Union) (20), had taken progressive steps to detach itself monetarily from the U.K., most notably by committing to the European Monetary System in 1978 (20), and signing the Single European Act in 1986 (21). Ireland had little in the way of an indigenous industrial base, and, as a result, was in a position to offer lucrative tax incentives to entice U.S. multinationals to establish a European base here (17). According to Donal Donovan and Antoin E. Murphy, “by the end of the 1990s, Ireland had become the second largest exporter of packaged computer software in the world after the United States” (17). A country formerly notable for its insular trading policies, subservience to the United Kingdom, economic stagnation, and mass emigration due to unemployment, had achieved a budget surplus with practically full numbers in employment by the millennium (16-7).

But, as well as being notable as an economic phenomenon, the period must also be considered in relation to the specific cultural ramifications it inspired, insofar as the “Celtic Tiger” has also become an umbrella term for a particular zeitgeist, with characteristics that distinguish it clearly from what came before, that is, unprecedented prosperity, and an accompanying confident, even swaggering Irishness. That is not to say that culture and

economy exist as two disparate poles within Celtic Tiger Ireland, where, as Honor Fagan has noted, “[t]he cultural element is clearly part and parcel of the Celtic Tiger, and the economic element certainly has a strong cultural component” (137) Rather, economics and culture within Celtic Tiger Ireland must be acknowledged as intimately linked through the processes of production and consumption to the extent that it is Irish “culture” or a particular idea of Irishness that has proven to be Ireland’s most lucrative asset and economic export. If it is not surprising that unprecedented economic success begets further industrial development, an increase in public spending at the same time also inspires a self-assurance and consumer mentality amongst those who benefit from it. In the Irish case, this was also accompanied by a keen interest in cannibalizing any saleable elements of “traditional Irish” culture. It is this cultural component that is discernible in films such as *About Adam* (2001), where, as many critics have noted, there is an uncredited character that, as much as the male protagonist Adam (Stuart Townsend), plays a leading role: the city of Dublin itself. Here, the lothario Adam’s readiness to seduce five members of the one family is staged against as a backdrop of Ireland’s capital as a “seductive site of global conspicuous consumption” (Brereton, “Branding Irish Cinema” 33) complete with rolling hills, romantic castles and pub culture as well as stylish boutiques, art galleries and luxury cars. Indeed, it is their capacity to embody an Irishness that is at once traditional and cosmopolitan that makes Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy of such ideological significance, particularly working within the context of an industry such as Hollywood long noted for its love of, what Pat Brereton describes as, “outmoded Arcadian imagery of Ireland” (“Branding Irish Cinema” 28). As Irish actors in Hollywood, they traverse the intersection between a prosperous Irish nation at the acme of its global reach on the one hand, and a United States with much cultural capital invested in keeping alive a version of Ireland untouched by modernization on the other, while it was

Townsend's inability to portray both facets that arguably accounts for his failed career.

Richard Dyer states that, what makes stars interesting

is the way in which they articulate the business of being an individual, something that is, paradoxically, typical, common, since we all in Western society have to cope with that particular idea of what we are. Stars are also embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives, and indeed through which we make our lives—categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on (*Heavenly Bodies* 16).

As I will argue, the particular way that Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been represented in Hollywood, and the discourses surrounding their star persona, speaks to a need to reconcile these polarized versions of Irishness within the American cultural sphere.

Taking a thematic approach, each chapter of this thesis addresses a stereotype that has traditionally been associated with Irishness, and Irish masculinity, in Hollywood cinema. In the case of Irishness, the perpetuation of stereotypes through popular media like film, and television, has resulted in certain characteristics becoming globally embedded in social consciousness. In this respect, readers will observe that, while there is a continuous dialogue uniting the four chapters, the first two, and final two chapters, differ in terms of their theoretical focus. Chapters One and Two concentrate on the colonial stereotypes of Irish whiteness and violence, while Chapter Three considers a trope frequently employed in representations of the Irish family. Chapter Four then, discusses the emergence of an anti-stereotype that discloses a deliberate effort within Celtic Tiger Irish culture to shift attention away from the traditional representations of the Irish landscape as explicitly rural. Rather than a biographical study this thesis considers the star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, and the roles that they have played throughout the period in question, through the lens of each stereotype, and the particular way it has been reiterated, or challenged, by the rubric of Celtic Tiger Irishness within the context of their masculinity.

Dataset

So far as dataset is concerned, Richard Dyer has foreground the extent to which “films have a distinct and privileged place in a star’s image.” (*Stars* 61). With this in mind, significant consideration is given below to films in which Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have starred during the Celtic Tiger period. This is not to suggest, however, that audiences confuse stars with the characters they play. But the existence of a coherence between character and star person does offer insight into how actors are marketed, or market themselves, in individual ways. Thus, similar emphasis is also placed upon the reviews of these films, interviews with the actors themselves, and perhaps most significantly, on the commentaries on their individual performances as well as the directors they worked under, where, as Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus make evident, “DVD-extra text is very fertile terrain” (39) for scholars of film. Finally, the remarks of reviewers in newspapers, magazines and entertainment websites are also afforded attention in the chapters to follow. Diane Negra’s argument in *Off-White Hollywood* for example, is based on “evidence culled from fan magazines, popular magazines and newspaper articles, publicity materials, and other such sources” which she finds to be “both complex and richly illuminating” (11) and given that, as Hsiang Iris Chyi and Dominic Lasorsa observe, “the rapid growth of the internet has changed the media landscape” (“Access, Use and Preferences” 2), my own effort has endeavoured to source evidence from a cross-section of this landscape by focusing on the film reviews and articles written about Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy from popular websites such as rottentomatoes.com, and databases such as IMDB, and LexisNexis that scholarly precedent has also consulted. Thus, just as Negra’s approach illustrates the importance of, not only newspapers, but also film and fan magazines, and similar publications of “low-cultural status” (*Off-White* 11) in the dissemination of a particular star’s public image, so this thesis has turned to their contemporary and digital equivalent.

In keeping with the theoretical shift described above, my method of film selection differs slightly between Chapters One and Two on the one hand, and Chapters Three and Four on the other. The films discussed in Chapters One and Two are based on three specific criteria, the first being thematic relevance. As stereotypes, the themes of these chapters—Whiteness and Violence respectively—speak to the position of Irishness in Hollywood within the context of the Celtic Tiger period, and reveal the extent to which it has preserved or challenged traditional stereotypes of Irishness, on screen and off screen, whether through film text or star text. Secondly, I have opted for films in which Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been afforded a significant level of screen time on the basis that major parts or leading roles, by their nature, are generally more informative when subjected to analysis. Finally, I have chosen films that hold specific relevance to the careers of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy in Hollywood, and, in this respect, certain film choices will be justified where necessary on an individual basis throughout the relevant chapters. The films analysed here possess an ideological significance in the sense that they contribute to the meanings that Meyers, Farrell, and Murphy connote as Irish actors in Hollywood, and by implication, offer an indication as to the kind of values they communicate to the audiences that watch them.

The films selected for discussion in Chapters Three and Four then, are determined by the objective of the particular chapter. Chapter Three for instance, considers the representational weight of oedipal conflict or the paternal bond with regard to contemporary representations of Irishness. These films are then divided into three sub-categories: films that juxtapose two generations of Irish actors; films where Farrell, Meyers and Murphy play sons; and films in which they take on a specifically paternal role. Chapter Four varies somewhat insofar as it looks to the origins of Farrell's, Meyers', and Murphy's acting careers in an effort to trace any possible continuities that exist between the kind of characters/roles these actors have been chosen to play across their careers within the time frame concerned, and the

extent to which they reflect an urban or rural consciousness. In the case of all four chapters, each film has been selected with due regard to the overall objective of the thesis, namely, to assess the way that Irish actors of a particular generation have been represented within the context of Hollywood.

To this extent, Hollywood is the primary domain under investigation. Hollywood cinema possesses a global reach unrivalled by any other film industry, and it is on account of their circulation and promotion within Hollywood—as a world-wide industry and publicity machine—that Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy can be considered as “stars” beyond an indigenous Irish or UK context. In this vein, as Ben Goldsmith et al, have pointed out “Hollywood in the contemporary era is only properly intelligible as a global phenomenon with particular local instantiations or iterations” (1). These writers make an argument for the concept of a “Global Hollywood” that takes account of “the fact that Hollywood is a space of relations and flows, as much as it is a physical place” that encompasses not only the “production, distribution, and consumption of Hollywood films around the world” but also “the money, people, companies and places from all over the world which are now involved in film production with Hollywood partners” (1). Their point is to illustrate the reciprocal (though very unequal) nature of contemporary film-making, whereby Hollywood and national film industries across the world rely on each other, predominantly out of financial need. This thesis similarly places importance on the global reach of Hollywood as “a space of relations and flows” but one that not only informs but is also informed by cinemas of other nations. In this regard, certain films are included for analysis that are part of the national cinemas of Ireland or Britain, if they secured enough exhibition within the American film industry to accrue media attention and/or contributed to the way that the star personae of Farrell, Meyers, or Murphy were read within U.S. popular culture. The arguments put forward throughout this thesis hinge on the fact that stars are, and must be thought of as,

cumulative cultural products. In this respect, James Naremore's answer to the question "who is John Wayne?" is equally applicable to stars in general:

In a very real sense he is as much a character as anyone else in the story, the product of publicity and various film roles, represented by a fellow whose original name was Marion Morrison. I think of him as real (Marion Morrison may have thought so, too), but he is just a construction, an image that has ideological or totem function. (157)

Naremore's observation about Wayne alerts us to the fact that the body of any star must effectively be thought of as an amalgam of signs, accumulated across a career and composed of the various roles a star has played, both on screen and off. As we shall see, this is of particular relevance with respect to the dialogue that exists between star persona, and the performance of a character. But it is also relevant in terms of the present point under discussion, namely, that fans come to know actors through their films which, where ethnic actors are concerned, usually begin in productions closer to home than in the host country where they eventually make their careers. Gurinder Chadha's BrAsian (British and Asian) film *Bend It Like Beckham* is one such case in point. *Bend It Like Beckham* cannot, even in a very loose definition of the term, be considered a "Hollywood film." But the romantic comedy is afforded due consideration in the Chapters to follow, not only for its thematic relevance, but also more importantly, as there is ample reason to suggest that the movie was one that brought Meyers to the attention of Hollywood, and introduced the actor to American audiences. Consider for instance the following three reviews of Woody Allen's *Match Point* in *CNN* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* respectively:

Manhattan's most ardent ambassador has left the building.

Woody Allen, known for creating visual love letters to New York in all his movies, has crossed the pond and set his latest, "Match Point," in London. The location move was based on financial reasons, but it has seemed to give him a new lease on life. "Match Point" is his best film in years.

Jonathan Rhys Meyers ("Bend It Like Beckham") plays tennis pro-turned-instructor Chris Wilton. He's a highly ambitious young man who firmly believes that chance and luck -- not to mention being in the right place at the right time -- determine your destiny. (Clinton)

It's been more than a decade since Woody Allen has made a movie that has gotten anyone excited, but "Match Point" -- his 40th film as a director since 1965 -- is doing just that. It stands as a testament both to the power of persistence and the fact that it's not impossible for a filmmaker to have a renaissance at age 70....

It's the biggest star vehicle to date for the fast-rising Rhys Meyers ("Velvet Goldmine," "Bend It Like Beckham") and he makes the most of it. (Arnold)

Each of the above are reviews of *Match Point* that aim to inform readers about what to expect from Allen's latest film. In order to achieve this, the reviewers anchor Meyers' career as an actor through Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*. The film is used here at a relatively early time in Meyers' international career to remind American audiences that they know the star of *Match Point* from an earlier role, the implication being that, if readers had not seen or heard anything about Meyers' upcoming performance in *Match Point*, they *would* remember him from *Bend it Like Beckham*. Further support for this argument can be taken from a review published by the *Toronto Star*, which, at the time of the film's release, marvelled at the success of *Bend It Like Beckham* in North America:

It is rare for Indian-themed movies to make the Top 10 in North America. *Bend It like* [David Beckham] is well ahead of the pace of last year's *Monsoon Wedding*, which grossed \$6.2 million after its eighth week on its way to a \$14 (U.S.) million total ("Beckham Bending into a Sleeper Hit").

Thus, while *Bend It Like Beckham* is not a "Hollywood film," these references point to the movie's relevance within the context of Meyers' Hollywood career as well as its familiarity for American film fans. For similar reasons, the thesis also takes into account successful television series or mini-series, most notably—in the case of Meyers—Michael Hirst's *The*

Tudors (2007-2010), which soared in popularity in the U.S., and made Meyers a house-hold name in America.

But, as the research of Brookey and Westerfelhaus has shown, DVD extras and bonus features can also “function rhetorically in attempting to shape viewer interpretation” (22). Much like the present thesis, these authors speak in terms of a heightened period of advancement where digital technology is concerned, in which DVD replaced the VCR as the most sophisticated, and popular, platform through which to view film within the domestic sphere in the United States. First made available for retail in April 1997 (Inceoglu and Park 4805), after a relatively tentative start, demand for DVDs exceeded expectations so that, in 2003, the number of manufacturers had risen from 16 to 51 (4806), and DVD players outsold VCRs by 40 to 1 by 2008 (4805). These figures reveal just over a decade of time in which film studios made more money releasing films on DVD than at the box office, while Pat Brereton’s assertion that ancillary DVD material encourages audiences, (and, for Brereton, film students), to engage further with their favourite films (*Smart Cinema 4*), suggests the existence of a “digitally literate” American film viewing public who took time to engage with and learn about their favourite movies and the stars within them.

A further aspect in need of clarification then, is the issue of framing with regard to the Celtic Tiger. As we shall see, the origins of what became referred to as Celtic Tiger Ireland can be traced back to the initiatives of Sean Lemass in the 1960s. However, with successive periods of prosperity and recession, it was 1994 before the term “The Celtic Tiger” was coined by Kevin Gardiner, in a Morgan Stanley report, in response to the way that growth of the Irish economy replicated the so-called “Tiger” economies of Asia. As a result, it was not until this time, the mid-1990s, that the concept of a Celtic Tiger came into circulation, and it is from here that the present study begins its analysis. Similarly, there is some ambiguity in ascertaining among academics what specific year the Celtic Tiger economy was recognised to

have collapsed. In this thesis, it is the point in which the acting Irish government officially acknowledged the critical state of public finances toward the end of 2008 that is taken to mark the end of Ireland's Celtic Tiger period, although it is acknowledged that the foundations for the recession that followed were the result of several years of imprudent budgeting on the part of this Coalition Government, as well as the reckless lending practices of Irish banks for the best part of the previous decade.

Through the method just described, this thesis will consider the representation of Irish masculinity in Hollywood at an unprecedented point in Irish history—one that challenged previously held tenets regarding Ireland and Irishness both domestically and globally—by tracing the film careers of three Irish actors, Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers and the publicity discourses that surrounded them during this time. It necessitates an appreciation of these actors not only as Hollywood stars but also as Irish stars working in Hollywood, who as such, can function as touchstones for cultural myths pertaining to gender, sexuality and national identity. To this end, the thesis engages with existing research in related subject areas such as star studies, masculinity studies, diasporic studies, and Irish studies, as well as ethnicity within Irish and Hollywood cinema. Ruth Barton's book, *Acting Irish in Hollywood: From Fitzgerald to Farrell* (2006) for instance similarly concentrates on Irish actors in Hollywood where she contemplates acting, particularly the acting of ethnic actors, as an analogy of emigration. Barton's objective is to consider how star biographies were often made to conform to a social mobility fantasy of "the immigrant who, through hard work and good fortune, makes good" (6). She positions the ten Irish actors of her study individually against this narrative of immigrant success, and shows, through a detailed discussion of their careers, how each one defied "expectations of the Irish actor in Hollywood" (18).

Barton privileges the role of accent as a sign that points to the slippage between the original and its copy” (6) and through which “we detect ethnicity” (7). But unlike this thesis her argument considers accent solely in terms of a vocal performance, and, as Hamid Naficy reminds us in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), “[i]n the classical Hollywood cinema, the characters’ accents were not a reliable indicator of the actors’ ethnicity” (24). As such, Barton’s use of accent is not sufficiently comprehensive when it comes to an analysis of contemporary actors working in Hollywood, such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, whose careers, and recognition as Irish, have been fashioned predominantly through roles playing non-Irish characters.

In this respect, Naficy’s argument presents an alternative way of thinking about accent with potential relevance for the Irish stars in question here. Naficy is referring to postcolonial Third World filmmakers working “across national boundaries” (3) since the 1960s. But for him, “accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes” (4). Thus, much like the watermark described above, Naficy’s perspective on accent is not confined to what he calls “spoken presentations” (22) but instead refers to a “submerged ethnicity” (8), and is particularly useful to keep in mind when considering the careers of ethnic actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy within the context of Hollywood.

It should, however, be acknowledged, that Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy cannot be thought of as displaced in the sense that Naficy refers to. They are not filmmakers but more importantly they are not in exile: they are film stars, and as such, must be recognized as autonomous agents selling their labour within the context of Hollywood as a film industry, and also as products for consumption. Thus, stars can in many ways be thought of as existing in a complex relationship with Hollywood where they are to a certain extent both powerful

and yet subject to manipulation by the industrial conditions through which celebrity is produced, as Turner's *Understanding Celebrity* would imply.

Invariably, either position, or a combination of both—as I argue above—must take account of the way stars exist as signs within popular culture, and it is in this light that Dyer's *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) (mentioned above), hold such relevance for contemporary discussions of cinema and film celebrity. Dyer revolutionized star studies by being one of the first to theorise stardom in terms of “the nature of its ‘ideological effect’” (*Stars* 20). As he writes in *Stars*, “one needs to think in terms of the relationships ... between stars and specific instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions in the culture (which are reproduced in the actual practice of making films and film stars)” (31). Stars collapse the distinction between the real person and the character, but not to the extent that fiction is confused with reality (as mentioned above, audiences do not actually believe that actors are the characters they take on to be on screen). Rather, there exists the perception that actors, as real people, invest the film and television characters they play with genuine emotions: their performances articulate ways of being human in a particular context (Dyer, *Stars* 21).

By considering stardom in terms of its ideological effects, it is possible to understand the relationship between stars and their fans as one dependent on, or affected by, the socio-political contexts in which particular actors become popular at particular times, by embodying qualities that either settle or expose tensions brought about by social instability (*Stars* 31). What shall emerge from the forthcoming analysis then, is, that at a time when definitions of contemporary Irishness were in flux in both Ireland and America, the particular way that these three actors performed their Irish masculinity negotiated the anxieties aroused by these instabilities.

While *Stars* considers its subject in terms of its sociological and semiotic significance, and questions why and what film stars signify, or to put it another way, why stars matter, what they represent within dominant Western popular culture, and how they achieve this, *Heavenly Bodies*, looks at stars in terms of their “constitutive elements” by paying heed to “the notions of personhood and social reality that they relate to” (2). Of particular relevance here is Dyer’s discussion of star persona as an amalgamation of an actor’s public and private self. He draws attention to the fact that, insofar as all the information publicly disseminated about a star also includes the articles, photographs, and gossip columns devoted to the star’s off-screen existence, this persona is as much a construct as the character that the star plays within the fictional world of a particular film. As Dyer puts it in *Heavenly Bodies*, “[a] film star’s image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as the interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life” (2).

Dyer’s research has been formative where star studies is concerned, but that is not to say the discipline remained static in his wake. The anthology *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (1991) edited by Christine Gledhill is one such example. Published in 1991, it purports to recast pre-existing work on stardom in light of more current debates affecting star studies, and contains essays by influential writers within film and star studies such as Miriam Hansen, Janet Staiger, Barry King, and Gledhill herself. That being said, with the exception of Diane Negra’s *Off-White Hollywood* and Barton’s *Acting Irish in Hollywood*, few writers on stardom have concentrated solely on ethnic actors, and this thesis, by focusing on actors notable for a particular type of Celtic Tiger Irishness, aims at meeting this deficit. An awareness of ethnicity is crucial to the following argument. This thesis begins by acknowledging how the relationship between Irishness, and whiteness, is a complex one that has, if anything, become indelibly more so with the passing of time. With a colonial past and

a history of emigration that has lingered in popular imagination on the one hand, and a contemporary context that has been hostile towards immigrants into Ireland on the other, the Irish have been both victims of ethnic/racial abuse, and victimizers of others. As this thesis argues, Irish actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been implicated in this fraught history by being recognized as both ethnic and white to the extent that they have traversed, what has been described as, “a complex oscillation between otherness and whiteness” (qtd. in Negra, *The Irish in Us* 2).

Here again then Dyer’s research must be acknowledged for its import within the scholarship on whiteness to the extent that *White*, published in 1997, is one of the most comprehensive monographs on the subject. *White* is a study of the representation of white people by white people, and the implications of being seen, or not seen, as white within Western society. Several points that Dyer raises are of significance for this thesis. The first issue relates to the way that whiteness works as an organizer of human identity that determines access to social power (1). Dyer draws attention to the fact that being identified as white is to be considered race-less, to the extent that whiteness is upheld as the human standard against which “others are raced” (2). Furthermore, as an artificial category, whiteness is a matter of perception and is inherently unstable, with the result that there are gradations of whiteness, and who has counted as white has fluctuated across time and place.

According to Dyer:

A shifting border and internal hierarchies of whiteness suggest that the category of whiteness is unclear and unstable, yet this has proved its strength. Because whiteness carries such rewards and privileges, the sense of a border that might be crossed and a hierarchy that might be climbed has produced a dynamic that has enthralled people who have had any chance of participating in it. (19-20)

It is this point in particular—the existence of internal hierarchies within whiteness—which shapes the discussion of whiteness in Chapter One of this thesis. Moreover, with this

assertion, Dyer's *White* can be positioned alongside several other key books within ethnic studies that set out to empty whiteness of its social power by making it subject to interrogation, such as David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991), Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995), and Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998).

All three texts set out to deconstruct an essentialist notion of whiteness by paying close attention to the social factors affecting the inclusion or exclusion of ethnic minorities as white within the context of early nineteenth and twentieth century American race relations. Indeed, Negra's *Off-White Hollywood*—referred to several times above—takes a similar line of inquiry but bridges the gap between this period and the present by focusing on white ethnic film stars from the 1920s-1990s. According to Negra, “as female embodiments of national fantasies, ethnic female film stars have symbolized the promise of American pluralism and proved the desirability and reliability of the American Dream (sometimes in triumphant success narratives, sometimes in negative object lessons).”(3) Thus, unlike Dyer, Roediger, Ignatiev or Jacobson, Negra's *Off-White Hollywood* (2001) is explicitly feminist in its objective to the extent that it works to illustrate how, throughout its history, Hollywood has used ethnic femininity to assuage certain anxieties about Americanness and assimilation. As we shall see, her edited collection *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* (2006) is also of relevance where the present thesis is concerned insofar as much of Negra's research since the publication of *Off-White Hollywood* in 2001 has approached whiteness and feminist concerns through a consideration of white American masculinity, particularly within the context of September 11. In this respect, this thesis, along with the writings of Negra and several other scholars discussed below, reflect a broader concern since

the nineteen-nineties within the humanities, social sciences, and popular culture which began to question previously held tenets that theorized masculinity as monolithic.

Seminal among the research that emerged during this period were two independent studies; *Masculinities* (1995), by Raewyn Connell; and *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996), by U.S. Michael Kimmel, both sociologists. To the extent that film studies focused on gender before this time, it was dominated by Laura Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis in her discussion of the male gaze within Hollywood cinema. Beginning from the premise of a patriarchal ordering of the world, Mulvey stated that "film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (6). Mulvey saw cinema as "an advanced representation system" (7) that fulfils a primordial, scopophilic desire on the part of the spectator where "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and female/passive" (11). For her, understanding this system of representation in which the male protagonist is always the bearer of the look, while woman is always its subject, is crucial in the attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal order, and scopophilic pleasure, that mainstream cinema perpetuates through a combination of narrative and spectacle.

Steve Neale's 1983 article, "Masculinity as Spectacle" then, sought to interrogate this fundamental premise, namely, that masculinity, as much as femininity, could be positioned as spectacle within cinema, even if, as a patriarchal counter measure, that look must be constantly mediated, fractured, or disavowed. Neale did not wish to challenge Mulvey's argument so much as open up a space within it to consider the position of masculinity in greater detail. He concurred that "the spectatorial look in mainstream cinema is implicitly male" (15). But ultimately, Neale argued that men, like women, could also connote "to-be-looked-at-ness."

Several edited collections were also published in the area of film and media studies, which brought together scholars who considered a diverse array of characters, films, and national cinemas. These include two volume of essays edited by P. Kirkham and J. Thumin, *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (1993), which contained essays from fourteen leading male academics, and *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women* (1995), which contained writing from seventeen female scholars, while a later publication issued in response to the Kirkham and Thumin anthologies, *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* (2004), edited by Phil Powrie et al., was intended to consider European representations of masculinities.

But although *The Trouble with Men* responded to the need for writing on screen masculinities that was not just confined to an analysis of Hollywood films, the essays on European cinema did not include a consideration of Irish masculinity. In this respect, a publication that focused specifically on Irish masculinity in cinema, for example, something similar to that of Andrew Spicer's *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (2001), was severely lacking. A book to address this absence, *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema*, was not published until 2012, although it should be noted that essays by its author, Debbie Ging, were published throughout the 1990s and 2000s in several journals and anthologies on related areas. In *Men and Masculinities* Ging argues that "films have much to say about how a particular society 'does gender'" (4) (and indeed race, as shall become clear in the chapters to follow). With this in mind, Ging considers the implications of the lack of heroic archetypes of Irish men in Irish cinema (1), and the way that Irish films have tended to problematize masculinity (11).

While the first decade of the millennium produced significant research in Irish film specifically that include works such as *Irish Film: The Emergence of Contemporary Cinema* (2000), by Martin McLoone; *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (2000),

by Lance Pettitt; *Irish Film Censorship: A Cultural Journey from Irish Film Censorship to Internet Pornography* (2004), by Kevin and Emer Rockett; *Irish National Cinema* (2004), by Ruth Barton; *Early Irish Cinema, 1895-1921* (2008), by Denis Condon; as well as anthologies such as *Contemporary Irish Cinema: From The Quiet Man to Dancing at Lughnasa* (1999), edited by James MacKillop; and *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland* (2005), *Men and Masculinities* encouraged further scholarship specifically on Irish masculinity, and was followed shortly afterwards by an anthology based on a conference held in NUI Galway in 2011. The collection was edited by Conn Holohan and Tony Tracy, and entitled *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture: Tiger's Tales* (2014). Chapters discussed subjects such as sport, popular music, politics, religion, gender, and immigration in terms of Irish masculinity in Celtic and post-Celtic Tiger popular culture and, like Ging, writers were concerned with drawing attention to “the relationship between socio-political currents and the construction of contemporary gender within contemporary popular art forms” (4).

While there are ways in which the conclusions in *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture* both inform and support the arguments made regarding Irish actors Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Cillian Murphy, their star personae and the characters that they have played, there also are important distinctions in need of acknowledgement. The chapters within *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture* draw attention to “the uncertain state of Irish manhood” in Celtic Tiger Ireland (1), but, as an anthology that addresses masculinity from a variety of perspectives and agendas within Irish popular culture, the intersections between this thesis and the edited collection are limited. To this extent, certain chapters, such as Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone’s detailed consideration of musical masculinities, are of greater relevance than others. Their chapter provides a useful insight into, what both men describe as, “the crass commercial imperatives” of Celtic Tiger Ireland, and is particularly informative when taking into account Colin Farrell’s very brief sojourn into the Irish popular

music industry of the 1990s. Ultimately, however, with its focus on Hollywood rather than Irish cinema, this thesis takes a different perspective to the authors of *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture* by positioning itself on the opposite side of the cultural dialogic exchange between both countries.

If a similar argument can also be made with respect to Debbie Ging's monograph, it should be stressed that the distinctions between this thesis and *Men and Masculinities* exceed contextual particularities. These differences shall be attended to in greater detail in the following chapters where this thesis proposes an alternative perspective to Ging's particular focus on New Laddism. This being said, Ging's analysis in *Men and Masculinities* rightly points to the fact that, as much as Irish cinema can be said to have produced "some of the most astutely observed and gender progressive accounts of Irish men and masculinity outside academic research" (11), it has also been notable for "images of men who are violent, tyrannical, emotionally damaged, depressed, suicidal, alcoholic, socially marginalised or otherwise excluded from the dividends of male cinematic heroism" (1).

In this respect, this thesis focuses on how Irish actors of the period have served to make palatable certain aspects of Celtic Tiger Irishness, which also preserve traditional stereotypes of Irishness. As we shall see, these stereotypes are formative to the way that Americans and Irish Americans understand and perform their Irishness. What becomes clear from the way that Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy are referred to in commentaries, reviews, and articles is that they are rarely just actors, but Irish actors. This matters not only in terms of how a star conducts his or her public image, although this, too, is significant. But it also matters because it suggests that ethnicity, in this case Irishness, can affect how a character is interpreted. It may not influence the plot, but it does suggest that how a character is made real for the audience is related to the ethnic background of the actor playing the part.

For this reason, it is necessary to consider the history of Irish actors working in Hollywood, as well as to pay heed to the obsession with all things Irish in the U.S. that has developed in a particularly blatant way since the nineteen-nineties. It is with this in mind that Negra's edited collection *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* is of particular interest insofar as the anthology, along with *Screening Irish-America* (2009), edited by Ruth Barton, crystalizes the major arguments affecting the representation, and circulation, of Irishness in the U.S., and the extent to which it has become invested with immense social capital. Negra's hypothesis that "whatever else it may be, Irishness is reliably, invariably, a form of whiteness" (1) is central to the volume, and highly informative when it comes to thinking about Irish actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy whose whiteness, we shall see, is also complicated by discourses of "black Irishness" within popular culture.

With a more specific medium in focus than *The Irish in Us*, the authors included within *Screening Irish-America*—the first of its kind on Irish American cinema (1)—confine their attention to cinema and television, but with respect to both early and contemporary examples. Like *The Irish in Us* "[q]uestions of race and ethnicity" recur throughout the volume, which considers issues affecting the representation of Irish and Irish American experience in the U.S. (Barton, *Screening Irish-America* 2). The chapters discuss subjects such as Catholicism, assimilation, social mobility, stereotypes, Irish American characters, actors, directors, the reception of Irish and Irish American sport, films, and personalities in Ireland and America. These essays are particularly informative for articulating an awareness that "representations of the Irish and Irish Americans on screen were formulated not as a consequence of who made the films or programmes but as part of an on-going negotiation between those texts and their audiences" (3), and speak to the way that star personae are not constructed in isolation, but develop and are shaped by the responses of the fans who scrutinize them.

Informed by the previous work referred to above, this thesis focuses on Irishness, masculinity, and Hollywood cinema and considers the careers of three male Irish actors who achieved celebrity status within the Hollywood film industry. In this regard, this thesis takes inspiration from the comments of the editors of *The Trouble with Men* with their assertion that, “[s]tars are indubitably central to the filmic representation of sex and gender, as the literally embodied site where masculinity and femininity take on their most idealised, powerful and immediate forms” (5). By paying close attention to the way that these stars embody the male (and in some cases female) characters that they play, and the particular way that the Irishness of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy is understood to inform their roles, or is read into their performances in the articles, reviews, commentaries, and interviews that followed, this thesis will consider the meanings attached to Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity within Hollywood cinema.

As indicated above, each of the four chapters of this thesis focuses on a particular stereotype of Irishness. Chapter One considers the relationship between Irishness and whiteness, and the way that Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity has accommodated both colonial and hegemonic elements of Irish racial history enabling it to figure as both exceptionally white and (politically) black. Chapter Two focuses on violence, and the extent to which it has become a recurrent stereotype which has lingered in the popular imagination to affect the way that both the Irish and non-Irish characters played by Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been received. Chapter Three, “Fathers, Sons, and Irish Masculinity,” considers how these three actors represent a new generation of Irish masculinity. This new generation, the thesis suggests, is not only implicated in the conventions of Hollywood, but also responds to the weight of the father figure in discourses affecting Irishness. Chapter Four then, discusses the role of the city within the context of Celtic Tiger Ireland. It argues that the masculinity and star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been affected by discourses in which the

city emerges as a hub of global influences and transactions that extend beyond the limit of commerce and industry to incorporate sexual and ethnic identity. These four chapters will then be followed by a conclusion. Taking inspiration and knowledge from the work of previous scholars, it is intended that this thesis, by considering the U.S. careers of three Irish actors in light of the socio-cultural and economic phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger, will stand as a valuable contribution to existing literature on Irishness, masculinity, and Hollywood.

“TIGER CELTS”: IRISHNESS, WHITENESS, AND MASCULINITY

This chapter will investigate how complex affinities between Irishness and whiteness, informed the careers of Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Cillian Murphy in Hollywood during the Celtic Tiger period. In this vein, it will look at the broad outlines of the history of Irish whiteness, in order to fully excavate the development of discourses that informed Irishness and race in Hollywood during this time. For centuries, the Irish have emigrated in vast numbers to the U.S. and with them a host of Irish characters to inhabit American literature, drama, and film. Whether as drunken Irish Paddies, tempestuous brawlers, virginal colleens, or reverent holy fathers, Irish figures have retained a popular currency in U.S. fiction that continues to withstand the passage of time. Succeeding generations of Irish Americans have celebrated their Irish roots by distinguishing their specific Irish brand of “Americanness.” In this way Irishness has served to valorize whiteness “as a category of racial fantasy” with particular currency from the turning of the twentieth century (Negra, “The Irish in Us” 1). The use of the word valorize here is important. Defined as “to raise or stabilize the value of (a commodity, etc.)” the term expresses the way that Irishness, as a source of symbolic currency, has been appropriated to fortify white identity and this will be considered further in the pages that follow.

Key to this analysis then, is establishing what Irish identity or “Irishness” actually implies, and acknowledging that an answer requires taking on board the often contradictory events that have shaped the micronarratives of Irish experience both past and present. For many, Irishness is linked to an agrarian economy and rural landscape, and it is this idea of Ireland as “a land of mystery, old ways and down-to-earth values consonant with Celtic mysticism” (Schaffenburg 161) which became a nostalgic reference point for generations of Irish Americans. Related to this is a tendency to define Irishness from an Anglocentric

perspective, or, to quote Declan Kiberd's expression, "Ireland as not-England" (*Inventing Ireland* 30). Here Irishness was constructed negatively, and in this sense there are two ways in which Ireland's colonial history has been recognised as having contributed to a form of Irish identity. On the one hand, the Irish have been accused of indulging in a "steady-state syndrome of Irish victimhood" (Foster, "Something to Hate" 5) by choosing to hold onto past grievances despite contemporary cessation of hostilities. On the other, improved industrialisation, and successive years of economic growth throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, led to a readiness to engage in a type of historical amnesia by electing to disown aspects of national trauma "as part of an older story that does not resonate with the 'southern new times' marked by economic boom, transnationalism, global tourism and a revisionist historiography" (Mac an Ghail, and Haywood 387). Finally, Irishness has become a "particular prism through which to view whiteness" (McVeigh 254). Robbie McVeigh has commented that it was only with emigration that the Irish truly began to understand their whiteness as a form of social and political capital, and, as a result, it has been via a complicated relationship to whiteness that Irishness has been thoroughly defined in recent decades (254).

However, as Karl C. Schaffenburg has observed, "competing definitions of Irishness color the study of Irish history and culture" (157). In this respect, the present argument corresponds with Liam Harte's approach to Irishness "as a continuum of multiple and partial identifications rather than a monolithic cultural category" (228). Much like a bricolage of the aforementioned aspects of Irish identity, this thesis contends that the "Celtic Tiger Irishness" which emerged over the last two decades exerted an enduring fascination in the United States as a flexible formation of white masculinity, by accommodating competing understandings of Irishness. Moreover, this particular brand of Irishness, which has propelled actors such as Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers to Hollywood stardom, differs, as

we shall see, from Irish American male stars of a similar age, such as Edward Norton, or Ben Affleck, due to the “occasional” nature of the latter’s Irish personae. Norton can assume his Irishness as the lovesick young priest in the romantic comedy, *Keeping the Faith* (2000), or the hardened criminal Monty Brogan in the *25th Hour* (2002), but he can cast off such associations in his role as (for example) the troubled “Narrator” of the male cult classic *Fight Club* (1999). For Diane Negra, this phenomenon relates to the recent commercialization of ethnicity, which she describes as maintaining an “a-la-carte” status in contemporary U.S. popular culture (“The Irish in Us” 2). Negra’s work on the coalescing of Irishness and whiteness informs many of the contentions which shall be dealt with in the following chapters. However, it should be stated that it is the very way that the present thesis deviates from Negra’s that makes her work of such relevance to this study.

While Negra’s arguments are rooted firmly in Irish American discourses, and the specific way in which Irishness has functioned to address certain crises to do with popular representations of masculinity and the depreciation of whiteness in the U.S. following September 11, the present thesis argues that there is a clear distinction between the ways in which discourses of Irish Americanness and indigenous Irishness operate in popular Hollywood cinema. This issues from the contention that star persona and ethnicity materialize as a type of “watermark” in film characters, to the extent that, “actor’s lives do, in various ways, spill over into screen performances and into the narratives they animate” (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 17) and this will be explained in greater detail in the sections that follow.

To quote Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII in the highly successful HBO period drama *The Tudors* (2007-2010), “you think you know a story, but you only know how it ends. To get to the heart of the story, you have to go back to the beginning.” Taking a lead from this, however, entails not only addressing the history of Irish experience in America, but

also acknowledging the circumstances that made emigration necessary for successive generations of native Irish in the first place. The first section of this chapter then, will put forward a brief discussion of the racialization of the Irish by Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth century, and will be followed by a more thorough consideration of race and Irishness within the concurrent American context. The section will interrogate the use of race as a tool of British imperialism in one environment, and the political currency of whiteness for Irish immigrants in an American context. It involves approaching race as an “ideology” (M’Charek 420), to recognize it as “a relational object” (421), and a difference that “is of the body, not in the body” (437), where, as noted by A. M’Charek, “race is made relevant and materializes in a variety of ways, from medical sensibilities to legal arrangements and tactics in criminal investigation to national identity and historic tie making” (424). The next section will briefly elaborate further on a concept outlined in the Introduction of the thesis: that ethnicity can feature as a type of “watermark” when bolstered by the promotional discourses of stardom and film culture. This will be followed by a discussion of Celtic Tiger Irishness and the manipulation of history that enables Irishness to figure as exceptionally white, and also as “black” in the sense of political disenfranchisement, through the colloquialism “the black Irish.” The chapter will then move to illustrate these arguments with reference to five films from the Celtic Tiger period, starring the three actors dealt with in this study.

Irishness and Discourses of Racial Difference

The nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century prevail as a cogent period during which political hostility, born from colonial tension between Britain and Ireland, was incited by theories of racial difference. Unlike other populations colonized by Britain, there was a need to distinguish the Irish as inferior on grounds other than colour, to demonstrate that they were barbaric, uncivilized and incapable of self-governance. Caricatures in English journals such as *Punch*, and *Harper’s Weekly* drew comparisons between the “Irish Iberian”

and “the Negro,” and the Irish were represented with simian features as the “missing link” in the evolutionary chain (Dyer, *White* 52-4). The Irish were, to quote Elizabeth Butler-Cullingford, “‘proximate’ rather than ‘absolute’ Others, a disturbing mixture of sameness and difference, geographical closeness and cultural distance” (14) and it is this idea that continued to dominate the relationship between both countries across several centuries.

For the vast numbers of Irish who emigrated to U.S. shores during this time, discourses of race proved equally crucial where it became imperative to avail of every opportunity to distance themselves from black Americans. This was achieved by emphasizing race in general, and whiteness in particular, as a marker of difference. If the Irish were considered ethnically other, and subjugated in a British context, they were progressively assimilated into the United States at a level above non-whites, such as African Americans, though not without considerable struggle over stereotypes. Matthew Frye Jacobson’s detailed analysis of the nineteenth and twentieth century in America provides an insight into the way that the ties between whiteness, culture, and politics unevenly shaped the experiences of white immigrants and non-whites during this time. In terms of who could claim inclusion in the white race, and the particular way that citizenship was divided on racial grounds, Jacobson considers race as a category that resides “not in nature but in politics and culture” (9). His work includes discussions on immigrants from several European countries, including Ireland, and Jacobson’s conclusions are helpful in detailing the nuances of the racially charged political atmosphere that the Irish helped to shape, and entered into, across a century.

Reading race in terms of political currency, Jacobson cites examples from the earliest legal codes governing American citizenship, to illustrate the degree to which whiteness stood as a dominant criteria for inclusion in the body politic. According to the legislation quoted by Jacobson, citizenship was granted to any “free white persons” who, on entrance to the United States and having resided within the country for a year’s duration, could prove so before a

magistrate (22). In this way, Jacobson demonstrates how assumptions regarding whiteness were built into government policy, how whiteness was an integral aspect of republicanism, and how it was rendered invisible by assumption in the laws of the immediate decades:

So natural was the relationship of whiteness to citizenship that, in the debate which followed, the racial dimension of the act remained unquestioned ... In general, the nation's first legislators saw the law as too inclusive rather than too exclusive, and nowhere did they pause to question the limitation of naturalized citizenship to "white persons." (22)

Equally important to take account of here are the implications regarding the position of "non-whites" in American society. As Jacobson points out, a specific understanding of race was embedded in the founding ideology of the New World, that was established in relation to the economic importance of slavery, and against the threat posed by Native Americans, where the capacity to protect was fundamental to the survival of colonists (25-6). Citizenship entailed defence, and "[t]he very notion of 'providing for the common defense' was inherently racial in the context of slaveholding on the one hand and frontier settlement on the other" (25). In relation to this then, to be non-white was to be deemed "unfit for government" to the degree that the idea of extending citizenship to "free" blacks of the time was never entertained (28).

However, the years from 1840 onwards deeply affected assumptions pertaining to race and citizenship in the U.S. due to the persistent increase in white immigrants from Europe. According to the figures quoted by Jacobson, immigrants from Ireland and Germany dominated the numbers entering America at this time, most notably, in the former case, in response to the devastating impact of the Famine (43). By 1860, there were over 4 million migrants residing in America, with almost half of that total of Irish origin, so that "[b]y 1920 the 'white' foreign-born population was more than 13.5 million, most of whom would not have qualified for Benjamin Franklin's appellation 'Saxon' (nor, indeed, 'lovely white')"

(43). Such a massive influx of foreigners redrew the lines of how whiteness was understood in U.S. society, to the extent that it raised the question as to whether whiteness alone brought with it an automatic assumption of “fitness for government.” For Jacobson,

The political history of whiteness and its vicissitudes between the 1840s and the 1920s represents a shift from one brand of bedrock racism to another—from the unquestioned hegemony of a unified race of “white persons” to a contest over political “fitness” among a now fragmented, hierarchically arranged series of distinct “white races.” (41)

The significance of these consequences in the present thesis extends from the fact that they created a social awareness of whiteness that was not monolithic, but “variegated” (52). (That is not to suggest, of course, that white Europeans did not emigrate to the U.S. before the 1840s, merely that the comparative number of migrants that arrived before that decade did not disturb the position of whiteness as “a legislative and conceptual monolith that left the gates open to all European comers” (40).) The term “variegated” employed by Jacobson here effectively conveys the idea of race as a hierarchy, that was ranked, firstly, by skin colour, but also by ethnicity, within which the Irish were held in esteem above African or Native Americans, but decidedly below white Americans, or American Anglo-Saxons, and this is important to take note of. As we shall see, certain details of Irish ethnic exclusion have been absorbed into popular culture in the Celtic Tiger period, in an effort to distance Irishness from racism, and white supremacy, by linking Irish and African American experiences of marginalization. Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* is a useful point of reference here for the later decades of the nineteenth century, and his discussion focuses entirely on the stakes at large for the Irish in proving themselves worthy of social and political recognition, or what Jacobson repeatedly refers to as “fitness for government.”

Both Ignatiev and Jacobson approach the case of the Irish in America during this time by stressing, firstly, the importance of whiteness in terms of social and political capital, and

secondly, the way that, in competing with blacks for labour opportunities, the Irish as a subgroup became a forceful presence when affiliated with subsequent pro-slavery campaigns. Riots between the Irish and blacks were commonplace in nineteenth century America, and Ignatiev discredits the suggestion that the Irish and blacks worked harmoniously during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or were united through their mutual suffering. He emphasizes the need for the Irish to situate themselves on the white side of the colour line that divided America in a societal structure based on colour, where blackness was rendered synonymous with servitude, and whiteness with both social and moral superiority. To all intents, the Irish “sought refuge in whiteness” (Ignatiev 111). This is important to take account of, particularly due to the fact that, as we shall see, from the Celtic Tiger period Irishness has become a means to valorize a jaded white masculinity, through claims linking the historical treatment of Irishness with black marginalization. However, Ignatiev takes a slightly different perspective to Jacobson, specifically with the contention that “in becoming white the Irish ceased to be Green” (3):

To the extent that color consciousness existed among newly arrived immigrants from Ireland, it was one of the several ways they had of identifying themselves. To become white they had to learn to subordinate country, religious, or national animosities, not to mention any natural sympathies they may have felt for their fellow creatures, to a solidarity based on color—a bond which, it must be remembered, was contradicted by their experience in Ireland. (111)

By contrast, Jacobson suggests that the Irish were very keen to retain their ethnic identity, albeit in such a way that did not compromise their assimilation. He discusses how rituals of nationalism in terms of “myth” and “sensibility” were deeply inscribed in the discourses of Irishness practiced by Irish immigrants (50). As Jacobson frames it, if the Irish were considered a separate racial caste the idea was partly reinforced by Irish immigrants, who racially distinguished themselves as “Celts,” an identity that, it must be remembered,

was itself formed in opposition to Anglo-Saxonism (50). This argument more fully conveys the linking of culture and race in the sense that many of the actions taken by the Irish, as a subculture, were reported in a language that stressed the Irish as biologically distinct, and questioned the extent of their “whiteness.” Giving the example of draft riots of 1863, in which Irish immigrants specifically targeted blacks as competitors in an unstable labour market, Jacobson reasons that,

If the actions of the rioters seem to have embodied a working class entitlement based both on race (white entitlement) and on class (their privileged status as producers in a producer's republic), many non-Irish onlookers and commentators, in their turn, registered their own republican claims by questioning the rioters' full status as “white persons.” (54)

The social dilemma posed by the Irish as both immigrants and white, became more complicated due to the growing numbers of non-whites and other whites, for example, those of Asian origin who migrated to America in the early decades of the twentieth century, and subsequently led to a re-evaluation of U.S. immigration policy. Nativist and eugenic arguments had already been voiced in opposition to non-native whites such as the Irish, Italian, or Jewish communities. However, these attitudes were not so much changed as contextualized by the increasing arrival of non-whites, and non-European whites, seeking citizenship, where, according to Jacobson, “[t]he newly urgent question of European immigration prompted a redefinition of whiteness; and yet within a shifting context of slavery and Emancipation, continued continental (and later trans-Pacific) expansionism, and anti-Chinese agitation, that definition was fraught with contradictions” (72-3).

In the light of a rapidly expanding and variegated population, the previous naturalization laws passed in the 1790s that granted citizenship to all free whites who had resided in the U.S. for more than a year, was subsequently re-examined by legislators. Inspired by eugenics, and heightened by fears that miscegenation with certain races would

detrimentally impact the American demographic, policy changes initially extended to race quotas that limited to two per cent the number of each racial group seeking citizenship (82-3). According to Jacobson, this was later qualified further by the Johnson Act (1924), named after the proposals put forward by Congressman Albert Johnson of Washington, who advocated for quotas to be based on a census taken in 1890 as opposed to a more recent census from 1910. By this logic, migrants could be limited to those groups, predominantly of European origin as opposed to other white nationalities, for example, native Chinese, and Japanese immigrants, and also trans-Pacific non-whites, who were deemed of inferior “stock” and lesser intelligence by comparison (83). As noted by Jacobson:

The terms of the debate of the Johnson Act itself expressed a fear for the well being of the republic and asserted a philosophy of “fitness for self-government” that were deeply embedded in American political culture, and that extended all the way back to the Revolutionary generation and its own naturalization law of 1790. The exclusionary logic of the 1924 legislation represented not a new deployment of race in American political culture, but merely a new refinement of how the races were to be defined for the purposes of discussing good citizenship. (87)

As the passing of the Johnson Act would suggest, and according to Lawrence J. McCaffrey, the first two decades of the twentieth century were dramatic in terms of Irish assimilation (88). From this time forward, the Irish achieved greater social mobility, some of which can be attributed to the significant numbers of Irish who had entered local government, most notably the Democratic Party, which retained a strong presence in North Eastern cities. Numbers of Irish rose through active involvement in trade unions, and, as an immigrant group of substantial size, the Irish were an asset in terms of voting potential. According to David Carroll Cochran, part of the reason that American politics has maintained a history of social accord, despite having to accommodate a culturally diverse population, can be explained by the way that it has managed to incorporate ethnic minorities into systems of local government (599). He states that,

While Irish Americans were only a fraction of the entire U.S. population from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, they made up large minorities in many cities and clear majorities in many urban wards. As a group, they carried out their most significant political action on the city and ward levels, where they had enough leverage to pursue their needs and interests through group mobilization (599).

As Carroll Cochran frames it, politics served as a means for Irish and Irish Americans to transcend class boundaries, by enabling those working within the “urban machine” to distribute provisions amongst their own and other immigrant communities, ranging from material needs to economic and employment opportunities (596-7). Indeed, in such circumstances, it is easier to understand the reasoning behind Jacobson’s perspective on the Johnston Act, where the immigration policy specifically favoured Euro-American over non-white and non-European immigrants.

By the 1940s, the Irish were not only largely assimilated into U.S. society, but were also taken as representative of it (O’Brien 60). Many recruits of Irish extraction achieved prominence for War service, which, according to Matthew J. O’Brien, did much to elevate the social standing of the extended Irish American community as “[p]ostwar accounts of American immigration history also identified the Irish as quintessentially American” (60). Irish Americans were more widely dispersed among the middle-classes (Rogers 146). The apotheosis of Catholic Irish achievement came with the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961, which, in a country founded by Puritan and Protestant pilgrims fleeing religious persecution, would seem a reasonable confirmation of ethnic assimilation.

While academic perspective regarding the century following the mass emigration of the Irish in the 1890s has largely achieved a consensus based on the research of Jacobson, Ignatiev, and others, such as David R. Rodeiger, opinion on the period between Kennedy’s presidency and the close of the millennium has been subject to wider interpretation. For

example, Jacobson views assimilation, where the Irish are concerned, largely in terms of cultural homogenization. Considering the forty years following the passing of the Johnson Act, he points to the replacement of the label “whites” in favour of “Caucasian,” an umbrella term that served to deracialize whiteness. “Caucasian” embraces all previously variegated levels of whiteness in favour of a triumvirate of racial distinction, “Caucasian,” “Mongoloid,” and “Negroid” (qtd. in Jacobson) where, “racial differences within the white community lost their salience” by heightening the “premium on race as color” (Jacobson 95). However, it has also been argued that assimilation and ethnic distinction are not as mutually exclusive as Jacobson’s perspective would suggest. Carroll Cochran, for example, refers to the fact that cultural distinctions and traditions can be preserved within succeeding generations of immigrant groups even following several generations of integration (592-3). As Carroll Cochran observes:

... in spite of significant assimilatory tendencies, a group’s distinct cultural space in American society remains important. It certainly provides support for an ethnic group before and during the often long and uneven process of assimilation, but it also continues to hold those elements of group identity and culture that assimilation has difficulty eliminating. (592-3)

More recent research into Irish Americanness by Diane Negra and others lends greater weight to Carroll Cochran’s contentions that “[e]thnic identity itself can remain a more or less salient feature of group members’ self-definition for generations, even after they are largely integrated into the dominant society” (592). As mentioned in the Introduction, Negra’s work, in particular, is relevant to the present thesis specifically with regards to the position of Irishness in the U.S. at the turn of the millennium, and the uses it has been put to in American popular culture with regards to whiteness and masculinity. The collaborative book *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* is a reference point about the currency of Irishness in American culture at this time. In it, she has suggested that,

“[c]onferring ethnic legitimacy on white Americans newly beset in the 1990s multicultural, claims of Irishness catalyzed a heritage fantasy that has both domestic and touristic functionality” (“Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics” 354).

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century coincided with the emergence of a “crisis” of masculinity in Europe and America, one aspect of which derived from the fear that “whiteness” was losing its social value, due to an exaggerated emphasis on political correctness. The fact that the traditional male arenas of “bread-winning” such as industry, manufacture, farming, or physical labouring were no longer guarantors of economic success had a perceived impact on many white American men of the 1990s, as the controversy over, for example, Robert Bly’s *Iron John* demonstrated. As white collar positions and an industry that prioritized qualifications over manual labour became more rewarding in terms of financial security, the entry and promotion of women and “minority” ethnicities in U.S. occupations ensured that white men found it increasingly challenging to gain social recognition. According to the social historian Michael Kimmel:

Industrialization and deindustrialization made men’s hold on the successful demonstration of masculinity increasingly tenuous; there are fewer self-made successes and far more self-blaming failures. The segment of the economy that has been hardest hit—small shopkeepers, independent farmers, highly skilled manufacturing workers—is exactly the segment that clings most tenaciously to the ideology of self-made masculinity. At the same time, native born American white men faced increased competition for those scarce jobs from newly arrived immigrants, and women “invaded” even those last all-male bastions like sports, the military and military schools. (*Manhood in America* 216)

As Negra has demonstrated, Irishness had already been employed as an antidote for the alienating effect of capitalism, and technological advancement, and, in this respect, the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 proved a crucial event in the gradual erosion of white American morale (“Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics” 354). Not only were there substantial casualties from the New York Fire Department (FDNY,

known for its overwhelmingly white demographic), but also, the social trauma in the aftermath of the disaster left many U.S. survivors seeking desperately for a means to bolster their confidence as American citizens. With the catastrophic events of September 11, the retreat to anachronistic consolations of Irishness allowed fire-fighters such as Mike Moran to valorize their whiteness in the midst of national despair. Negra cites Moran's public, verbal affront on the figure presumed to be behind the attacks, Osama Bin Laden, in which the fire-fighter challenged Bin Laden to "kiss my royal Irish ass!" as an example of how it became possible for Moran and others to celebrate whiteness (through Irishness) without becoming tainted by the stigma of racism ("Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics" 362). For Negra, the incident "speaks forcefully to the emergence of the trope of Irishness as white ethnic legitimacy and empowerment in contemporary American culture. . . . Amidst the exigencies of politics and the marketplace, invocations of Irishness give shape and substance to nebulous, unstable, and/or discredited notions of national and ethnic identity ("Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics" 359-61).

Moran's declaration demonstrates how appeals to Irishness, particularly to Irish masculinity, were mobilized in post-9/11 America as a way of contesting the politics of Arab assault, without overt recourse to displays of racial bigotry. It operates by assuming the markers, meanings, and social understandings of an Irish identity, without sacrificing the privileges afforded by whiteness, and circulates within a cultural framework where ethnicity in general, and Irishness in particular, has been appropriated for popular consumption, becoming what Negra describes as an ideal "a-la-carte" ethnicity. Before proceeding further then, it is necessary to address the commodification of ethnicity, particularly as it concerns Irishness within Irish America. This is important, for it is the popularity of Irishness as an ideal ethnicity amongst Americans that serves as a market for representations of Irishness in Hollywood cinema and television. Discussing the ways that Americans have embraced a

selective formation of ethnicity through product consumption entails acknowledging the discretionary use of Irishness as an identity accessory by Irish Americans. It involves arguing that indigenous ethnicity manifests as a type of “watermark” in terms of cinema, and considering the idea that discourses of indigenous Irishness in cinema and television remain in situ irrespective of characterization.

“A-La-Carte” Ethnicity versus the “Watermark” of Irishness

Over the past several decades Americans have steadily taken greater interest in establishing, fostering, and exhibiting an ethnic heritage through product consumption. What began in the 1970s as a reactionary response to the relative gains made by black power movements progressed to a situation in which, “white descendants of immigrants who had arrived primarily from southern and eastern Europe during the sweeping second wave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and who had faced discrimination from the native population at the time, began to assert their brand of ethnic pride” (Halter 4). By the turn of the century, this national obsession had broadened to include black and white “ethnics” (4) the idea being that investment in one’s own heritage was an investment in simpler, more spiritually enriching values of the past, as opposed to the vacuousness of contemporary capitalism (12). Genealogy, holidays in ancestral homelands, ethnic dress, merchandize, and food have all served as avenues to experience, and affirm, an “authentic” ethnic identity (10). Ethnicity becomes consumable, despite the obvious irony in which mass produced products designed for an ethnic niche market are purchased with the explicit intention of establishing an ethnically enriched lifestyle alternative to materialistic twenty-first century living (13). As Marilyn Halter notes, “whether shopping for a brand-name trinket or a brand-new identity (or even literally branding oneself with that identity), the creative quest of ethnic particularity is a driving passion in today’s America that the nation’s market economy embraces with an equally supple ardor” (24).

In a context where the number of Americans claiming Irish ancestry is greatly exaggerated, Irishness is one of the most accessorized ethnicities within the United States (Negra, “The Irish in Us” 11). This is increasingly apparent within the twin domains of cinema and television. From shopping channels marketing Irish inspired home décor, to Irish American drama series like *Rescue Me* (2004-11), *The Black Donnelly’s* (2007), and *Blue Bloods* (2010-), Irishness exists as a lifestyle appendage to be consumed at will, and to varying degrees, where, according to Halter’s research, “[t]he requirement of optional or part time ethnicity is a prior sense of belonging enough to be able to freely distinguish oneself from mass society on the basis of cultural difference” (10). There are two crucial points in need of clarification here. Firstly, it should be stated that within this context, recourse to ethnicity, whether it be Irishness, or Mexicanness, or Frenchness, does not necessitate abdicating American affiliation. Conversely, reclaiming an ethnic heritage is widely accepted as the ideal means to illustrate Americanness in an individualized way. Related to this then, a second important point to emphasize is the “optional” aspect of this discourse, namely, that, as the ethnic identity on offer is expressed in objects and accoutrements, it is open to the same discretion that products can be consumed, discarded, or updated. As noted by Halter, “[t]his type of ethnicity is so flexible and sporadic that it is possible to switch from one cultural form to another and then back again with ease” (195).

However, it is the contention of this thesis that indigenous Irishness disperses differently within film culture, where the hype surrounding Irishness in supplementary discourses of stardom becomes embedded in star persona. In other words, what Colin Farrell brings to performance is as much affected by his Irishness, as it is by the style of acting he practices, or, in the case of Jonathan Rhys Meyers, for example, the particular androgyny that he brings to the characters he plays. That is not to say that Irishness in this respect is not commodified to the same extreme as discussed earlier in the case of Irish America. Rather,

while Irish American actors can temporarily trade on their ancestral claims to Irishness as a form of white identity capital, it is the consistency with which indigenous Irish actors like Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy infuse the movies in which they participate with the distinctive hue of their ethnic character that accounts for their continued popularity in twenty-first century Hollywood: they are inseparable from their Irishness.

It is in this respect that considering ethnicity as a type of “watermark” becomes a useful analogy to discuss how these actors’ Irishness resonates within a film text, regardless of the characterization in question, and the inclusion, or exclusion, of an Irish accent. Much like the way that Matthew Frye Jacobson describes race, ethnicity is also a matter of “perception” (9), insofar as “it frames our notions of kinship and descent and influences our movements in the social world; we see it plainly on one another’s faces” (1). Moreover, as Daniel Boorstin’s much cited dictum reminds us, a star is a person who is “well-known for their well-knownness” (qtd. in G. Turner 5). The career of a star is made on the basis that, when watching a film, fans remain aware of the presence of the actor alongside or within the performance of the character, or, as Paul McDonald has stated, “no matter how credibly a character is played, the actor always remains visible” (195).

The idea of a watermark then conveys the effect of this visibility, as McDonald refers to it, in relation to stardom, and the way that a star’s persona is as much based on his (or her) performances “off-screen” as it is from the films that serve as “privileged instances of the star’s image” (Dyer, *Stars* 88). Speaking of Irishness as a watermark emphasizes a fundamental premise of this thesis, namely, that just as a viewer recognizes Farrell, Meyers, or Murphy-the-actor when playing a particular character, the Irishness of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, and what it resonates in popular culture in the way of stereotypes, also lingers as a subtle, but traceable, presence beneath the surface of the film text. As shall become apparent, ethnicity, and its association with either an absence, or presence, of colour (usually

understood as “blackness”), is an important aspect of the stereotypes in question, where Irishness avails of the privileges of whiteness, while also claiming a commonality with the history of ethnic oppression. The next heading will consider the meaning and relevance of the term “black Irish” in terms of the Celtic Tiger period, and as it is understood within an American or Hollywood context. The paradoxical relationship between “black Irishness,” and Irish whiteness, will then be explained before the final section will use the concept of the watermark to consider the ways in which ethnicity is employed in films starring the Celtic Tiger actors of this study and the discourses that surround them.

“Black Irishness”

In discussing “black Irishness” it is necessary to begin with a matter of qualification, namely, that in the present context, the term refers to the contention that the Irish, having at one time suffered through both colonization and emigration, share a history of oppression comparable with African Americans. The origin of the term itself is shrouded in some ambiguity to the extent that several theories have been offered. Two of these date back to Ireland’s colonization by England. As discussed above, arguments of Irish marginalization are not completely ungrounded insofar as the Irish were historically racialized and deemed inferior. Thus on the one hand, it has been suggested that “black Irish” originated as a colonial slur that likened the Irish to African American slaves, first in Ireland and then also later for Irish immigrants in the U.S. where, as we have seen, they were to some extent bracketed with Blacks as lesser members of society. On the other hand, there also exists the contention that the label “black Irish” refers to descendants from the Spanish survivors of the wreck of the Armada in the sixteenth century who, after integrating with the native population, were characterized by physical features such as a sallow complexion, dark hair, and dark eyes (“Who Were the Black Irish and What is Their Story?”). However, the idea of

“black Irishness” as a contemporary political category has largely been applied to white Irish and propagated through popular culture and careful marketing practices, strictly as a way to essentialize Irishness as a white identity that is in some way exempt from accusations of white privilege.

As Catherine M. Eagan has noted, “an increasing number of Irish Americans know that the popular Anglo-American press once depicted their ancestors with simian and Africanoid features” (24). Eagan describes this process as “Hibernophilia” and states that, “Hibernophiles celebrate intersections of the ‘Celtic’ and the ‘black,’ or ‘African,’ even as they deemphasize how the ‘whiteness’ of ‘Irishness’ might compromise those intersections” (23). She covers several channels through which associations between Irish and black marginalization have been disseminated and her discussion includes the comparisons made by Catholic activists in Northern Ireland in the 1960s between their struggle and that of African Americans, the widely quoted analogy from Roddy Doyle’s novel *The Commitments* (1987) that describes the “Irish as the blacks of Europe,” as well as the spectacular use of black dancers and singers in the subsequent versions of *Riverdance*, that were deliberately incorporated to compare Irish emigration during the famine to the slave trade that transported African and Caribbean people to the United States (21-53). In each case, the examples of Hibernophilia illustrate how cultivating these connections enables Americans, or Irish Americans, to exceptionalize their whiteness by dissociating it from social privilege, through comparative ethnic suffering on a par with blackness. According to Eagan,

Distanced from their past suffering and culturally adrift in a multiracial world in which they are identified as “whites” alongside Anglo-Saxon Protestants, these Irish Americans, most often as consumers of culture but also as participants in politics and academia, are revealing their desire to re-become the “other” and deny their past and present participation in the white power structure. (23)

There are two important provisions to be pointed out in relation to Eagan's chapter, and its relevance to the present thesis. Firstly, the majority of the examples she refers to, particularly those just cited, were initially staged in Ireland, before later being exported to the United States. In other words, this concept has been circulated within both an Irish and American context, and this is important to recognize in light of the substantial numbers of actual black Irish now residing in Ireland, who are continually subjected to racial abuse, and refused recognition by the Irish government. Recent research, such as that conducted by Zélie Asava, has made an important advancement in Irish studies, by exposing the fact that the contemporary demography of Ireland is far from homogenous, due to the substantial emigration from countries both within and outside of the European union in the past several decades. Asava's work considers the representation of black and raced characters within Irish film and television, in order to "challenge the perceived homogeneity of the [Irish] nation" (2). In so doing, she breaks down the colloquial understanding of the term "black Irish," and "repurposes it as a label for those who are both Afro-Caribbean and Irish" (2). However, for the most part, the term "black Irish" as employed in popular television and cinema, has referred to claims of the political disenfranchisement experienced by white Irish as both colonial subjects in Ireland, and stigmatized immigrants in the U.S. In this way then, the idea that the Irish are "black" uses race as a label of distinction and a means to refute indictments of white privilege, where, as noted by Patricia Reid-Merrit, "[d]uring the emotionally turbulent, social consciousness-raising period of the 60s, the use of the term Black became a lightning rod to gather all those wanting to be part of a new world order" (78). In referring to black Irish within the present context then, it is intended to convey the way that Irishness has attempted to capitalize on this politically charged period of African American history in various domains of popular culture.

The second aspect to point out in relation to black Irishness, and Eagan's discussion of it, concerns issues of class in Ireland and the U.S. Taking the Irish context for example, most reference to the "black Irish" within popular culture calls to mind Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*. However, as Mary McGlynn's discussion of the novel points out, the "black Irishness" referred to within the novel is more based on class prejudice, and the rural-urban divide, than overt racism (237-8). In this sense then, the idea of the Irish as the "blacks of Europe" is seriously discredited. However, despite the fact that Ireland's economy had become a global example for its success during the Celtic Tiger, it is nonetheless in this period, namely the late 1990s and early twentieth-first century, that novels such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996), and the Irish dancing sensation *Riverdance* (1996), both of which perpetuate the idea of a marginalized black Irish identity, became immensely popular. Moreover, this is also the case within the American context. As earlier demonstrated, Irishness is most rigorously cultivated through consumerism, and in this sense then, actions, such as organizing Irish themed weddings, or spending money on specifically Irish themed merchandize, is only an option that is available to those Irish Americans of a particular income bracket. Thus as Eagan points out,

Ethnicity is not something that influences Irish Americans' lives unless they want it to. They can embrace their ethnicity through purchases, leisure activities, and even political involvement but still enjoy the advantages of being white in America's racially hierarchical society. Irish Americans who claim commonality of oppression with blacks in a lecture hall, a movie theatre, or a heated conversation in a pub still go home as whites once they have left that context. (28)

This thesis proposes that black Irishness, that is, the perception of Irishness as a not-quite-white identity—the perpetual underdog one step removed from white privilege—is key to the way that Irishness is coded and celebrated within the United States. It is suggested that it is this identity that allowed for the pre-September 11 resonance of Irishness as a heritage fantasy divorced from the exigencies of modernization that Negra speaks of, and that

similarly enabled Irishness to serve as an appropriate identity through which Americans, such as Mike Moran, could speak against the Arab assault of 9/11 while semantically circumventing potential accusations of racism. More significantly in the present case, this thesis argues that black Irishness or not-quite-whiteness is a popular discourse that permeates the star personae of Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Cillian Murphy during the Celtic Tiger period, and it is this contention that will occupy the remainder of the present chapter.

Whether as a result of external framing by media and popular press, or part of the off-screen persona they present to the world, or more often than not, a combination of both, black Irishness—in the sense of a disenfranchised ethnic whiteness—has been a significant discourse surrounding the careers of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy in Hollywood. The following section considers five films that each stars one of the actors in question: *Bend It like Beckham*, *Match Point*, *Hart's War*, *S.W.A.T.* and *Red Eye*. Of these, *Hart's War*, *Bend It like Beckham*, and *Match Point* deal explicitly with race, while *Bend It like Beckham* and *Match Point* concern specifically Irish characters, but all of the examples discussed below contain instances where Irishness is aligned with a not-quite-whiteness, or political blackness. In the British romantic comedy *Bend It like Beckham*, and the Woody Allen drama *Match Point*, Jonathan Rhys Meyers plays a character defined by his status as an ethnic outsider and to this extent both films present a scenario that affiliates Irishness with blackness in political terms. By contrast, in *Hart's War* and *S.W.A.T.*, Colin Farrell is cast as American. In both cases, his character shares a homosocial bond with a black character, however, it is the particular way that Irishness was racialized in the discourses surrounding the films' release that is of greatest interest here. Finally, *Red Eye*, starring Cillian Murphy, concerns Irishness in a far less obvious way to the other movies considered, but as shall become apparent, Murphy's Irishness, or not-quite-whiteness, serves a particular agenda within the context of

the film's production, where it diffuses an otherwise problematic representation of "Americans killing Americans" in the specifically heightened racial tension of post-September 11 cinema.

Bend It like Beckham (2002)

Bend It like Beckham (2002) is a British comedy set in west London about the efforts of 18-year-old Jess (Parminder Nagra) to join an amateur girls' football team against the wishes of her parents. As noted in several analyses of the film, its title, "Bend It like Beckham," is employed metaphorically. The literal meaning of the expression extends from an unusual football manoeuvre immortalized by the British footballer David Beckham, where he strikes the ball in such a way to effect a curve that causes it to circumnavigate the goalkeeper, and land in the back of the net (Raschke 126). Thus within the context of the film, as Jessica Raschke observes, "[t]he notion that you could 'bend a ball like Beckham' could be interpreted to mean having the ability to 'bend' your own life in a way that is true to you (and without causing harm to anyone in the process)" (123). As an Indian girl in a conservative Punjabi household, Jess is not encouraged to play sports. When she befriends Jules (Keira Knightly), and the latter discovers her talent, Jules encourages Jess to audition for the Hounslow Harriers, an amateur girls' football team. The team is coached by Joe (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a young Irish man and former footballer who was forced to give up his dreams of playing professionally due to a serious knee injury. The narrative follows the success of the team, and also the obstacles that both Jess and Jules must overcome to realize their dream of playing football. For Jess, this involves convincing her parents to allow her to socialize with "goras"—a derogatory term adopted by the younger generation of the Punjabi community for white males. The plot is complicated by the fact that both girls become attracted to their coach, which causes friction in their friendship. While the film's main concern relates to the position of Asian minorities in London, what is of particular interest

here is the fact that *Bend It like Beckham* also presents an image of black Irishness or Irishness as a disenfranchised white identity in Western culture.

Most critical analyses of *Bend It like Beckham* have discussed the “lesbian potential” of the film and the way that it depicts the contemporary life of a BrAsian community. Katharina Lindner for example, points to the possible lesbian readings available with careful examination of the spectatorial identifications between Jess and Jules. Throughout the film, the two girls take support from their friendship which is based on their mutual love of football, and failure to conform to the codes of feminine behaviour that are upheld by their families. As a result, a lot of narrative time is given over to Jess and Jules’ attempts to conceal their friendship and their active involvement with the Hounslow Harriers. According to Lindner’s research, the decision to replace an interracial homosexual relationship between Jess and Jules with a heterosexual love triangle, that included the character of Joe was taken by director Gurinder Chadha to avoid offending any Punjabi viewers, or dissuade them from going to see the film (217). Notwithstanding this contention, Lindner argues that a network of exchanged glances between the two female leads is discernible, and betrays this initial intention to include a lesbian relationship in the film (217).

In terms of Joe, the character of concern in the present context, Lindner’s approach to *Bend It like Beckham* takes a lead from Chris Straayer’s *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientation in Film and Video* (1996), specifically Straayer’s discussion of “the male intermediary,” a male character inserted into a narrative to deflect lesbian readings within a film. Straayer claims that, “[b]ecause female bonding and the exchange of glances between women threaten heterosexual and patriarchal structures, when female bonding occurs in feature narrative film, its readiness for lesbian appropriation is often acknowledged by internal efforts to forbid such conclusions” (18). For Lindner, Meyers’ character, Joe,

functions as this intermediary male, and she points to several scenes within the film where Joe's character ruptures the physical and emotional intimacy between Jess and Jules (217).

Based on Straayer's and Lindner's hypotheses, then, Joe serves as a token character, or a plot device, included to heteronormalize the film. He is, to use Lindner and Straayer's term, "an intermediary male," and, in this respect, Joe's masculinity is predicated on his position as a love interest, but not offensive enough to overshadow the relationship between Jess and Jules (see fig. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Keira Knightly, Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Parminder Nagra in *Bend It like Beckham* (2002)



Figure 2. Keira Knightley, Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Parminder Nagra in *Bend It like Beckham* (2002)

But this “intermediary” position is also applicable when taking the film’s construction of racial prejudice into consideration, insofar as the romance that develops between Jess and Joe is significant for the general assumptions the movie makes in regards to the similar bias that is imposed against Indian and Irish ethnicities. In a scene in which Jess responds aggressively to racist remarks directed at her during a football match, Joe claims he can empathize with her experience as an Irish man. Here the assumption is explicitly made that Joe’s whiteness is conditional and is an example of how the film presents Irishness as politically disenfranchised as a result of ethnic discrimination by positioning it in terms of comparative suffering with BrAsianness. As Claudia May points out in relation to the closing scenes of the film,

Jess’s father, who once had turned his back on playing cricket, now participates in this sport with Jess’s Irish boyfriend, Joe. Jess’s parents appear to accept Jess’s relationship with Joe. Mr Bhamra’s burgeoning friendship with her boyfriend also flags that they share in common a history of colonization. Such a union heralds a meeting of cultures and histories that is pregnant with possibilities as Joe and Mr Bhamra converse with one another and learn about and from each other’s experiences. (271)

May's observation here draws attention to two aspects of the film that are significant in terms of the present discussion. Firstly, that at a narrative level, the film includes a secondary plot in which Irishness is cast in terms of both ethnic marginalization—Joe's Irishness has made him "other" within the context of Britain—to the extent that, secondly, he can empathize with the BrAsian teenager Jess in terms of a shared experience of ethnic suffering. Thus the film, set in contemporary London and released in 2002, a time when, it must be remembered, Ireland was being held up globally as the poster country for economic, social and cultural prosperity, *Bend It like Beckham* presents an anachronistic version of Irishness through the character of Joe, whose entire presence in the film is defined by past experiences of Irish disenfranchisement. By doing so, *Bend It like Beckham* ignores the fact that, as was reported in *The Times* (London) in December 2000,

There is no doubt that the performance of the Irish economy over the past decade has been nothing short of spectacular. The Irish Republic's growth rate has averaged close to 10 per cent - about double the levels seen in Britain at the height of the 1980s boom. The number in work has jumped by almost a half, and the signs of a prospering economy are there for all to see.

Dublin has a vibrant financial centre and myriad bars and restaurants, and packed high-class shops line the centre of town. The capital's beautiful Georgian houses are, almost without exception, in pristine condition. IBM, Intel and Hewlett Packard are among the leading high-tech companies that have put down roots west of the city. Ireland feels like a place that is going somewhere. (Paterson)

But more significant still where the present thesis is concerned, is the fact that, according to Meyers, the idea to play Joe as Irish was the result of an improvisation on his part:

"He was originally English," Jonathan Rhys Meyers told the Irish Examiner, "but I had to read with Parminder—who plays Jess—and during the screen test we did the scene where she complains that someone called her a Paki, and I just shouted back, 'Listen, I'm f*cking Irish and what's your problem?' It made sense that the Irish being a minority in England as well, Joe would have an empathy with Jess on that level. And the director just loved that, so Irish he remained." (Schwartz)

The anecdote is revealing for what it suggests about the position of Irishness during the Celtic Tiger period. It shows a readiness on the part of, not only the director Gurinder Chadha, but the actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers himself, to preserve a black Irish representation of Irishness.

If it could be argued that, as a subplot, the film's representation of Irishness is of limited significance, some other aspects relating to *Bend It like Beckham* that signify not only at a narrative level, but also in terms of Meyers' star personae more generally, are worth noting. As pointed out in the Introduction of this thesis, *Bend It like Beckham* was not only a European success, being instead a "worldwide hit" that "tapped into the mainstream" (Rees). But more importantly, as we saw, the film can also be considered as a grounding text, that was regularly referred to in the early years of Meyers' Hollywood career to anchor the actor in the memory of American viewers. Moreover, Meyers would later allude more strongly to the idea of the Irish as politically black, when he was cast as Elvis Presley in a two-part biopic on Presley's early life *Elvis: The Early Years* (2005) that filmed and aired in the U.S., for which he won a Golden Globe award. Emphasis was placed in the mini-series on Presley's impoverished upbringing, as well as the singer's affinity for black music that was popular at the time. Meyers received a lot of attention pre and post filming the series, based on the fact that, as an Irish man, he was an unusual selection for the role, but Meyers dismissed any suggestion that his casting was unconventional for this reason. According to the writer who interviewed Meyers for *today.com*, a news and media website connected to the popular American live talk show:

In this case, Rhys Meyers notes, there are certain parallels between his own life and Presley's.

"I was brought up a poor boy from southern Ireland. He was brought up a poor boy from the south of America," he said. "There's not that much of a difference in being poor". ("Elvis' Lives—In a Four-Hour TV Movie.")

Much like the earlier comments quoted above in relation to *Bend It like Beckham*, these remarks illustrate a deliberate attempt on Meyers' part to create an affiliation between blackness and Irishness, based on mutual social and economic hardship. The fact that he attempts to do this by referring to his own personal experience is a further example of how Irishness can feature much like a watermark within a film text. But more specifically in terms of the argument in question, much like he claimed ownership of the idea to cast the soccer coach Joe as Irish, in *Bend It like Beckham*, Meyers is attempting to make black Irishness a significant part of his star persona as an actor.

In this way, *Bend It like Beckham*, is an example of a film, made and released in coincidence with the peak of Ireland's Celtic Tiger, that along with its director and leading male actor, indulges in historical, social and cultural amnesia in its representation of Irishness, and the success of which suggests a receptiveness towards preserving an under-dog, or black Irish image of Irish masculinity defined by an experience of ethnic discrimination. The next film *Match Point*, is similar insofar as it stars Jonathan Rhys Meyers as a struggling Irish immigrant living and working London. But while it also presents an image of black Irishness, or Irishness as not-quite-whiteness, unlike *Bend It like Beckham*, *Match Point* is the conceit of a doyen of Hollywood and American filmmaking, Woody Allen.

***Match Point* (2005)**

In Woody Allen's *Match Point* Jonathan Rhys Meyers plays the character of Chris "a poor boy from Ireland come to London," who, having failed to excel internationally as a professional tennis player, gets a job at a reputable tennis club. His first student is Tom Hewitt (Matthew Goode), the son of a wealthy London business mogul, who welcomes Chris into his family's social circle on discovering their mutual love of opera. Through Tom, Chris

meets his sister Chloe (Emily Mortimer), and Tom's American fiancée Nola (Scarlett Johansson), and, soon after beginning a relationship with the former takes up a passionate affair with the latter. Problems arise, however, once Chris' affair with Nola threatens to jeopardize the privileged lifestyle he becomes accustomed to on marrying Chloe, and acquiring a lucrative position in his father-in-law's firm. He consequently takes the drastic decision to shoot Nola, their unborn baby, and Nola's elderly neighbour, and much of the film's momentum is dictated by Chris' motives for the murders, his conscience on their completion, and whether or not justice will prevail to see him caught and punished for his reprehensible actions.

Due to its heavy dramatic impulse and the absence of comedy or satire, *Match Point* would seem a major change from Allen's earlier films, if arguably more in keeping with the director's own nihilistic perspective (A. O. Scott). Allen's most successful movies prior to *Match Point* were marked by "the very Americanized perspective in which Allen has operated over the years" (Sorrento 140) making London a very atypical setting for the film. However, Allen has voiced his preference for an independent, auteur approach to filmmaking, and the director was content to secure funding from the BFI with the understanding that the film be shot within the U.K., using a predominantly British cast and crew (Garfield).

Rather than seeing *Match Point* as a complete departure for Allen, then, some critics of the film have alluded to the similar perspective on morality it shares with Allen's earlier *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), which also contains a main character, who chooses to end an adulterous affair by murdering his mistress, to avoid the loss of wealth and status that would accompany divorce from a loveless marriage. In this respect, Marat Grinberg connects the two films with the later *Cassandra's Dream* (2007) as part of a trilogy of "good and evil" (47). For Grinberg:

Among the three films *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is permeated with both the Jewish and the Judaic thanks to its allusions and positions; *Match Point* functions as, what I would call, a translation film; and *Cassandra's Dream* should be seen as an almost unique example of Jewish hermeneutics and polemics on-screen which become the movie's primary language. (47)

In relation to Grinberg's comments, it is worth noting that his assessment is governed by the objectives of the edition in which it appears, *Woody on Rye: Jewishness in the Films and Plays of Woody Allen*, a collection of essays all of which "agree that Jewishness is pivotal for an understanding of Allen's art" (Brook and Grinberg xxiii). As discussed earlier, Jewish and Irish immigrants were amongst the first influx of white ethnics, who vied for acceptance in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, and in this respect, "the vicissitude of Jewish whiteness is intimately related to the racial odysseys of myriad other groups—the Irish, Armenians, Italians, Poles, Syrians, Greeks, Ruthenians, Sicilians, Finns and a host of others—who came ashore in the United States" (Jacobson 3). This is not to say that the histories of racial prejudices against the Jewish and Irish are comparable, any more than the experiences of Irish and African Americans can be equated in terms of comparative suffering. What would seem to be the case in *Match Point*, however, is that Allen, obliged to set his story beyond what was typically his "Americanised perspective," chose the Irish as a social group analogously differentiated within Britain as Jewish communities are within America. According to the director:

I wrote *Match Point* originally about an upper-class family in the Hamptons. I made the switch to England where the social imperative gets magnified. The same is true of *Cassandra's Dream*. I wrote that and set it in England but I could have easily made it about two brothers living in Brooklyn, Queens, or Manhattan and an uncle with a proposition and with the same tragic events that occur, though status does get magnified in the more socially-conscious, class-conscious society of London. (qtd. in Lucia 41)

With the change of setting, and the inclusion of a black Irish character, the basic moral premise of *Match Point* relies upon a history of race relations between Ireland and England in which class boundaries overlap with racial tensions. The representation of Chris reveals a kind of ethnicized Irish whiteness that is loaded with symbolic currency, and provides several important insights on the type of Irishness preserved within Allen's film.

According to Matthew Sorrento in *The New American Crime Film*, film-noir became a popular genre for directors to reinterpret from the early 1980s onwards, and several features of *Match Point* lead Sorrento to place it within this generic category (137). In *Match Point*, the classic film noir private-eye is replaced by not one lone outsider but two in the characters of Chris and Nola, and for Sorrento, it is this aspect that attracts the lovers to each other: "The two have disparate motivations but are compatriots—not in citizenship, but in the fact that both are outsiders coming in, she from the American West and he from Ireland" (141). Taking this argument, it is Chris' Irishness which differentiates him from the Hewitts, particularly at the beginning of the film: he is pejoratively nick-named "Irish" by Tom while Chloe readily fills their friends in on the religious fanaticism of Chris' father. She embellishes the deprivation of Chris' background in a type of slum tourism in which poverty is exoticized to the extent that attraction "is rooted in the starkness of difference it displays" (Frenzel et al. xv).

In this way, Chris's ethnic difference manifests socially, and "[w]e see him reading *Crime and Punishment* and *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, which intimates his calculating nature, since Dostoevsky, like opera and tennis, allows him, a poor up-and-coming Irishman to imitate the habits of the rich" (Stuchebrukhov 145). Chris reignites the affair with Nola early into his marriage, but, despite her pregnancy, finds he cannot bring himself to leave the privileges his new lifestyle provides: "We sense from the film's early scenes that he wants to ascend, but not until the fates serve him favourably does this potboiler

produce a social critique. He submits when tempted by crime, but the new comfortable world he's reached through crime alleviates him" (Sorrento 141). It is this "social crime" that drives Chris to commit the "actual one" (Sorrento 142), namely, ill-won ascent into a class he is ethnically excluded from, and, in this respect, *Match Point* relies heavily on the notion of black Irishness as not-quite-whiteness, that in this case, leads to the murder of three people.

In this respect, it is worth considering the comments of veteran film critic, Roger Ebert, in his review of the film. Like Sorrento, Ebert distinguishes Chris and Nola as "outsiders," but also qualifies Chris's Irishness in terms of poverty—Chris is "a poor boy from Ireland." He also states:

The movie is more about plot and moral vacancy than about characters, and so Allen uses type-casting to quickly establish the characters and set them to their tasks of seduction, deception, lying and worse. Meyers has a face that can express crafty desire, which is not pure lust but more like lust transformed by quick strategic calculations. ("Match Point")

In the first instance, Ebert's remarks confirm the way that Allen's film indulges in a form of social, cultural and historical amnesia by representing Irishness in terms of under-privilege. In the second, he identifies common traits between Chris as a character, and Meyers as an actor. This suggestion is important, not so much on its own—one review, even by a man with such credibility in the industry as Ebert—is still only one review. But what is significant is the extent to which, Meyers' also repeatedly drew links between himself and his character in interviews about the film.

When questioned specifically about Allen's decision to cast him as the character of Chris, Meyers claimed that "[i]n casting me as Chris he cast me because all the elements that exist in Chris exist in Jonathan as well" (Balfour), while on several occasions, the actor recounted a particular conversation between himself and Allen when Meyers approached the director being nervous on his first day of shooting:...he said to me, "you know, well, Jonny,

you're like, you're 80% the character when you wake up in the morning you know? You just fill in the dots" ("Match Point Scarlett Johanssen, Jonathan Rhys Meyers"). This particular version of the anecdote is taken from "Unscripted," an interview between Meyers, and the actress who plays his lover in *Match Point*, Scarlett Johansson. In the interview for *Moviefone* Meyers and Johansson take turns asking each other questions, some of their own and others sent in from the American public, but what is most interesting in terms of their discussion is the way in which, as he did in interviews about *Bend It like Beckham* and *Elvis: The Early Years*, Meyers' appropriates discourses of black or disenfranchised Irishness, and makes them a significant part of his star persona. When asked by a viewer, Mike Austin from Austin Texas, as to whether he was better at soccer (for *Bend It like Beckham*), or tennis (for *Match Point*), Meyers expressed a preference for soccer, while giving the following explanation:

I wasn't naturally good at it [tennis]...soccer was easier for me because I grew up in a working class situation in Ireland: it was the only game that 12 kids could play that was inexpensive—throw a ball to them and they're busy for 4 hours kicking a ball around the place. Tennis isn't, tennis tends to be for people with money who can join private clubs and, you know, buy rackets and tennis shoes, and this is why it was a really really good sport for Woody to embrace as an upper class pass time—to be tennis. But I'm terrible at it. Sorry.

Here Meyers claims ownership of a working class identity that he specifically grounds in an Irish context. He maintains this image throughout the interview when later in the discussion he lists financial reward as one of the three things he loves about movies, in terms of working as an actor: "it pays better than menial work...and it does...I'm not going to lie to you...it's great!" In one of his most relaxed interviews it is worth noting that Meyers drops the refined, clipped English accent he uses in *Match Point* and which he began the discussion with, so that by its conclusion he speaks with a heavy Irish accent—pronouncing Scarlett and "grand" with flat hard vowels and the word lie, as "loy."

Thus *Bend It like Beckham* and *Match Point*, despite being generically very different from each other, are comparably significant where this thesis is concerned: At the level of the film, they present Irishness as an ethnically marginalized identity, turning on the notion of black Irishness as a form of political, social, and cultural disenfranchisement, while beyond the film text, Meyers draws an affinity with the character he plays by taking possession of a black Irish identity for himself. Moreover, as we shall see, in the following films discussed within this chapter, *Hart's War*, *S.W.A.T* and *Red Eye*, as well as throughout the thesis as a whole, the star personae of Farrell and Murphy are both strongly permeated, to various degrees and with varying levels of influence on the part of the actors themselves, by discourses of black Irishness.

***Hart's War* (2002)**

Hart's War (2002) is set in a German P.O.W. camp during World War II. In it, Farrell plays Thomas Hart, a law student who is made Lieutenant during the war due to his father's senatorship and former military service. When Hart is taken hostage by the Germans, and divulges classified intelligence under interrogation, he is sent to a P.O.W. camp in Augsburg, Germany, during which time he is ordered by the ranking American Officer, Colonel William McNamara (Bruce Willis), to defend the black Lieutenant Scott (Terrence Howard), who is falsely accused of murdering a white American officer.

In *Hart's War*, the treatment, trial, and survival of Lt. Scott are arranged as stages of Hart's development and redemption, and as a result, Hart's "war" is essentially a battle in which (the white) Thomas Hart proves his masculinity by giving (the black) Scott back his freedom. According to Robert C. Doyle, a P.O.W. historian who was invited to sit as a technical advisor for the film, the producers and screen writers of *Hart's War* were keen to address "racial difficulties," and, in this regard, the two black fighter pilots, Scott and Archer,

are subjected to bigotry on their arrival. Both are denied the salute befitting their rank within the barracks, and Archer is unjustly executed for concealing a weapon. However, the film can be accused of what Jason Smith describes as, “colorblindness,” an aesthetic that obscures the way that racism is embedded in the social structures of everyday living, by seeking “to individualize race and ignore the inequalities that are linked to it” (785).

Thus, while *Hart’s War* presents itself as progressive by exposing racist practices, it in many ways still perpetuates discourses of white power and black powerlessness. To this extent, the promotional discourses surrounding the film stressed the links between war and masculinity. *Hart’s War* was promoted as historically accurate, most notably by reporting that (white) survivors, such as war veteran Colonel Hal. Cook, “consulted with *Hart’s War* filmmakers on all aspects of camp life and gave valuable input on the script” (“*Hart’s War*: Production Notes”). Of particular interest here are Cook’s comments that, “the war robbed me of my youth but gave me my manhood” which were quoted in the film’s production notes. Rather than just a film intended to draw awareness to institutional racism then, *Hart’s War* uses racial prejudice as an arena to stage the redemption of its white protagonist, Thomas Hart.

At the beginning of the film, Hart’s opening lines confirm his naivety and immaturity in terms of active service: “I was miles from the front, and a stranger to war. Troops, fuel dumps, enemy units. They were pins on a map to me.” On being captured by German officers posing as American troops, Hart endures three days of gruelling interrogation where he is deprived of firstly his shoes and socks, exposing his feet to frostbite, and then removed of all his clothes and left to huddle naked in a freezing cell (see fig. 3 and 4). After revealing the location of American fuel dumps to his interrogator, Hart is transported to the stalag where he is subsequently shunned by other officers, particularly Colonel McNamara. Shuffling around the camp in bare feet and shoes two and a half sizes too big for him, Hart is emasculated,

most notably when it is revealed by Captain Ross that the P.O.W's are aware that he betrayed military information when questioned by the Germans: "That guy Lutz they threw you in with? He was a Level-One interrogator. McNamara had him, too. When a guy won't talk, they just keep kicking him up the ladder. Level two, Level three. It takes weeks. He was in there for a month. The only guy you saw was Lutz. And he spit you out of there in three days."



Figure 3. Collin Farrell in *Hart's War* (2002)



Figure 4. Collin Farrell in *Hart's War* (2002)

Whiteness in the film is based on its agency over blackness: McNamara's capacity to sacrifice Scott for the supposed good of the war effort, Hart's ability to prove Scott's innocence, and Hart's own entitlement to military respect. Hart's reclamation of his masculinity is predicated on his successful defence of Scott in the staged Court Martial (see fig. 5). Scott explicitly rejects Hart's offer to escape with McNamara, preferring instead to stay and give the other troops a chance at survival. But Hart denies him that choice. He confesses to murdering Bedford himself, knowing that only a direct confession will prevent the Germans from executing Scott at the conclusion of the trial. In so doing, and in forcing McNamara's own confession, Hart denies Scott the right to dictate the course of his fate. By the end of the film, and having assured the audience that Lincoln Scott got to return to his family in Macon, Hart has become a man after learning the true meaning of "honour, courage, duty," and "sacrifice."



Figure 5. Collin Farrell and Terrence Howard in *Hart's War* (2002)

In this way, *Hart's War* expresses the privileges of whiteness over blackness in terms of political currency, where the film's agenda had less to do with delivering an accurate portrayal of racism during the Battle of the Bulge, than with using World War II as a setting

to exercise contemporary racial politics. It is worth noting that two of the three black prisoners of war that were still alive during filming “affirmed the nonexistence of racial problems in the camp” when interviewed by Doyle (88). However, despite duly passing on this information, according to Doyle, the film’s producers and screenwriters were “determined to superimpose their social agenda on this movie, whether the World War II era’s history supported it or not” (88).

Within the context of the film, Hart, despite his weaknesses as a soldier, is placed at a level far above the black pilots, Archer and Scott. However, in terms of the film’s off-screen discourses, a row between Farrell and Bruce Willis during filming illustrates effectively the way that Irishness, despite Ireland’s Celtic Tiger present, is nonetheless consistently marked as politically disenfranchised in racial terms. It also serves to illustrate the way that, regardless of the ethnicity of the character he is playing in a particular film, where Farrell’s career and star persona are concerned, his Irishness is never not in question. But in this case, and as we will see in several others to follow, what is particularly of interest here is the extent to which Farrell’s whiteness is framed in terms of its distance from white American manhood. Farrell lost his temper with Willis for forgetting his lines during rehearsal, and, as he explains it,

“You learn from everyone in this business. I mean, you learn from watching Bruce. He couldn’t remember a line to save his life! There was one scene where I said, ‘Objection, your Honor!’ And Bruce looked at me and then he looked at the script supervisor and said, ‘Line?’ She whispered, ‘Sustained!’ I said to him, ‘You better go home and get an early night—you have a word to learn tomorrow!’” Willis charismatically responded, “F**k you, you Irish pr**k.” (qtd. in “Farrell and Willis Quarreled on Set.”)

While the crudeness of Willis’ response exposes a definite hostility between the two white actors, what is perhaps more significant here is the fact that the incident was reported at all, not only by the popular media who saw fit to exploit what was essentially a relatively

minor row, but also the fact that the story looks to have originated directly from Farrell himself. To be sure, the story provides some insight into the contemporary mind-set, certainly of Willis, and the extent to which he viewed Farrell in ethnic terms, regardless of both men's whiteness. Thus on the one hand, in a context concerning two white actors, as the off-screen stand-off between Willis and Farrell illustrates, Irishness, like blackness, is often subjected to a kind of unthinking racism, and, while Farrell is privy to the benefits of whiteness, he is still considered not "white enough," or as white as, the American Willis in this instance. But perhaps of greater significance is the fact that, in being reported at all, the incident expresses a need to essentialize Irishness as a disenfranchised form of whiteness or black Irishness whereby the media, as well as Farrell himself, present an image of the actor as an ethnic underdog, white, but at one remove from white privilege. Moreover, this is not the only example of such manoeuvring. Released two years later, *S.W.A.T.* is also notable for the racial perspective adopted both on, but particularly off, the movie set.

***S.W.A.T.* (2003)**

S.W.A.T. (2003) is an action/crime drama that takes place within the S.W.A.T. (Special Weapons and Tactics) division of the Los Angeles Police Department, and is a remake of a former 70s police series. Farrell's character, Jim Street, is an ex-S.W.A.T officer who is demoted when a bank heist goes awry, causing a hostage to get wounded by Street's hot-headed division partner, Brian Gamble (Jeremy Renner). When a veteran officer, Sergeant Daniel "Hondo" Harrelson (Samuel L. Jackson) is asked to return to the LAPD to assemble a new task force of S.W.A.T recruits, he selects Street as part of the elite team. Farrell plays a character who, having been previously rejected from S.W.A.T., rebuilds his career, and becomes part of the new unit that is comprised of "other" officers who have all been ostracized by the core officials of the LAPD. Marginalization, then, is an important

aspect of the film where it acts as a bonding experience that separates the characters from the L.A. police force, and the public they protect. Of particular note here is the way that race is gendered to the degree that whiteness within the force is emasculated. It is characterized by weakness, and governed by regulation, while race becomes a marker of non-conformance and free thinking where, according to the director, Clark Johnson, “to be a S.W.A.T cop you have to be a maverick” (“Director and Cast Commentary”).

In this respect, two white officers out of the six team members on the S.W.A.T force prove themselves inadequate as one, Michael Boxer (Brian Von Holt), is seriously wounded on their first assignment, the other, T.J. McCabe (Josh Charles) betrays the team for profit, while Captain Fuller (Larry Poindexter), also white, makes decisions based on bureaucracy rather than good judgement, and is described by Hondo as a “paper pushing punk.” Similarly, another white officer is rejected by Hondo due to his “courteous and professional” approach to law enforcement, and also because the cop in question is a vegetarian. It is this latter aspect in particular that persuades Hondo to exclude him from the team by arguing, “How the hell can I trust a man who won’t eat a good old fashioned American hotdog?” and the attitude confirms Hank Rothgerber’s argument that “[m]eat eating is linked to a motivation to conform to gender expectations, that is, a male desire, to appear masculine and to feel like a real man” (372).

By contrast, the remaining squad members, Deacon “Deke” Kay (James Todd Smith) and Chris Sanchez (Michelle Rodriguez), who are black and Latina respectively, demonstrate physical strength, dedication to their mission, and the psychological and physical resilience to persevere if things get “dirty behind a street bust.” Regarding Sanchez, the character played by Michelle Rodriguez, the director Clark Johnson used creative license to include a female S.W.A.T member in the movie. At time of filming, the actual S.W.A.T division of the LAPD was comprised of men only, and Johnson included Sanchez to “make a point of introducing

her character as someone who overcame those odds and that glass ceiling and got to do what she wanted to do” (“Director and Cast Commentary”). Thus Sanchez can be considered, what Christopher Ames describes as a “female man,” a woman who “combines macho physical intensity with a female body” (52).

In this sense then, ethnicity in general, rather than “blackness” in particular, is linked to masculinity as both are measured in terms of hardness, toughness and virility. Farrell’s Irishness is not overtly marked within the film due to the fact that he plays an American character. However, the depiction of race does raise the question as to where Farrell’s character falls within the racial demographic of the film. It is apparent that Farrell is white, but, if, unlike the other white characters in the film, he is proven to be both trustworthy, and sufficiently skilled, it becomes incumbent to ask what kind of whiteness does Farrell’s character represent? In order to consider this further, it is necessary to look at how the film’s expression of race and gender dominates the discourses surrounding the characters as well as the actors who play them, where Jackson and Farrell are drawn together comparatively.

Despite the notable high profile actors involved, *S.W.A.T.* failed to make much of an impression upon critics. However, the most successful element of the movie, according to reviewers, occurred in the sharp and humorous dialogue that is exchanged between Hondo and Street, particularly as they drive across L.A. to assemble the officers Hondo has hand-picked for his team. As sergeant, Hondo occupies a higher status to that of Street, with Street as the raw talent of the S.W.A.T. team and Hondo’s protégé. Yet they are both, to use Johnson’s term “mavericks,” and as such, they share a rapport that thrives from working off each other’s strengths rather than their differences that critics found entertaining:

As Farrell drives Jackson around recruiting members for the team, the Irishman provides the older actor with his best verbal sparring partner since John Travolta in “Pulp Fiction”. It’s a welcome comedy interlude sandwiched between action

sequences, and we could have done with a bit more, especially when such frivolity is sidelined and the serious task of finding a plot takes over. (Morrison)

Firstly, the direct reference to Farrell's ethnicity is worth commenting on, if for no other reason than it illustrates a recognition of ethnicity that goes deeper than the narrative level of film character and as such, demonstrates the extent to which the Irishness of Farrell, Meyers and Murphy features as a watermark within the films they play regardless of accent or characterization. Nor is it the only review of the film to do so. For example, in another article on *S.W.A.T* taken from *Jet*, a magazine which describes itself as "the weekly source of African American political and entertainment news," it was quoted how Irish heartthrob Colin Farrell who starred in *Minority Report* and *Daredevil*, said that there are similarities between both his character and the one played by Jackson. "Hondo decides on Street because he can see how hungry he is for a second chance. They're alike in that way. Hondo was pushed out of S.W.A.T by Fuller, so he's essentially saying to Street, I'm getting a break, so I'm giving you one too." (63).

There are two elements of interest here. Firstly, as in the *Empire* review, Farrell's ethnicity is referred to, and, in this instance, qualified to include the descriptor "heartthrob" in such a way that reveals an interpretation of Irishness as a sexually attractive form of masculinity. Secondly, while in this interview Farrell draws similarities between his character and Jackson's, the *Empire* review collapses the distinction between the two: it is not Street that drives Hondo around but Farrell who drives Jackson around, while the "verbal sparring" is said to take place between the actors rather than the characters in such a way that suggests a rapport or camaraderie between Farrell and Jackson. If the writer falls short of drawing similarities between the actors in terms of race or ethnicity here, elsewhere, Jackson certainly did.

Jackson took issue with the British TV presenter Kate Thornton when she attempted to claim Farrell as British despite his Irish nationality in an interview with both actors. When Thornton attempted to explain herself due to the fact that Ireland was “close by,” Jackson made the following response:

SLJ: Ok. That’s the source of all the conflict over there. You people always claiming the Irish as yours. We got a little problem just like that here called slavery but that’s ok we don’t need to talk about that so lets go. (more laughter)

KT: Well Colin is a very well paid slave.

SLJ: Ok good.

KT: As are you.

SLJ: Yeah all right. (Mason)

As well as another example of the way that the Irishness of the three actors considered in this study is a constant factor in the industry in which they circulate, here, Jackson specifically identifies the Irish as, not simply politically black, but slaves of the English, albeit, light-heartedly. The discourses surrounding the last film considered in this chapter, *Red Eye*, also racializes Irishness, but in a far more subtle way. On this occasion however, the films’ survival turns on a concept of Irishness as not-quite-whiteness where there is reason to believe that the Irishness of the leading actor, Cillian Murphy, had several important implications for the film’s reception.

***Red Eye* (2005)**

In *Red Eye*, Cillian Murphy plays an American character, Jackson Rippner, who is hired to coerce a young hotel manager, Lisa Reisert (Rachel McAdams), into cooperating with Russian terrorists who intend to assassinate the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, who is due to stay at the hotel where she works. The majority of the film is set on board an airplane, and Rippner’s task is to convince Lisa to use her managerial position to alter the

number of the suite intended for Deputy Secretary Keefe and his family in the hotel, thus making it easier for the conspirators to carry out the assassination attempt. Rippner accomplishes this by threatening to have Lisa's father killed, if she fails to follow his instructions all the while subjecting her to immense psychological and physical violence throughout the duration of the flight, and also afterwards when he follows her to her father's home. What makes *Red Eye* important within the present context is the fact that Rippner's most threatening aspect is his appearance as "a regular guy," or more specifically, the inoffensiveness implied by his whiteness in terms of post-9/11 Hollywood film (see fig.6).



Figure 6. Cillian Murphy and Rachel McAdams in *Red Eye* (2005)

Given its setting primarily on board an airplane, and the fact that, as an action-thriller, its concept of terror extends from the apprehension surrounding air travel following the hijacking, and collision, of two passenger aircraft into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, *Red Eye* positions itself tangentially, if not exclusively, within the generic frame of the post-9/11 terrorist film (Cettl 221). According to Klaus Dodds, "[a]s an immensely popular form of entertainment, films are highly effective in grabbing the attention of mass audiences. The power of film lies in not only its apparent ubiquity but also

in the way in which it helps to create (often dramatically) understandings of particular events, national identities and relationships to others” (1621). While Dodds’ point here acknowledges the semi-cathartic potential of cinema, he also draws attention to the way that the particular staging of a scenario in film can encourage certain responses to, or understandings of, national trauma. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the stipulation of the terrorists in *Red Eye* as Russian was less the result of Craven’s specific design than a response to certain concerns put forward in the final stages of production. As a result, *Red Eye* more closely alludes to representations of terrorism following September 11, than to a legacy of Cold War hostilities. Regrettably, it is not within the scope of this thesis to consider the genre or subgenre of post-9/11 cinema in extensive detail. However, there is an important aspect in need of cursory discussion, specifically for its relevance to the manipulation of ethnic “whiteness” within *Red Eye*, namely, the expression of national crisis in terms of a crisis of masculinity.

The gendering of national trauma in general, and in the “War on Terror” in particular, is important to keep in mind if reading *Red Eye* specifically as a post-9/11 action thriller. In this respect, responses to the aftermath of September 11 have been acknowledged as twofold where masculinity is concerned. On the one hand, the reaction of Americans, whether in New York, or at the Pentagon, was reported in such a way as to align victimization with feminization, or by, what Julie Drew describes as, “feminizing fear” (71). Similarly, media accounts, as well as statements released by military, and political personnel expressed the attacks in terms of penetration that implied an open violation of American sovereignty, and a devastating, potentially debilitating, loss of national virility. As Drew comments further, “It comes as an unpleasant lesson in logic that if American men—even soldiers at the Pentagon—behave as women-victims behave under such circumstances, we must either understand ourselves as a nation as more feminine (meaning, in this context, more weak and

vulnerable and paralyzed in the face of terror) than we had previously believed, or we must question the entire binary of feminine/masculine characteristics and behaviors attributed to sexual difference, and their relative value within our culture” (72).

On the other side of these responses, then, it has been commented that White House officials presented their intentions for strategic reprisal before the American public as actions that were dependent upon “manning up” before their enemies, where, as Matthew Hannah has observed, “[w]hatever the ‘real’ reasons were behind the invasion of Afghanistan, there is no question that a mobilization of destructive manhood ideals was centrally important in allowing the Bush administration to proceed with the support of most Americans” (552). Slavoj Žižek has questioned “where would President George W. Bush be without Sept. 11?” such was the emphasis on Bush’s presidential manliness in the ensuing years, from his immediate recourse to war, to employing cowboy metaphors in speeches addressing the nation (Kellner 626), to his staging of a classic scene from an iconic Tom Cruise movie where “Bush emerged in full *Top Gun* regalia from a jet plane with ‘Navy One’ and ‘George W. Bush, Commander-in-Chief’ logos” (637). These examples illustrate the extent to which polarized understandings of gender have framed public reaction to September 11, and, as shall become apparent, similar discourses circulated explicitly, and implicitly, in the films that emerged throughout the decade.

What makes *Red Eye* particularly interesting in the present case, then, is the fact that, as a white American, Murphy’s character, Jackson Rippner, lulls the heroine, Lisa, into a false state of security. Here, the use of allegory is crucial to the movie’s interpretation: a vulnerable female is threatened, and the safety of her family put in jeopardy unless she succumbs to a killer’s demands. Craven even includes the backstory of rape into Lisa’s history to heighten the terror she experiences. The plot is then moved to one where Lisa fights Rippner on her own territory. Once the plane lands, she stabs him in the throat and

finally confronts him when he follows her back to her family home. There, she takes back control of the situation where, according to Craven, “that’s the triumphant moment when she realizes . . . He realizes that he can physically beat her but he’ll never beat her spirit. And now he’s just impotent. He’s just a beaten man really” (“Filmmaker Commentary”). In keeping with these comments, while Lisa victoriously survives the ordeal, it is actually her father, a stronger masculine presence in the film, who shoots Rippner in the head (see fig. 7).



Figure 7. Brian Cox and Rachel McAdams in *Red Eye* (2005)

Bearing in mind the gendered responses to the attacks described earlier, it is possible to read the plot development of *Red Eye* in terms of post-9/11 cinema. David Holloway describes the device as “allegory lite,” and according to Holloway:

In Hollywood allegory lite, controversial issues can be safely addressed because they must be “read off” other stories by the viewer; while the “allegory” is sufficiently loose or lite and the other attractions on offer are sufficiently compelling or diverse, that viewers can enjoy the film without needing to engage at all with the risky “other story” it tells. (83)

Craven’s discussion of the film in the commentary and interviews that accompany the DVD version, as part of its “special features,” supports interpreting *Red Eye* as a redemption

allegory of the terrorist attacks of September 11. Craven states that “I think it’s part of that post-9/11 reality of flying, where everything’s different. Flight attendants are not happy with their jobs, don’t feel secure in them, and they’re not that happy about serving people anymore. And the customers are always watching the people around them, wondering if they are somebody dangerous.” He later describes Lisa as a “combatant. You know? She’s not a civilian anymore,” and speaking about the final confrontation scenes shot in a suburban house in Miami, Craven argues that he “thought any American, and probably anybody, would love to see that reversal where he’s [Rippner] on the other person’s turf” (“Filmmaker Commentary”). In this way, the film allows for a cathartic confrontation between the opposing forces of good and evil, and, as Dodds has pointed out, “the use of airliners as weapons of mass destruction was indicative not only of a sort of asymmetrical warfare but also denied Americans an opportunity to confront their adversaries in a proverbial ‘show-down’” (1628).

A problem with the film arose, however, after screen testing a preliminary version before a sample audience, when it emerged that, according to Craven, “certain people were uncomfortable with Americans killing Americans” (“Filmmaker Commentary”). Whether Craven is referring to audience members or representatives of the studio financing the film is unclear. However, as a result, it was not until this late stage in the production that the group shown loading a missile at Keefe’s hotel suite were dubbed with Russian voices. Craven jokes that most of those playing the “terrorists” were members of the film crew, and, once the Russian voiceover was added, it became necessary to edit the film so as to conceal that the actors were not actually speaking the dialogue.

What is particularly interesting about this aspect of *Red Eye* is the fact that Murphy’s character remains unaltered in the same way. Craven’s comments raise the question as to why, if objections were made to Americans killing Americans, no such objections were

issued in regards to Murphy's character. Rippner speaks with an American accent throughout the film, and, as such, his character is presumably an "American guy" ("The Making of *Red Eye*"). This perspective would imply that maintaining Rippner's nationality as an American was only tolerable due to the fact that the actor playing him, Cillian Murphy, was not. It would suggest that while Murphy's Irishness was not an overt issue in the movie's narrative, it was, nonetheless, significant enough to ensure that the movie was not read as an instance in which an American killed an American. The director has commented on his initial reluctance to cast Murphy for the role due to the fact that "he was so Irish to me, and this character was written to be an American" ("The Making of *Red Eye*"). From this perspective, then, *Red Eye* presents an anomaly. On the one hand, its main antagonist is a white, American terrorist, whose nationality is maintained as American despite the fact that the actor playing him is Irish. On the other hand, the voices of the actual terrorists in the film were dubbed with Russian accents even though, as minor characters in the plot, they appear at only fleeting moments throughout the movie. This leads to the suggestion that not only does an actor's ethnicity impact how a film is symbolically interpreted—in other words that Murphy's Irishness appears as a watermark within the movie's sub-text—but also that Murphy's ethnic whiteness or not-quite-whiteness made him an appropriate medium to portray an American terrorist in the sensitive climate of post-9/11 America.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the complex way that colour and nationality determine social and political power, in a context where the human norm is defined through whiteness. It has discussed how, far from straightforwardly, Irishness has wavered across the colour line, and brought with it histories of experience as both colonized subject and colonizing ally. Subjugated racially within a British context, due to the fact that their whiteness contradicted

the understanding of skin colour as a visible measure of civility, Irish emigrants fared differently within America, particularly during the Civil War and post-Civil War periods. While there would seem genuine reason to suggest that early generations of Irish emigrants experienced hardship, and were ranked interstitially between African Americans and white Anglo-Saxons in terms of social and political power, the Irish gradually moved from the social margins towards assimilation within the American mainstream.

Of specific concern in the present chapter has been the multiple uses that this history has served in Hollywood cinema in general, and most particularly during a time when the indigenous Irish were experiencing a substantial increase in economic stability, industrial development, and immersion in global commerce. What can be concluded from both a theoretical analysis, and an analysis of the films and careers of Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers, is the fact that Irishness still resonates between the relational spheres of both whiteness and blackness. As the examples taken from the discourses surrounding two of Farrell's films, *Hart's War* and *S.W.A.T* illustrate, there is evidence to suggest that Irishness remains variegated within popular culture. However, the degree to which the references to Farrell's black Irishness can be considered legitimate instances of quasi racism, and not just further examples of the way that Irishness has been cannibalized as an ideal "guilt-free" ethnicity, is open to question.

The consideration of Cillian Murphy's role within *Red Eye* may arguably be a more reliable measure in this regard. As the analysis demonstrated, Murphy's suitability for the part of an American terrorist in a post-September 11 context was only acceptable due to the fact that his variegated Irish whiteness resonated as a type of watermark within the text, and enabled him to play a benign terrorist in appearance while at the same time serving to deflect the potential distaste aroused by showing Americans killing Americans. Thus, despite the substantial economic growth and progressive materialization of indigenous Irish society

during the Celtic Tiger period, there is an evident reluctance to relinquish the victim status accrued as a former colony.

In this sense, Celtic Tiger Irishness can be seen to compete in what has been termed the “Oppression Olympics,” a scenario in which different subjective voices get “mired in competitions for the mantle of ‘most oppressed’” (Hancock 250). As we have seen in Woody Allen’s *Match Point*, Chris’ less-than-white identity drives him to murder, in a desperate attempt to retain membership of an upper class British family that is dependent on marital ties, but prohibited by his “black Irish” ethnicity and class. However, from the same perspective, Meyer’s character Joe in the final film considered, *Bend It like Beckham*, would seem to challenge this paradigm by “cooperating” rather than “competing” for victim status. As an “intermediary male,” Joe, in *Bend It like Beckham* is at once a love interest to neutralize the film’s potential lesbian subtext, and, more importantly within the present context, an empathetic supporter for the heroine Jess through their mutual, but independent, experiences of ethnic prejudice. It is possible however to suggest that any such empathy is self-serving, certainly in the case of Meyers as an actor. The fact that his character shows the capacity to empathize with another—that appreciates and respects ethnic differences in a non-divisive way—does not alter the fact that Meyers’ own initial intervention in the film’s narrative attempts to circumnavigate white privilege where Irishness is concerned.

What can be concluded from this chapter then, is the way that in popular culture, historical narratives of Irish subjugation and sovereignty conflate to produce discourses of Celtic Tiger Irishness as both politically black and white in different contexts, and, in terms of cinema, these films demonstrate how Irishness is at once read as different to, but a valued part of, mainstream whiteness. To the extent that Irishness has resonated as a watermark within the film text, it has been to imply various stereotypes which, having been integrated with the discourses of these actors’ star personae, have had the potential to affiliate with, or

reside between, both political blackness and whiteness. Taking these actors as examples then, the next chapter, “Gael Gore” will consider the way that the resilient stereotype of Irish violence constitutes another integral component of Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity in Hollywood cinema.

“GAEL GORE”: HOLLYWOOD REPRESENTATIONS OF IRISH VIOLENCE

In a Macedonian banquet hall, King Philip celebrates his second marriage to the new Macedonian Queen Eurydice. The hall is filled with celebrants. Wine and music are plentiful, and the men, most of whom appear drunk, take their fill of the drink and women on offer. More than a romantic union, the wedding symbolizes a national and political alliance between Greece and Macedonia, an alliance that will ultimately be jeopardized by the events to come, as the king's eldest son, Alexander, insults the bride's father and spurns the new marriage. Despite the chaos that ensues, Alexander refuses Philip's orders to apologize, and proceeds to leave the hall. The king, furious at his son's insolence, grabs a sword and tries to attack Alexander, but flounders drunkenly and lies roaring on the hall floor. Alexander regards his father with disgust, mocks him, and leaves the ruined wedding feast with his supporters.

The scene described above is from the 2004 movie, *Alexander*: co-written and directed by a veteran of Hollywood cinema, Oliver Stone. It is used to introduce this chapter for several reasons, the most pertinent being the fact that the role of Alexander is played by Irish actor, Colin Farrell. But, *Alexander* is also of interest here due to the fact that Farrell, although a star noted for his ability to credibly perform accents other than his own, speaks with a clear Irish accent. The character of Philip, although played by U.S. star Val Kilmer, also speaks with a deliberate and pronounced Irish accent. The majority of Philip's most trusted generals in the film are played by Irish actors, with the remaining officers supplemented by English actors, all of whom speak with Irish accents in a film that recounts the details of the legendary Macedonian prince, and his ambitious attempt to unite all the

known kingdoms beneath a single ruler. *Alexander* demonstrates all the major stereotypes afforded to Irish men, such as alcoholism, Oedipal tension, and pugnacity, and it is cited here to demonstrate how Hollywood in general, and Oliver Stone in particular, has made use of Irishness, Irish actors, and Irish signifiers as a means of communicating male violence in American cinema.

If the above scene would appear to be more in keeping with how Hollywood has typically staged an Irish wedding, rather than a Greek or Macedonian one, such a conscious use of Irishness, even for the allegorical reasons declared by Stone in the case of *Alexander*, is relatively rare in a film not featuring a single Irish, or Irish American, character. However, the pairing of Irishness and anarchic or erratic displays of violence, with, or without, the excessive consumption of alcohol, is not without precedent. But neither is it without historical basis. A propensity for violence is rooted in Ireland's colonial past where, as Martin McLoone has commented, it "was seen as a tragic flaw of the Irish themselves" (*Irish Film* 34). While the specific details of colonization in Ireland cannot be considered general knowledge, popular culture has to a certain degree cannibalized specific historical facts which have subsequently become culturally embedded. As Colin Graham has stated, "Ireland becomes a plenitude of images replicating itself for continual consumption and at times achieving an oversatiation. It is here that the 'Ireland' which is excessive topples into an Ireland of ceaseless reproduction and commodification" (2). Irishness has frequently functioned as shorthand for expressions of anger and physical aggression in male-centred narratives, to the extent that violence often appears as biologically encoded in Irish people, rather than a legitimate response to political conflict.

Such stereotypes take on immense significance, when considering the prominent position of violence in U.S. popular culture, where Hollywood cinema is concerned. As shall be discussed in greater detail later, violence is integral to the composition of American

cinema: Hollywood operates on a commercial imperative that caters primarily (though of course not exclusively) to a young male audience (Kramer 124). Thus, violence and spectacle are routinely prioritized over romance in numerous blockbuster films, so much so, that violence is frequently integral to narrative construction, and, as Marsha Kinder has stated, “Hollywood’s narrative orchestration of violent attractions has reached the point of super NOVA, where violent spectacle is increasingly noisy and explosive, more blatantly stylized and parodic, more wildly humorous and energetic, and more specifically tailored to a male mentality” (76).

But Kinder also reminds us that, “[t]he link between ethnicity and masculine violence is hardly new” (84). With violence acting as an inherent aspect in the structure of U.S. cinema, and so appealing to its audience demographic, a reasoned conclusion points to a correlation between the ethnic stereotype of Irishness and violence, and the popularity of Irish actors in Hollywood. In this respect, Irishness serves a useful purpose in Hollywood films: Irish characters allow for sanctioned expressions of male violence that might otherwise be viewed as sensationalized, or gratuitous displays.

This chapter considers the extent to which, despite Ireland’s post troubles’ and postcolonial present, the Irish actors of the Celtic Tiger period have frequently been cast as violent: in both the films they have starred in and the discourses surrounding their star personae. The chapter begins by addressing the importance of violence to popular constructions of masculinity in the U.S. that became particularly heightened in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This is followed by a consideration of the historical circumstances in Ireland, which have contributed to the ingrained stereotypes of violence that is frequently attributed to Irish males. Cinematic portrayals of Irish violence from both British and U.S. cinema are then dealt with in detail, before the remainder of the chapter analyses how the Irish actors of this study have appeared in films in which their

Irishness is watermarked into their performances, and functions as a shorthand for violent masculinity.

Masculinity and Violence

In an article entitled “Masculinity and Heroism in the Hollywood ‘Blockbuster,’” Richard Sparks considers several of Hollywood’s most popular cinematic genres, with a view to determining if the way films “dignify and celebrate the suffering and striving of their leading men” might provide an insight into the defining qualities of masculinity (348). Sparks begins by discussing the differences between “marked,” and “unmarked,” nouns, with particular reference to the way that certain occupations and roles such as “hero,” “villain,” “cop,” “killer,” “psycho,” “hood,” “private eye,” “con,” and “gangster” explicitly adopt male, rather than female, pronouns (348), and goes on to consider several violent films starring muscular male heroes such as Mel Gibson, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Bruce Willis. Sparks’ is a Professor of Criminology—the academic study of crime and criminals—and as such, his perspective in “Masculinity and Heroism in the Hollywood ‘Blockbuster’” is directed towards that end. But, his study is an appropriate position from which to begin the present discussion: both Sparks’ article, and what will be discussed below, address the way that a capacity for violence is considered to be a fundamental attribute of manliness. In this vein, John Pettegrew discusses American masculinity in terms of a psychological mind-set, a “disposition,” or “pathology” that he traces to two discourses from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the first promoted through myth and the second through “de-evolutionary psychology” (2). He considers masculinity as a performance of specific practices that, in the most basic sense, extend from these two ways of thinking about the position of men in America, and their role in American society, and both are useful to consider further. These discourses relate to the significance of violence in Hollywood cinema,

and by extension, contribute to the degree to which it has been receptive towards narratives pertaining to the Irish “troubles.”

To this extent, Richard Slotkin’s *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (1973) is an illuminating source of reference for discussing violence in terms of American mythology. Slotkin defines myth as “a construction of symbols and values derived from real and imaginary experience and ordered by the imagination according to the deepest needs of the society” (13). He looks to the progenitors of the cowboy—the characters immortalized in early American literature, their confrontation with the land and the aboriginal community, and relates the polarized themes of colonization and integration, violence and reverence, to the efforts of European settlers to establish a referential paradigm of “compelling metaphors” that would encapsulate their arrival in, and confrontation with, the New World (6). According to Slotkin, Puritan immigrants faced a double-bind on attempting to establish themselves within the American wilderness. It was necessary for colonists to prove themselves as European against heathen natives, while also feeling compelled to authenticate a narrative of experience that was distinctively influenced by the physical hardships of an unknown territory (18-21). As Slotkin observes, “[t]he first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of American experience” (5). As well as a venerated text in the area of early American Studies, Slotkin’s *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973) is also, to quote G. J. Barker-Benfield, “fundamentally about men,” and, as such, is of relevance to gender studies in terms of the “ongoing existence of de facto histories of men” (xxxiii). Much like Henry Giroux’s statement that “violence is sutured to primal masculinity” (17), Slotkin’s hypothesis

here conveys the way that an image of man battling the elements of the wilderness, and hardened by the exertion, has been the cornerstone for subsequent ideals of U.S. masculinity.

The second of the discourses referred to above—and which has contributed to a popular perception of men as predisposed towards violent behaviour—is “de-evolutionary psychology,” a branch of evolutionary theory extended from the ideas put forward in Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). Of particular relevance here is Darwin’s discussion of sexual selection, which, as Michael Ruse explains, operates as a “selection that occurs within a species,” and “a function of the fight for mates, coming in two basic forms: selection through male combat and selection through female choice” (14). Derived from the premise of male rivalry in the animal kingdom, and also Victorian stereotypes pertaining to men and women respectively, Darwin’s research had a lasting influence on evolutionary theory in general and masculinity in particular. According to Pettegrew:

In extending Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, current evolutionary psychology makes a sweeping historical argument about why early twenty-first century humans are still working with cave men and women minds. The putative uniformity of cross cultural differences between men’s and women’s mental trait can be explained by the proposition that all human beings are born with a cognitive and emotional makeup adapted from the recurring environmental demands during the 2 million years the species spent as Pleistocene-period hunter-gathers. (4)

In linking particular behaviour patterns to residual instincts from prehistoric civilization, Darwin and Darwinian inspired bio-determinism advance a theory of men as “naturally” aggressive. Thus, Pettegrew’s argument draws attention to the way that discourses pertaining to manliness in popular culture continue to look back towards regressive formations of male behaviour, to the extent that contemporary ideals of masculinity are still seen to require affirmation through physical displays of violence and emotional stoicism:

The interpretive loop between animal and human male psychology culminates in violence, or at least a pre-disposition towards brutality. And yet, de-evolutionary masculinity, I argue has not been limited to a psychotic few but has been a common denominator among men living in the United States. It certainly can be subdued, tempered and rejected—out of hand; but reflexive aggressiveness has been a starting point for many men. It has enjoyed normative psychological status (1).

At a ground level then, masculinity becomes dependent on behaviour and qualities that are firstly, harmful to both men and women, and secondly, unattainable in a context where manual labour is no longer valued to the same extent in American society. Latham Hunter describes a shift “from production (making things) to consumption (making money to go out and buy things)” with the latter traditionally marked as the prerogative of women (74), while Michael Kimmel has also pointed to how there are fewer and fewer opportunities for men to prove their manhood. For the vast majority of men in America, it becomes impossible to achieve mythic definitions of masculinity in a world of ever increasing technological advancement:

American men bought the promise of self-made masculinity, but its foundation has all but eroded. Instead of questioning those ideals, they fall back on those same traditional notions of manhood—physical strength, self-control, power—that defined their fathers’ and their grand-fathers’ eras, as if the solution to their problem were simply “more” masculinity. (218)

Susan Faludi makes similar comments in her book on the American genderscape, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999). For Faludi, the transformation of America from a labour to a market-based economy had major repercussions for American men. Denied the same opportunities as their fathers in a post-World War II society, men responded angrily to the contemporary “ornamental” culture of America in which men were increasingly feminized through consumerism:

By the end of the American Century, every outlet of the consumer world—magazines, ads, movies, sports, music videos—would deliver the message that manhood had become a performance game to be won in the marketplace, not the workplace, and that male anger was now part of the show. An ornamental culture encouraged young men to see surliness, hostility, and violence as expressions of glamour, a way to showcase themselves without being feminized before an otherwise potentially girlish mirror. (37)

In sympathizing with the plight of men, and considering the crises of men and women as casualties of the same image-orientated culture, many supporters of Faludi's earlier book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991) were highly critical of her "taking up the cause of the enemy" in *Stiffed* (Carey). To some readers, Faludi's thesis about male angst overlooked the main difference distinguishing the effects of consumerism on men and women respectively, specifically from the perspective that if society commodified and rendered vacuous the lives of both sexes equally, it was only men who responded by directing their pent up hostility against women: "Contrast men's loss of identity to women's struggles, from domestic violence to sexual harassment, and it seems a little trite" (Davy). Thus critics largely underestimated Faludi's argument which, in the same vein as Michael Kimmel, extends from Judith Butler's classification of gender as a verb, and not a noun (Julie Smith 133). Rather than a designation then, both Faludi and Kimmel draw attention to masculinity as a performance, and relate male violence to the socially enforced codes that are presently unattainable and define men by emotional imperviousness and inimitable physicality.

Popular culture in general, and cinema in particular, operates as a touchstone against which society measures itself, acting as, in Debbie Ging's phrase "a manual on masculinity" ("A 'Manual On Masculinity'?" 29-52). Hunter makes a similar point in her discussion of male crisis where she argues that film, as a cultural practice that is both informed by and informs culture, is also useful as a tool for critical interrogation (71). While numerous genres can be said to contribute, such as the office movie referred to in Hunter's essay, action

cinema in particular is an arena which is most driven to producing idealized versions of masculinity. It is also a genre where success is largely dependent on the spectacle of the violence it portrays.

One of the consequences of ornamental culture that Faludi draws attention to is the use of masculinity as “visual spectacle” that became popular during the 1980s (35). Similarly, Joseph Paul Moser has observed that the numerous channels of popular culture, from advertising to video games, have reinforced a “repressive and dangerous mandate” whereby “violence and domination keep appearing sexier all the time” (2). The male icons of this period were notable for their brawn, and “muscle men,” such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, participated in a culture that presented masculinity as “something to drape over the body, not draw from inner resources; that it is personal not societal; that manhood is displayed, not demonstrated” (Faludi 35). These actors formed part of a tradition within Hollywood cinema during the 1980s with *Rambo: First Blood* (1982), *Terminator* (1984), *Indiana Jones* (1984), *Missing in Action* (1984), and *Die Hard* (1988) being some of the most popular movies to emerge at the time. These films all involved a male protagonist, who tested his mettle against enemy armies, machines, and terrorists, all of which meant exposing his muscular body by various means:

One of the most important features of these films is their portrayal of male bodies. Eighties films gave audiences close-ups of Rambo’s throbbing bicep (though it was admittedly hard to tell what they were at the time), contrived plot opportunities for Chuck Norris to remove his shirt (it always seemed to be hot in the movies where he lived), a naked and powerful Arnold Schwarzenegger lit by the afterglow of a postnuclear future, a Martin Riggs whose entire body was a “lethal weapon” (especially lethal to women—every woman he had sex with got killed), and an astoundingly durable Bruce Willis, whose body withstood broken glass, explosions, beatings, and falls from airplanes to still catch the bad guys. (Jeffords, “The Big Switch” 198)

In this vein, Harvey O'Brien has described action cinema as a cinema of reaction, or, "the cinema of striking back." For O'Brien, the action film is a delicate amalgamation of form and content whereby the hero becomes "heroic through the act of fighting" (2). The action film rests upon resolution through action, which in the case of most action films literally translates into resolution through violence. The hero demonstrates his valour by taking action against an adversary who is a threat to society: "The fact that Rambo 'wins' the war is less important than the fact that he tries to—he acts. In acting, he dramatizes both the inner struggles of himself and the outer struggles of America on the whole in psychically processing the Vietnam experience" (9).

Overall, in the traditional Hollywood action film then, violence is presented positively as a means of resolving crisis, and testifies to the hero's manliness, and this has implications when considering the differences between British, and American, representations of the Irish "troubles." While the popularity of the muscular protagonists of the action genre gave way to more sensitive male types throughout the 1990s, action movies promoted a positive perception of violence, not only as a method of resolution, but also as an appropriate marker of masculinity. The action genre solidified the practice of, what Yvonne Tasker refers to as, "suffering as spectacle," in which the hero's masculinity is proved, and glorified, through his capacity to endure violence and suffering. According to Tasker, "[t]he physical power of figures like Rambo, a power that is marked primarily through the body, is showcased within a narrative which also offers ritualized suffering of the male hero as spectacle" (106).

But, Harvey O'Brien's reference to Vietnam above raises an important point of difference between the traditional hard body films, just referred to, and the U.S. troubles films, discussed below. At a deeper level, the formulae of the hard body genre encode the American defeat in the Vietnam War, and, in this respect, Susan Jeffords refers to "a process of cultural debriding" within film cycles such as Rambo or Missing in Action ("Debriding

Vietnam” 525). Jeffords borrows the term from a medical treatment used for burn victims and injured soldiers, in which a patient is submerged in a whirlpool bath that removes dead and infected tissue from areas of skin damaged by fire (“Debriding Vietnam” 525). The formulae of the hard body films allow for a cathartic regeneration of the (notably white) American male body, following not only the onslaught of an ethnic enemy considered inferior, but also in light of the failure of the U.S. government in overseeing American involvement in the war, and conducting negotiations with their Vietnamese counterparts (“Debriding Vietnam” 526).

While Drew Ayers is right to caution against “drawing a direct correlation between Hollywood and politics (without demonstrating how that correlation is established)” he acknowledges that, when applied metaphorically, Jeffords’ general approach to hard body films is useful for “illuminating the ways in which film, as but one cultural product, may indicate contemporary political trends” (45). In this particular case then, Jeffords’ metaphorical use of debriding here is beneficial as an example of how Hollywood has at times used masculinity as a register for national trauma, insofar as it is possible to interpret the wounded body of U.S. war veterans, and their subsequent resurrection, as a response to a national need to revitalize the American body politic.

In this respect, many scholars have drawn comparisons between the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the Vietnam War, specifically in terms of its effect upon the national psyche and the extent to which the anxiety, debates and trauma of the event have been exercised within post-9/11 cinema. The Twin Towers, embodiments of man’s mastery over the skyline, if not specifically emblems of America’s capitalist wealth, can be thought of as phallic totems (Caputi 2), that were subsequently castrated by the two passenger airplanes which reduced the World Trade centre to rubble. Almost immediately voices from the White House to the *Washington Post* sought refuge by valorizing conservative constructions of white American manhood:

... after 9/11, the government and the media were only too keen to participate in a mythmaking process intended to heal the national psyche. Rather than pose difficult questions, America wrapped itself in a protective blanket of a mythic—and therefore familiar—narrative of manly men and defenceless damsels in distress. (Bjerre 242)

Both gendered and raced, the optics following 9/11 couldn't have been clearer: it was white “manly” men in the form of firefighters and first responders who were hailed as the heroes of the catastrophe, and predominantly white military personnel of high rank in the Bush Administration, as well as the Commander in Chief himself (as we saw in the discussion of *Red Eye*, in the previous chapter), who were looked to to repair U.S. morale, inevitably, by recourse to morally-sanctioned violence.

As much as President Bush and his supporters construed the invasion of Iraq as a “War on Terror” and a battle between Western (read white) righteous Democracy against Arab infidels, films of the following decade mirrored contemporary debates. Like their Vietnam-centred predecessors, cinema screens were dominated by narratives championing or expressing anxiety about, the state of white masculinity, either way, with violence employed as a mode of response.

What can be concluded from all the arguments referred to above is the way that, as Jane Caputi observes, “[o]ne of the most effective ways for men to restore honor and manhood is to deploy violence” (6) and the extent to which “discourse normalises violence to sustain structured hierarchies of desire” (Agathangelou and Ling 519). It is a similar kind of process that Caputi speaks of here which distinguishes American troubles films from their UK counterparts insofar as the former not only “normalises violence” but quasi celebrates it as a kind of restorative impulse. That being said, the correlation between Irishness and violence did not originate in the U.S. As such, the next section will trace the historical processes that shaped the evolution of a trait that began in one country as a justification for a

colonial intervention, and is so often presented as a given in the popular culture of another.

Irishness and Violence

The idea of the Irish as a “simian primitive—a violent and irrational character” was solidified in the nineteenth century, and continues to reverberate in present day discourse (McLoone, *Irish Film* 60). As discussed in the previous chapter, framing the Irish as barbarians derived from the British imperative to represent Ireland as a colony in need of imperial governance. Ireland was constructed as the antithesis of England’s propriety, and the English, according to Kiberd, “presented themselves to the world as controlled, refined and rooted; and so it suited them to find the Irish hot-headed, rude and nomadic, the perfect foil to set off their own virtues” (9).

In terms of the “troubles” specifically, representations of Irish violence have originated, and developed, through two particular formulae. The first, concerns localized images of Irish violence that have come from English, or occasionally Irish sources, and are referred to as “troubles” films. These films take a critical stance against Northern Irish violence, and typically cast the troubles as a consequence of a pathological predisposition of the Irish to violent behaviour. As Colin Coulter has noted, “[t]he conviction that Northern Irish people are the demented charges of atavistic passions has of course been articulated through conveniently crass racist stereotypes that have proved depressingly resilient” (*Contemporary Northern Irish Society* 3). Of the films representing the resurgence of intense political conflict in Northern Ireland from the 1970s to the middle of the 1990s, very few, if any, focus on the political motives concerned, while the “post Troubles” cinema of recent years has continued to contrast Protestant and Catholic in terms of the “rational thinker” against “his volatile, emotional Other” (Barton, “Troubles Cinema” 214). Movies that have

been created as a result of Irish collaboration have tended to take a similar perspective, and to this extent, it has been suggested that Irish film makers have “internalized and reappropriated” those negative images of themselves (Ging, *Men and Masculinities* 131).

The U.S. has been the second source of films relating to the troubles and Irish violence. Removed from the conflict in time and place, these films reject the potential objectivity of distance in favour of finding a new narrative framework to resolve essentially American dramas following the conclusion of the cold war, with *Patriot Games* (1992), *Blown Away* (1994), and *The Devil's Own* (1997) among the most popular examples from the 1990s (McLoone, *Irish Film* 65). In this way, they can be accused of committing, what John Downing and Charles Husband refer to as the “primary fallacy” of externally mediated images of terrorism, “namely the assumption that an everyday shorthand—skin-colour, tribe, nationality, religious sect—conveys a sufficient explanation of the scenario under consideration” (89). These films play out their narratives by, on the one hand, reducing the nuances of political conflict to a limited selection of symbols against which to test particular concepts of American national identity, while on the other, absorbing a diasporic version of Irishness where red-hair, a typically Irish surname, Catholicism, or a Celtic soundtrack are just some of the signifiers which serve as a cultural shorthand and acceptable explanation for the bellicosity of Irish American characters.

Of particular relevance here, then, is the degree to which British, and American, produced images of the Northern Ireland troubles differ from each other, by presenting violence through two contrasting frames of reference: namely, images of violence which either enable or impede the resolution of a narrative crisis. This argument, formulated by John Hill in his chapter in *Cinema and Ireland* (1986), and concluded later in Hill's own *Cinema and Northern Ireland* (2006), speaks to the dynamic of violence presented in either

case, and concerns what Hill describes as “the internal relationship between representations of violence and the conventions of narrative and genre” (“Images of Violence” 151).

According to Hill, the classic film genres of the United States are structurally based upon the execution of violence which “is central to the positivism and dynamism characteristic of American cinema,” and a pronounced discourse of American troubles cinema (151). As shall become apparent, U.S. troubles films have tended towards displays of gratuitous violence, to the extent that the violence on show becomes necessary to evince the hero’s masculinity, and restore the social equilibrium under threat. In direct contrast, however, British produced troubles dramas, being more inherently grounded in the political implications of the troubles, have presented violence as an obstacle to civil accord, or the domestic safety of the characters. According to Hill,

The expression of violence in this respect, is not just less pronounced but also assumes a different complexion. Rather than providing a mechanism for problem resolution, it is violence itself which so often represents the problem—or danger—which the narrative must resolve (especially if the status quo is to be confirmed). The meanings with which acts of violence are invested are the reverse of those found in Hollywood. (152)

Insofar as both British and American interpretations assume a liberal humanist perspective by presenting the troubles as a drama played out between individuals, violence operates at a formal level, which, in the British films, proceeds to break down social order, while, in the U.S. films, violence materializes as sacrificial, purgative, and restorative in determining the measure of the male hero as both victim and victor. What follows is a brief analysis of British and American produced images of Irish violence. These will be considered to outline the themes with which Irishness and violence have been continually associated, and will provide a context against which to examine the contemporary depictions of Irish violence starring the Celtic Tiger actors of this study. Furthermore, they make clear the

distinctions between the cinematic treatment of Irish violence by Britain and America, and Hill's analysis isolates the positive momentum of violence in U.S. cinema, that has implications for the way in which Irish actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been received, and in some cases identified, as embodiments of Irishness and its stereotypes.

British/Irish produced images of Irish Violence

If it is a romantic image of Ireland, as a bucolic fantasy set apart by green fields, dramatic coastlines, and rugged clifftops that has captured the imagination of both Irish emigrants, and tourists, it is the urban, industrialized centre of Belfast, rather than the rural Northern Ireland landscape, which has been most associated with representations of Irish violence. While some conventions of British and Irish troubles cinema altered with the occasioning of the peace process in 1994, there are certain aspects of the films that remained consistent features, and warrant consideration here. These films have tended to lack the political context necessary for viewers to fully appreciate the circumstances pertaining to the extensive violence in Northern Ireland.

From a practical perspective, the ongoing unrest ostensibly prohibited film crews and cast from filming on location in Belfast itself, with the result that other urban centres such as Dublin, Manchester, or Liverpool have been used as surrogates for Belfast, and Northern Ireland, in troubles films such as *Angel* (1982), *Cal* (1984), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), or *Resurrection Man* (1997) (Donnelly 93-5). As a consequence, a substantial number of troubles films from the United Kingdom have lacked the urban industrial features of Belfast to fully contextualize the political situations they dramatize which, as Hill has observed, “reinforced the sense of Belfast as an abstract place of the imagination emptied of specific geographical and physical markers” (*Cinema and Northern Ireland* 213). More specifically, the violence on display appears random, void of political context or motivation, and the result

of a tragic fatalism that is presented as an inherent factor of Irish men. For example, in *Odd Man Out*, the film's hero Johnny (James Mason) is shot and left to wander the streets of Belfast with little hope of survival while similarly, in *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Cal* (1984), both Fergus (Stephen Rea) and Cal (John Lynch) respectively are "gentle" gunmen "unable to escape" their "violent past" (191, 195). This raises a second aspect of British troubles films in need of consideration, namely, the transposition of public, and political trauma, onto the domestic sphere.

While numerous filmmakers have chosen to separate the public and private realms, by contrasting the hostility of the former with the refuge offered by the latter, there has also been a tendency in troubles cinema for violence to impede the narrative resolution, particularly when the dramas in question contain a romantic subplot. As Hill has argued, it is a familiar device in British and Irish troubles films for political violence to frustrate or inhibit romantic desires:

What is significant, then, is not simply that the personal and political are assumed to be separate but that they are also set in opposition. It is romantic love and domestic stability which political violence inevitably damages; and only through an acceptance of love and domesticity that the divisions wrought by violence may be avoided or overcome. ("Images of Violence" 155-6)

Thus, *I See A Dark Stranger* (1946), *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Violent Enemy* (1967), *Angel* (1982), and *Cal* (1984) all contain relationships that become dependent on the assumption, or rejection, of political violence (175-181). Moreover, although films made following the ceasefire reflected the optimism of the period by favouring peace over cyclical violence, they nonetheless reiterated the antagonism dividing romantic love, and political activism. It is for this reason that it becomes incumbent upon Danny (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Maggie (Emily Watson) in *The Boxer* (1997) to flee the stifling environs of Belfast to remain together, while

for Kenny (James Frain) in *Nothing Personal* (1995), his allegiance to the unionist cause comes at the expense of his marriage, and eventually his life.

Although it may not seem surprising that British movies based on the Northern Ireland troubles are typified by pessimism, negativity, and frustrated romantic desires, it is a key characteristic that distinguishes British troubles films from their American counterparts. As Gill Plain describes it, a film industry is “a nationwide, creative and economic enterprise,” and, in this sense, while both the British and American troubles films organize their plots around the same political conflict, each reflects an individual “concept of the nation and the changing prescriptions of masculinity that characterised the period” (3-4). As such, it is on the “positivism and dynamism,” which according to Hill is “characteristic of American cinema” (“Images of Violence” 151) that the following section will now focus its attention, with particular emphasis paid to the way the troubles serve to consolidate a male identity hewn by violence.

U.S. Produced Images of Irish Violence

Politically, the U.S. sustained a very different relationship with the Irish in general, and issues specifically to do with Northern Ireland throughout the 1990s. To this extent, the transition of power in America from Republican to Democrat ensured that greater interest was taken in the prolonged conflict between Britain and Ireland. As Brian McIlroy has shown in *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the Troubles in Northern Ireland* (2001), the fact that the previous presidencies of Reagan and Bush sustained close affiliations with conservative British prime ministers had made both loath to meddle in the issue of Northern Ireland (91). The inauguration of Bill Clinton as president in 1992 meant that the White House kept abreast of Irish political affairs, and the symbolism of this relationship is clearly evident in several U.S. thrillers containing Irish antagonists that emerged during the early 1990s.

According to Helena Vanhala, “the United Kingdom has given the Middle East serious competition as the origin of film terrorists among the annual highest-growing films in the domestic box office from 1980 until September 11, 2001” (205). Of the fifty most successful action films released during the 1990s concerning international terrorism, there were six that Vanhala refers to which included backstories relating to the Northern Ireland troubles: *Passenger 57* (1992), *Patriot Games* (1992), *Blown Away* (1994), *The Jackal* (1997), *The Devil’s Own* (1997), and *Ronin* (1998). Although Vanhala confines her discussion to the most commercially popular Hollywood action films in which American actors play Irish characters, other films which straddle both Irish and U.S. cinema, such as *In the Name of the Father* (1993) or *Some Mother’s Son* (1996), might also be considered in this context. While each of the American films Vanhala refers to contain themes touched upon earlier in regards to British troubles films, it is in their portrayal of violence as a necessary stage in the hero’s development which distinguishes them from their British counterparts. Rather than violence as an impediment to societal values, the U.S. films incorporate violence into their narratives, as testament to the heroism of their male American protagonist.

Of relevance here is Dolf Zillmann’s discussion of “moral monitoring,” the argument that gratuitous violence in cinema is appraised on moral grounds. In this sense a reprehensible act of violence legitimates a comparably violent response from the victim that serves to “override the empathetic inclinations” of the audience (202). According to Zillmann, “justified hatred and the call for punishment allows us to uninhibitedly enjoy punitive action when it materializes. Negative affective dispositions, then, set us free to thoroughly enjoy punitive violence” (202). From this perspective, the absence of any apparent political motivations behind the actions of the Northern Irish terrorists acquires significance, particularly as it is predominantly the hero that the audience is guided to empathise with in these films.

To the extent that it is not permitted in civic life, but is condoned in films as a key narrative motivation, the whole question of revenge is crucial here. In this respect, Jean Ma makes a similar argument to Zillmann, but goes further by privileging vengeance at a formal level, as a “unifying logic” in which the repetition of incursion, and retaliation, propel forward the narrative momentum (49). Ma claims that this is a fundamental element of cinema, “incubating most readily in the crime thriller, horror, western and action drama,” and contravening as it does the moral and legal principle of civil society that disapproves of vengeance as an acceptable restitution of justice (50). Revenge, according to Ma, “can only endanger the rule of law and functioning of a just, humane, and reasonable social order. Viewed in the context of this normative discourse, the seemingly inexhaustible public appetite for fictive vendettas is all the more striking” (50).

Admittedly, an extensive reference to the turbulent history between Britain and Ireland that led to the troubles of the 1990s would be impossible in the space of a two hour narrative, but the U.S. troubles films that Vanhala refers to go to the other extreme, by reducing political motivations of the terrorist to little more than at best a brief backstory, and at worst, a laboured Northern Irish accent. For example, in *Passenger 57*, the terrorist Charles Rane’s (Bruce Payne’s) previous association with the IRA is only sparsely eluded to (Vanhala 205). *Patriot Games* delves further into the past of terrorist Sean Miller (Sean Bean) by linking Miller to a fictional breakaway faction of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), but diverts the attention to Miller’s determination to seek revenge for the death of his brother, and away from any genuine political grievance against British authority in Ireland. Thus, it is vengeance, not political or social reform, that the films present as the underlying logic for the terrorist. The same can be said of *Blown Away* and *A Devil’s Own*, where, in each case, the terrorists are driven by bereavement, for the death of sister and father respectively. Of the two remaining films, *The Jackal* amalgamates the characters of terrorist

and mercenary into one single deadly adversary to be defeated, while Ronin avoids a thorough explanation of the political motive behind the actions of the terrorist Seamus O'Rourke (Jonathan Pryce), beyond his position as an IRA handler. As Vanhala has concluded in *The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films (1980-2001)* (2011), "Hollywood leaves out religion in its portrayals of Northern Ireland terrorism, neglecting the context of the region's struggles between the Catholic Republicans and the Protestant Unionists. The films also fail to explain political ideologies and motivations" (231). By omitting even the most basic history behind the troubles, these six films deploy violence as spectacle, turn revolutionary action into vendettas, and present the elimination of the Irish insurgents as an essential stage in the hero's personal journey, even when the terrorist in question is played by a recognized Hollywood star such as Brad Pitt.

Of further concern here are the films' treatment of the terrorist's psychopathology. As is also often the case with movies involving terrorists from the Middle East, the Irish guerrillas are fanatical to the point of madness. According to Vanhala, realistically speaking insanity would occlude the consideration of these men as terrorists under the definition acknowledged by the U.S. State Department (209). However, in the case of certainly four of the six films she refers to, the mental stability of the Irish/Northern Irish terrorist ranges from highly questionable to conspicuously impaired. In *Passenger 57*, for example, the madness of terrorist Charles Rane is made evident early on in the film when he slams his attorney's head onto a table and insists he repeat the phrase "Charles Rane is not insane" in response to the brief's suggestion to enter an insanity plea at Rane's trial (209). While not to the same extreme, the Irish terrorist of *Patriot Games*, Sean Miller, wages a personal vendetta against Jack Ryan (Harrison Ford) when the planned assassination attempt on the life of a British royal inadvertently leads to the death of Miller's younger brother, and here again the film suggests it is revenge not politics that ultimately motivates Miller. Both insanity and

vengeance are implied in *Blown Away*, where, as Martin McLoone has noted, Tommy Lee Jones' character Ryan Gaerity is the "ultimate psycho republican" (*Irish Film* 66). After escaping from his prison cell in Northern Ireland, Gaerity follows his former protégé, Jimmy Dove (Jeff Bridges), to America, and seeks revenge for both the death of his sister, and Dove's role in his incarceration, by planting bombs around Boston.

Both *The Jackal* and *Ronin* portray terrorists who fail to provide any clear political reasoning behind their destructive behaviour. In the first film, the "Jackal" of the title (Bruce Willis) appears driven in an ambition to defeat the "good" IRA man, Mulqueen (Richard Gere), and, as such, the plot is simplified to a battle of wits between the two men. Similarly, the terrorist Seamus O'Rourke of *Ronin* becomes obsessed with procuring an elusive briefcase due to be auctioned to the Russian mob, for no clearly stated reason except he is "mad" (Vanhala 224-8). The final film discussed from this group, *The Devil's Own*, was the subject of controversy during its release for casting a paragon of American masculinity, Brad Pitt, as the Belfast IRA terrorist Francis "Frankie" McGuire. According to McLoone:

He is probably the screen's most attractive IRA man ever and he is certainly the most smoothly efficient in the tradition of the American hero. In the scene set in contemporary Belfast Frankie, almost single-handedly, takes out "half the fucking British Army" and in New York easily outwits and outguns mere American criminals who attempt to double-cross him in the deal over the missiles. The film's strength as a genre piece is that it sets in conflict two equally attractive American heroes, and in this central drama Ireland is largely irrelevant. As an example of the new villain, Frankie is ambivalent to say the least. (*Irish Film* 66)

As with the earlier films mentioned, *A Devil's Own* clearly demonstrates both the necessity of violence to the narrative resolution, and also, how the troubles of Northern Ireland were appropriated, not to make any particular political point about the British occupation of Ireland, but to temporarily replace the Soviet Union as a foreign threat to American safety at the culmination of the Cold War. In this way, the use of Irish characters at

the particular moment satisfied a niche left vacant in U.S. cinema, where, as Barton has noted, “[m]any of the films made about Northern Ireland ... operate on a generic basis that has little to do with understanding the politics of the Troubles and much to do with finding new turf on which to play out the tensions of the international political thriller” (*Irish National Cinema* 5-6). In direct comparison to the negativity of British troubles films, Hollywood has employed Irish violence, and a particularly volatile form of violent Irish masculinity, as a spectacle to be appreciated in its own right. U.S. troubles films provide clear examples of how Irishness is coalesced with a propensity for violence and, perhaps most importantly, they demonstrate how the elective nature of Irishness in the U.S. has, in recent years, served as a vent to work out expressions of anger, and personal rage, in times of national crises. This has particular relevance when considering how Irish masculinity has been appropriated in the films of the three Irish actors of this study throughout the Celtic Tiger era. While the casting of popular U.S. actors as Irish insurgents, such as the example of Brad Pitt in *The Devil’s Own*, served to glamorize and popularize the notion of violent Irishness, it equally gave way to a context in which Irish characters have become recognized as appropriate mediums through which to communicate authentic representations of violence. Moreover, such a process does not seem to have been confined to a narrative plain where we see a similar process at work in the discourses surrounding the star personae of Irish actors, and in the present case, of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy.

Irishness, Violence and Star Persona

In an essay entitled, “Irishness, Anger and Masculinity in Recent Film and Television,” Diane Negra has examined the “hardening” of Irishness in several post-9/11 movies and television series featuring Irish American male characters (281):

The tough new “rules” of millennial American capitalism are frequently spoken through, or in conjunction with, Irishness. Irishness is worn by the characters in the texts I’ve analyzed as a kind of light camouflage as they manifest an anger that would be less sanctioned if directly articulated as an expression of straightforward Americanness. (294)

Negra confirms her thesis through a series of examples taken from two mid-season television series, *Brotherhood* (2006-2008), and *The Black Donnellys* (2007), and also an analysis of the highly successful 2006 Irish American gangster movie *The Departed*, directed by Martin Scorsese. For Negra, the recourse to Irishness demonstrated in these films reveals a resentment against the “emasculating effects of a hyperconsumerist culture” and a yearning for “identity formulations that can guarantee, simplify and authenticate citizenship” (286-7). The accessory nature of Irishness in these texts allows for expressions of anger that would otherwise be considered gratuitous (294), and for Negra, the citations of Irishness in the media she discusses appear “designed to alleviate stress points in the psychology of contemporary U.S. masculinity” (280).

Negra’s argument here is in many ways a reiteration of one made earlier in *The Irish in U.S.*, (discussed in the previous chapter) regarding the consolatory use of Irishness as a heritage fantasy insofar as she claims that in *The Departed*, “the shattered tribalism displayed in the film is contextualized within a New Economy bereft of traditional social and institutional protections” (292). The difference with Negra’s contention on this occasion is, of course, a post-9/11 context in which, rather than simply employing Irishness as a nostalgic reference point and a way of reliving a pre-lapsarian past, the texts she discusses use Irishness to vent their anger and frustration at the impossibility of such a task. In this way, the characters she discusses find succour in performances of hypermasculinity (287), which, according to Agathangelou and Ling, “reflects a reactionary stance” and “arises when agents

of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity” (519).

However, as Negra is at pains to point out, the texts she discusses appear more committed to the use of “Irishness as an accessory discourse to Americanness” insofar as, the “narratives are marked by the minimal involvement of Irish performers, a fact which suggests their disinterest in a sourced, indigenous Irishness” (280). Negra makes an important point here. But what are the implications of her argument for films concerning indigenous Irish actors? Or to put it another way, is her argument applicable in cases where, in the same period that she discusses, Irish actors have on some occasions played Irish characters, while at other times not?

If ethnicity in general and indigenusness in particular, as it is constructed in star personae, can also be considered part of the “cumulative cultural product” that is the actor, then the fact that the Irishness of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy has been implicated in their portrayal of male characters who display a pathological propensity for violence, offers scope for further consideration. The star personae of Meyers, Farrell, and Murphy circulate in popular culture with an identity that is mediated through past and present stereotypes, which, in this instance, relates to the correlation between Irishness, and violence through a volatility historically ascribed to Irish temperament and behaviour. As Negra herself reminds us in *Off White Hollywood*, star personae must be recognized and acknowledged “as cultural texts in which our understandings of gender, ethnicity and national identity are embedded” (9).

In the case of Cillian Murphy, this image is rooted in the literary phenomena of the Irish Gothic. Luke Gibbons, in *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture* (2004), has discussed how the “Gothic,” which originated as far back as the medieval period in Europe but veered into its more recognizable form during the eighteenth century, “spread into

the recesses of everyday life, giving rise to the phantom public sphere haunted by fear, terror and the dark side of civility,” and, most importantly, merged to articulate the terror of the religious and racial difference of the colonial Irish (10). As Gibbons notes,

It is through the Gothic that race is connected to the paranoid imagination, seeing in every member of a different society or religion a potential source of terror, which is all the more insidious for presenting itself as normal, or availing of the achievements of western society—freedom, market relations, mobility, education, technology. The possibility that these may act as a disguise for barely concealed forces of savagery and destruction is consistently applied to the alien or the immigrant, but is seldom conceded in relation to western modernity itself and the forced march of history. (*Gaelic Gothic* 83-5)

Murphy’s star persona draws on a similar sense of Irish Gothicism referred to above by Gibbons. However, rather than brute strength, subtle features of Murphy’s appearance, such as his pale, often pallid complexion, his rather lean figure, and piercing eyes have frequently been attributed to his Irishness in roles concerning primordially violent, volatile, and changeable characters in films such as *28 Days Later* (2002), *Batman Begins* (2005), *Red Eye* (2005), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006), *Sunshine* (2006), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *Perrier’s Bounty* (2009). In this way, Murphy’s star persona bears much resemblance to that of his predecessor, Gabriel Byrne: “a new vision of the Gothic outsider-hero, a figure who ... found his hour with the advent of the millennium” (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 163).

Farrell’s image, however, while also mediated through his Irishness, is consolidated through his more physical embodiment of the wild Irish Rover, or what Barton describes as his “rebelliousness,” and “spontaneity” (*Acting Irish in Hollywood* 213). Thus, while Murphy’s Irishness is often reaffirmed through his association with indigenous Irish cinema and drama, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, Farrell’s Irishness, by contrast, is consistently reiterated through his public image as a Hollywood “bad boy”

predominantly due to his early reputation as a star with a rampant social life, and given to excessive bouts of drinking. Murphy has often declined to participate in interviews, preferring to separate his private life from his professional career, but Farrell has frequently courted media attention (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 211), and particularly availed of the lucrative currency of Irishness in U.S. popular culture where “he is identified by a freewheeling garrulousness that draws on long-existing associations between Irish acting and the oral tradition. The difference is that this is now seen as being sexy” (219). While this reputation has made accessible roles that sometimes require him to portray a more sensitive, homoerotic sensibility, such as in *A Home at the End of the World* (2004), or the ambiguous sexuality of his character at certain points in *Alexander* (2004), Farrell is more prominently associated with a hardy, physical bravado. This aspect of his star persona has frequently been watermarked into his performance of characters who are required to be physically strong, spontaneous, and energetic, and more often than not violent, such as the combat scenes in *Tigerland* (2000), *Intermission* (2003), *Daredevil* (2003), *S.W.A.T* (2003), *Alexander* (2004), *Miami Vice* (2006), *A New World* (2006), *Shell Shock* (2009), *Total Recall* (2012), or *Dead Man Down* (2013).

Much like Murphy, Jonathan Rhys Meyers’ ability to intimidate does not reside primarily in his physical body, as the discussion of his role in the HBO series *The Tudors* shall demonstrate. Rather, Meyers’ image has emerged and is shaped through a twenty-first century fetishization of Irishness, and, as a male sex symbol, Meyers’ body is often presented as a spectacle. His early acting career was supplemented by male modelling for popular fashion houses such as *Hugo Boss* and *Versace*; however, the publicity surrounding Meyers’ career has tended to fixate on, as we saw in the previous chapter, his problematic Irish upbringing, and also his recurring addictions to alcohol and anti-depressants. The actor has been admitted to rehabilitation clinics for his addiction on at least four occasions throughout

his career to date, and has not yet managed to overcome his tendency for excessive drinking. Any reference to Meyers' childhood has reiterated his expulsion from school for truancy, the abandonment of the O'Keefe family by his biological father, his family's poverty, and also the time Meyers spent in an orphanage. According to Meyers in an interview with *Hello Magazine*, "I got into acting to stay out of jail." In this way, and as we saw in the previous chapter, his life is framed as "erratic" (Kubiak) where the actor has been presented, and has presented himself, as a tragic figure, whose highly photogenic appearance never fully conceals the violence, and antisocial behaviour, of his troubled Irish childhood, and this has been mirrored in, or watermarked into, the numerous beautiful, violent, and tragic characters he has played in *Match Point* (2005), *Elvis: The Early Years* (2005), *The Children of Huang Shi* (2008), *From Paris with Love* (2010), *The Tudors* (2007-10), and *Dracula* (2013-14).

While these three actors mediate their star personae through their very different public "bodies," they are united by the fact that, as Barton puts it, "the current generation of male Irish actors have refashioned that image [of Irishness] to one of dark Byronic romanticism and an aura of sometimes dangerous sexuality concealed behind the beguiling soft tones of the national brogue" (*Acting Irish in Hollywood* 220). Barton's line of reasoning here draws attention to the fact that, where Irishness is concerned, the metrosexual can be aligned with more historical colonial stereotypes of Celticness. For example, L.P. Curtis has argued that,

... of the many pejorative adjectives applied by Educated Englishmen to the Irish perhaps the most damaging, certainly the most persistent, were those which had to do with their alleged unreliability, emotional instability, mental disequilibrium, or dualistic temperament. The stereotypical Irishman was a kind of Celtic Jekyll and Hyde; he oscillated between two extremes of behaviour and mood; he was liable to rush from mirth to despair, tenderness to violence, and loyalty to treachery. The Irish were therefore often treated as an untrustworthy and dishonest people ... It was this distrust and suspicion of the Irish that continued to warp Anglo Irish relations well into the twentieth century (51).

Curtis' observations here draw attention to the way that a fundamental aspect of the contention that the Irish were unfit for self-government in the nineteenth century was argued on the grounds of the supposed instability and "dualistic" temperament of the Celt, a volatile combination of "sentiment and savagery" (Curtis 51), traces of which can be seen being picked up in the interviews, film reviews, and commentaries relating to the careers of Murphy, Farrell, and Meyers. The development of these profiles will be considered in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis, "Sexuality and the City."

Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy each participate in, and operate under the rubric of, Irishness in Hollywood, and have repeatedly been selected to portray violent characters of both Irish, and non-Irish, origin. In this respect, the next section will consider three films: *Daredevil* (2003), *Alexander* (2004), and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006). While generically very different from each other, these three movies all explicitly link Irishness in general, and Irish masculinity in particular, with violence. To this extent, these films hark back to regressive tropes typical of the troubles films discussed above, but they are also films that in various ways and to varying degrees show signs of being, what Terrence McSweeney describes as "bound to the decade in which [they] were made" ("Introduction" 7), namely a post-9/11 context.

***Daredevil* (2003)**

The transition from comic book to film has enabled directors and studios to avail of the benefits of an already existing fan base, and the twenty-first century has seen multiple heroes from graphic comics brought to the big screen with *Batman*, *Superman*, *Spiderman*, and *Ironman* among the most successful to date. However, comic book adaptations are not without their complexities, as filmmakers often find themselves faced with the difficult task of faithfully recreating a convincing image of some of the most unusual characters and

locations. It is within this context that Farrell's role as Bullseye in *Daredevil* must be considered. The character of Bullseye is a boorish mercenary retained by a mobster named The Kingpin, the arch rival of the eponymous hero of the film, to dispose of several characters who threaten his criminal enterprise. The role of a henchman or supervillain is an unusual one, and dissimilar to a lot of the parts that Farrell has played throughout his career. But, what is most striking about this particular character in the present case is the fact that, with Bullseye, Johnson presents a villain whose violence is communicated predominantly through his Irishness.

While directors such as Guillermo del Toro and Christopher Nolan have had success with melodramatic versions of comic-book superheroes, such as *Hellboy* (2004) and *Batman Begins* (2005) (which will be considered below), Mark Steven Johnson was less successful with his representation of the tormented vigilante *Daredevil* (2003). The movie stars Ben Affleck as the title character, whose remaining senses are heightened to superhuman extent when an accident in his childhood involving toxic chemicals leaves him blinded at the age of twelve. The adult alter ego of "Daredevil," Matt Murdock, works as a lawyer by day, while by night he exacts "justice" on criminals who escape conviction through the legal system. *Daredevil*'s arch rival is the business mogul and crime boss Wilson Fisk, or "The Kingpin" (played by Michael Clarke Duncan). As the story develops, The Kingpin hires a thug with meticulous marksman skills called Bullseye (Farrell) to dispose of a rival businessman, Nikolas Natchios (Erik Avari), and the majority of the film consists of a series of combat sequences, the first, a sort of "courting" combat between *Daredevil* and Elektra Natchios (Jennifer Garner) who becomes his love interest, the second, between *Daredevil* and Bullseye, when Murdock tries to protect Natchios, and finally, a battle in which *Daredevil* takes on The Kingpin for himself.

On the one hand then, *Daredevil* amplifies to the extreme a fundamental stereotype of troubles narratives, that is, that of the violent irrational other. Bullseye is a belligerent thug whose Irish ethnicity is inflated and exaggerated to the point of parody and underwrites his action. He is violent, because he is Irish, and revels in it. On the other, Matt Murdock's universe is a nihilistic one that the traditional institutions of law and order have proven incapable of protecting. Daredevil is a vigilante, a citizen made combatant by the evil that has taken control of his city, and as such, compelled to take matters into his own hands. To this extent, the film reiterates discourses of post-9/11 America, namely, one in which the enemy is "demonised into absurd Bond-style villains" and the "moral net" thrown wide" as the hero fights not "out of narrow self-interest, but for a new moral order" (Bunting, "Intolerant Liberalism" 17). Thus, *Daredevil* relies firmly on traditional tropes of Irish violence that are strikingly reminiscent of troubles narratives, but in a way that appears poised to address post-9/11 anxieties.

Of particular interest here is Stephen Boyd's analysis of the film, most specifically his contention that *Daredevil* "steered away from traditional depictions of superheroes based around a focus on distinguishable abilities, and instead primarily focused on distinguishable ethnicities" (314). Boyd bases his argument on the liberties taken with the identities of the original comic book characters: Matt Murdock's Catholicism is taken as a referent for an Irish American background (his closest confidant in the film is a catholic priest), while Elektra, Bullseye, and The Kingpin are marked as Greek American, Irish, and African American respectively. As a result, the narrative moves forward relative to the circulation of power between ethnic groups, and from this perspective, the character of Bullseye takes on particular significance.

Bullseye is introduced in the movie playing darts in an English pub, and the scene immediately sets out to establish the character's ethnicity as Irish with recognizable auditory

cues. The character's Irishness is enhanced, according to Boyd, by the addition of music by the Irish American punk-rock band *House of Pain*, whose antagonistic lyrics reaffirm the character as "an almost unstoppable aggressive force of nature representing a threatening and violent idea of Irishness" (317). Described as a "bloody Irish piece of trash" by his opponent, Bullseye also speaks with an exaggerated Irish accent, which, according to Johnson, was Farrell's own, although the actor has since denied this:

That was Mark Steven Johnson's idea. He said to me, because it was never specified in the comic book where Poindexter/Bullseye was from, so he said, "You can do it in the Irish accent," and I was like, "Fuck yeah, man. Definitely." I mean I even did a stronger Dublin accent than what I have. (with heavy accent) "Did all the Bullseye and all that shite, you know." It was fun to play. (qtd. in Worley)

Given the few lines the character has in the movie, this use or supposed use of Farrell's indigenous accent is worth reflecting on. As Farrell's comment implies, there was no need for the character to be played as Irish in order to remain faithful to the original comic book account. Nor indeed, was it required for Farrell's benefit. The actor has been repeatedly praised for his ability to suppress his native accent, and affect other regional dialects, beginning with what is considered to be his American film debut, *Tigerland* (2000), where he played the male lead as a Texan recruit, Roland Bozz. But even if this had not been the case, Bullseye's brogue was barely warranted. For the most part the character's "dialogue" consists of guttural sounds and grunts to the extent that he comes across as boorish, bestial, and a subhuman counterpart to the superhuman Daredevil (see fig. 8). Bullseye's laboured accent is intended to make his Irishness unequivocal, and make sense of his actions through the use of the stereotype of Irish violence (Boyd 317), but it is important to note that accent is not the only marker of relevance here. As shall become apparent further on, part of the reason that Farrell's portrayal of Bullseye was so well received was due to the fact that critics, and

presumably the audience, recognized him as Irish in the first place, and took pleasure from seeing the actor “playing himself” (G. Franklin).



Figure 8. Colin Farrell in *Daredevil* (2003)

Through both the soundtrack and the character’s brutish actions, Bullseye is depicted as an Irish thug whose bestiality affirms the stereotypical association between Irishness and a predisposition to anarchic violence. The character is a convincing example of the way in which violence is presented as an innate characteristic of Irish masculinity, and to this extent, the ethnic placement allows for sanctioned expressions of violence that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate, but are here normalized through the resilience of the stereotype.

A similar process occurs in Farrell’s next film, *Alexander*, directed by Oliver Stone. By comparison however, *Alexander* received much more attention on its release, most notably due to its failure to impress critics and audiences alike.

***Alexander* (2004)**

With few exceptions, the general consensus amongst reviewers of *Alexander* was that the spectacular failure of Stone’s 2004 epic stemmed from his choice of Farrell as his leading man, alongside a cast of Irish actors; a decision that derived from the director’s conviction

that a strand of Celticness linked the Irish and Macedonian peoples. As has become apparent, it was the recurring reports of Farrell's hedonistic "private" life that had the greatest impact on the viewing public in the early stages of his career. Stone was reportedly made familiar with Farrell's reputation prior to casting, having personally witnessed the star's belligerent behavior when the actor appeared looking "like a Dublin street thug" at the restaurant for their initial meeting (Fierman 27). Defending his decision to afford Irishness such a central position in his film, Stone argued that the deliberate selection of Irish accents over the more "parochial" and "ornate" English syntax was intended to replicate the boisterous demeanor of Celtic men: "Irish to me is a beautiful language, it's got poetry in it and the English would not have been as effective. I think Colin could have easily done English, he has been on British television he could have easily gotten that, but there is something more poetic about Irish ... it's Celtic" (Stone "Commentary by Oliver Stone and Historian Robin Lane Fox").

Stone's motivation behind his casting of Irish actors, and use of Irish accents, operates on an erroneous conflation of "Celticness" and Irishness. While Celtic, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the term, refers to the "epithet of the languages and peoples akin to the ancient Celtic; particularly, of the great branch of the Aryan family of languages which includes Breton, Welsh, Irish, Manx, Scotch Gaelic, the extinct Cornish, and the ancient languages which they represent," Irish is "of or belonging to Ireland or Irish people." Stone's statement regarding Colin Farrell's ability to "do" both the Irish and English language mistakenly presumes that accent and language are interchangeable. Whether or not Farrell used his native accent does not alter the fact that he is speaking English. Both assumptions are examples of how U.S. popular culture has cannibalized Irish history for American popular consumption, and it is this process which I would argue similarly presumes that violence is an inherent characteristic of Irish men.

In this regard, the film is replete with instances in which Alexander conducts himself in a markedly aggressive manner, and Stone relied heavily on the correlation between Farrell's Irishness and violence to convey this facet of Alexander's character. Obvious examples include when Alexander vents his fury upon his general Cassander, played by Jonathan Rhys Meyers, or the manslaughter of Cleitus (Gary Stretch), one of Alexander's oldest allies, after both had consumed copious amounts of wine. In the case of the latter scene, Alexander demonstrates extreme paranoia at Cleitus' allegations of his despotism and illegitimacy, and once accused of patricide, the young king loses all reason, seizes a spear and drives the weapon violently into Cleitus' solar plexus. The entire dispute is powerful in that it reveals how Irishness, alcoholism, violence, and masculinity are conflated by Stone and infused by the use of Irish accents as a marker of Celticness, and these attributes of Irishness are relayed through Farrell's star persona as a specifically "Irish" actor. For his part, Cassander was initially intended to figure as a potential rival to Alexander with the suggestion being made in hindsight that "the part came naturally to Rhys Meyers: he only had to see Farrell hogging the limelight to experience Cassander's envious emotions" (G. McCarthy). Given that Meyers' role as Cassander can be described as "fleeting" (G. McCarthy) at best, the insinuation is debatable. But, it is interesting to note here that just as Stone makes use of Farrell's Irishness, Meyers' Irishness outside of the film is implicated in a similar process insofar as it is implied that, having "endured a difficult upbringing in Dublin and Cork," Meyers has "been a chameleon all his life," and is "vulnerable in his contempt for fellow actors and the movie business" (G. McCarthy). To this extent, both Meyers, and his character, are construed as jealous and duplicitous through his Irishness.

In respect of Stone's use of Farrell's Irish background, the director's comments on the film's climax, the point in the movie in which Alexander's army is set in opposition to the phalanx belonging to the superior Indian forces, are equally telling. The spectacular moment

when Alexander spurs Bucephalus into a suicidal impact with an armoured elephant moves the optics into infra-red footage, and accentuates the carnage of the campaign. According to Robin Lane Fox, the combat is a symbolic transposition of an emotive episode, and, as such, is “historical drama” and “not in any sense historical documentary” (“Commentary by Oliver Stone and Historian Robin Lane Fox”). Stone’s intended concept for the scene was to effect the impression of his hero’s “greatest moment.” What is crucial is how the director depends upon Farrell’s star persona to communicate an urbanized propensity for violence in order to demonstrate Alexander’s ruthless determination to achieve everlasting glory by any means, even self-immolation: “Colin is riding the horse on those stirrups, he became ... he’s an excellent athlete. I can’t tell you everything he picked up on very quick, he’s a scrapper in the Irish tradition of the bar fight. He’s very fast, good with his eyes, and his reflexes, he played soccer” (“Commentary by Oliver Stone and Historian Robin Lane Fox”).

Stone emphasizes how Farrell’s Irishness ethnically armed him with the necessary experience to enact Alexander’s violent and reckless penetration of Porus’ defences. Much like the way *Daredevil* relies on the significance of Irishness within the discourse of Farrell’s star persona to surface as a watermark that is faintly visible within the character he plays, *Alexander* is a further example of a film in which Irishness, and Irish actors of the Celtic Tiger period, have provided a means to communicate violence in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

It is interesting to note, however, that despite the contention *Alexander* was a film in the planning since Stone’s student days at Yale, there was a tendency on the part of reviewers to read his film in terms of contemporary politics, namely, America’s invasion of Iraq following 9/11. In this respect, for many critics it was impossible not to see parallels between the actions of his Macedonian regent and the U.S. president. Of these Anthony Lane’s review of *Alexander* in *The New Yorker* was particularly hostile:

... what a war! Stone, who was in President Bush's class at Yale, uses "Alexander" to offer a strident argument in favor of unilateral aggression against foreign powers, on the ground that—guess what—it's good for 'em. The battle of Gaugamela, in 331 B.C., in which a quarter of a million men, under King Darius III, were put to rout by Alexander with a force of less than fifty thousand, was, in essence, the launch of Operation Persian Freedom.

But while remarks about the seemingly evident comparison between Alexander and Bush abounded— "He slaughters in order to liberate. Sound familiar?"—many commentators acknowledged the likelihood that this was "unintentional" (Ansen 60), particularly given Stone's obvious admiration for the young king, and very vocal distaste for both the sitting president and his policies. For his part, Stone saw any such interpretative similarities as a "facile way of condemning the film" (Stone, *Afterword* 337) and for him, "revenge was never motive enough for Alexander" (345). In this respect, Stone has doggedly argued in favour of seeing Alexander as an ancient visionary rather than an imperialist, for example, by insisting that Alexander's suicidal impact with an elephant in India "is a classic heroic sacrifice, meant to motivate his lagging men into action" (350).

Regardless of which perspective one takes on *Alexander*, there are three aspects of the film that are both largely irrefutable, and of significance where the present thesis is concerned, firstly, that Irishness in general, and Farrell's type of Irishness in particular, was crucial to Stone's vision of Alexander's character: "I love what he [Farrell] did and I think he had the panache and glory - he had that sense of Irish outsidersness and brawniness that the Macedonians did bring to the Greek Empire" (qtd. in Macnab 4). Secondly, that his decision to use Irishness in the film was in order to communicate the violence, where, according to Robin Lane Fox "the accents and the wildness really come in to their own" (Commentary by Oliver Stone and Historian Robin Lane Fox"). And finally that, even if critics did not genuinely "think Stone had turned into a Bush supporter overnight" there is little doubt that

“[i]n Alexander... Oliver Stone is deeply into deifying the Great White Male” (Gonsalves). In this way, with a leading man who Stone claimed “had to have enormous balls to do this and bravado” (Commentary by Oliver Stone and Historian Robin Lane Fox”), it would seem Stone’s *Alexander* aptly responded to “the post-9/11 enthusiasm for old-fashioned masculinity and heroism” (Tickner 342) and of course, regressive performances of violence.

The third film that will be discussed in this section in relation to violence is the 2006 troubles film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* by Ken Loach. Like *Alexander*, Loach’s film also caused some controversy on its release. In this instance, criticism was voiced against the movie not so much due to its sensitive subject matter—the Irish War of Independence and Civil War—as on account of the “Marxist, anti-imperialist” politics of its British director, and although the film does actively engage with the stereotype of the Irish as violent it is in such a way as to interrogate it through a “radical” interpretation of Irish history (qtd. in Ó Drisceoil, 5).

***The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006)**

The Wind That Shakes the Barley begins four years following the 1916 Rising, and concentrates on the occupation of Ireland by British soldiers, and the subsequent formation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) flying columns. Here, Murphy plays Damien O’Donovan, a recently qualified doctor who, at the opening of the movie, is preparing to leave Ireland after being offered a new position at a London hospital. On witnessing two incidents of British brutality, one against a seventeen year old neighbour who is beaten to death for refusing to say his name in English, the other against a driver who denies some British soldiers carriage on a train, Damien decides to turn down his job offer, remains in Ireland and, with the encouragement of his elder brother Teddy (Pádraic Delaney), becomes an active member of the IRA.

In keeping with the generic template of earlier troubles films, violence saturates *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*. In this respect there are several important scenes which are worth addressing, to the extent that they speak directly to the characterization of the Irish themselves as violent in the film. The first is relatively minor but marks the first coordinated strike in retaliation by the newly formed column, and involves an arms raid on a Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) barracks. But this is performed more with excessive force than violence as men are taken from their beds, and lined against the wall at gunpoint, and left unharmed. The raid is followed by the fatal shooting of four Black and Tan soldiers as they meet in the back room of a local pub, and eventually progresses to a massacre of British troops when the column ambushes several transport vehicles later in the film.

However, of all the violence carried out by the Irish in the film, it is Damien's execution of the young farm labourer, Chris Reilly (John Crean), himself a member of the IRA, which carries the most dramatic weight. Chris informs on the whereabouts of the column when the landlord he works for threatens the lives of his mother, and sister. The scene is incredibly poignant: Damien has known Chris since he was a boy. The youth is no more than sixteen at the time of his execution, and he is described as "only a young fella" and "one of our own" by the other men.

Insofar as the execution of Chris can be considered defining within the narrative logic of the film, it is also the scene which proves to separate *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* from previous troubles films. As discussed earlier, John Hill, in *Cinema and Ireland*, referred to the common traits that consistently appeared in films made by British and American directors on Ireland and the troubles, and one of the key issues raised by Hill as regards these films was their tendency to express the violent activity in "terms of individual deviance and not in terms of its quite possibly rational, social and political objectives" ("Images of Violence" 167).

As Hill rightly draws attention to, the focus on the personal at the expense of the political created the impression of the Irish as lacking “the standards of reason and order characteristic of a modern and ‘civilised’ society” (147). This argument notwithstanding however, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* can be seen as a contemporary reformulation or re-engagement with the resilient colonial stereotype equating Irishness to violence: it takes on board much of the familiar traits of such characterizations at a surface level, but by running them through a different, and more complex, set of motivations and principles, ends up interrogating these set-pieces and ethnic stereotypes.

In this way, Loach’s film calls to mind Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the nation as an “imagined political community” in the sense of a “horizontal comradeship” (6-7). While Loach decided against including historical figureheads who participated in the Rising “the towering figure of [James] Connolly casts a constant shadow” most notably through the character of Dan, a fellow guerrilla, former train driver, and fervent union representative (Ó Drisceoil 6). Both the factual and fictional characters assume significance here to the degree that Dan, and Connolly through him, represent a socialist strand of republicanism that is frequently ignored in interpretations of the troubles (6). Played by Liam Cunningham, it is his comradeship with Dan, more than the bond he shares with Teddy, or his love for the Cumann na mBan member, Sinead (Orla Fitzgerald), that impacts Damien the most within the film. From Dan, Damien comes to form his own convictions which ultimately move him to sacrifice human life, including his own, for his ideals. With Chris’ death on his hands, it is as a result of Damien’s commitment to this “horizontal comradeship” described by Anderson—a bond based on class and national fealty—that he is finally willing to sacrifice himself and his loyalty to his brother by blood Teddy, who takes a prominent local position in the partitioned Free State.

In this respect, Damien encapsulates the argument that “[d]ying for one’s country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur ... from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure” (Anderson 148). For Damien, he has “crossed a line” with Chris’ murder, and the event signals the escalation of his socialist principles leading him to reject the peace treaty signed by Collins, and ratified by the Irish people. Despite his brother’s pleading, and his condemnation from the pulpit by the parish priest, Damien remains steadfast, and the movie culminates with his execution by Free State soldiers for refusing to reveal the location of arms intended for use by the IRA.

Coming in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and being released the same year as the 90th Anniversary of the 1916 Rising, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* employs a different dynamic to the earlier troubles films discussed. It belongs to an era seeking to recover “lost memories of the revolutionary past,” in such a way that engages with the conditions of the present (M. McCarthy 362). Rather than simply embellishing violence against violence, Loach’s film draws attention to the violence within violence, substituting simplistic binaries of English against Irish or Protestant against Catholic with Irish against Irish and brother against brother, and laying bare the underside and inner complexities of revolutionary nationalism. Thus, if Loach’s film can be accused of reiterating a well-worn stereotype, it is to contextualize and load it with the social motivation, and ideological meaning, that was conspicuously absent from earlier approaches to the troubles.

Whether or not the three films discussed above were overall deemed to be a success or failure, it is worth noting that the violence of the characters did not diminish the popularity of the young Irish actors concerned. Colin Farrell’s multiple experiences playing violent characters, Irish and otherwise, have only served to augment his profile, and despite the, at times, politically incorrect violence of Bullseye in *Daredevil*, and indeed the critical contempt towards *Daredevil* in general, the role was far from detrimental to Farrell’s stardom. Critics

were highly positive about Farrell's performance, and, for many it was, as the review from the online movie site darkhorizons.com would suggest, one of the only redeeming features of the film. As mentioned above, the reviewer's comments also allude to the way that it is Farrell's signature type of Irishness, rather than a generic concept, that features as a watermark within the film, and made the characterization of Bullseye so particularly appealing:

"So what does this movie have going for it? Two words, Colin Farrell. The man plays a somewhat insane playful Irishman (ie. He's playing himself and is a deliciously 43 over the top and morbidly dark villain who just seems to be having a ball. Every moment he's on screen the man rules it ..." (G. Franklin).

This review is indicative of others concerning Farrell's performance as *Bullseye*, where for many critics "[t]he mood brightens when Colin Farrell appears as the maniacal villain Bullseye, who likes to kill his victims with tiny objects such as pencils, playing cards and paperclips" (Moses). Similarly, while it is true that Farrell's performance in *Alexander* was criticised (with particularly acerbic remarks directed towards his wigged appearance), his popularity was in no respect diminished by the failure of the film. Indeed most reports criticized Oliver Stone's overall concept, and argued that "the only one that Mr. Stone finally must answer to is himself" (Dargis). Farrell continued to be selected by directors for films such as *The New World* and *Miami Vice*. It is perhaps fairer to surmise then, that it was not so much Farrell's Irishness that was the problem with *Alexander*, but Stone's decision to make a feature of it to the point of fabricating the accents of other actors.

In the case of Murphy, his career has been founded on compelling portrayals in disturbing, and violent films, such as *Disco Pigs* (2001), *Batman Begins* (2005), and *Red-Eye* (2005). But reviews of *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* would suggest that responses to Murphy's performance were very much affected by the extent to which critics concurred with

Loach's interpretation of Irish and British history. In this respect, there was a tendency in the reviews of *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* to give simplistic readings of the film by ignoring Loach's careful attention to the complex issues at stake for the Irish of the time, and refusing to see beyond hackneyed stereotypes of Irish violence. In an article entitled "Fighting Mad," Kyle Smith of the *New York Post* described Loach's film as a "Brit-bashing historical drama" that "raises hard questions about Ireland's uncanny ability to kneecap itself" (43). Indeed, it is also worth noting that, much like in the case of *Alexander*, for some it was all too tempting to view the film through the prism of the contemporary "War on Terror." As Smith later goes on to comment, "[y]ou'll mull the idea of Iraq as the new Ireland, a freed animal that starts to devour itself, as Damien becomes a case study of what it means to be a patriot—or fanatic." He concludes by summarizing the movie in three words: "Boiling Irish Stew."

For Steven Rea of *The Inquirer*, "[t]here's a sad, jolting irony in the portrait of Murphy's Damien: a man who has sworn an oath to save lives, now training to take them." Rea refers to "the stony intent in Murphy's eyes," and describes the transformation of the "ordinary folk" to "savvy militia" with "violence and death rooted down into their souls." Many critics comment upon Damien's descent into radicalism, and describe him as "fanatical" (Elliot), and a "fervent socialist willing to do anything, no matter how unpleasant or morally questionable, to further the cause" (Bell).

By and large, these reviews suggest that responses took one of two approaches to the film, namely, they either showed a reluctance to go beyond a surface interpretation in terms of violence, or a tendency to view the character of Damien as nothing more than a mouthpiece for Loach's political perspective, which many critics took exception to.

Thus the reviews of all three films indicate the kind of responses that have been generated in reaction to the violent performances of the Irish actors in question, and for the remainder of the present chapter, it is useful to consider similar instances of violence, particularly, as they manifest in non-Irish characters. Both *Batman Begins* (2005), and *The Tudors* (2007-10), depend upon a portrayal of violence that emerges as an innate characteristic of the characters in question: the villainous Dr Jonathan Crane, and the notorious British monarch Henry VIII. Moreover, there is reason to conclude that this representation of violence as inherent is reinforced in the discourses surrounding both roles by the way that the Irishness of Murphy and Meyers is watermarked into their performances, or the way that Irishness is, to employ Christopher Holliday's expression, "abstracted: a spectre that looms large over the performance of Americanness [and Britishness] as it is conveyed on-screen" (74).

***Batman Begins* (2005)**

The paralytic potential of fear to govern everyday life lies at the centre of Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins*. It is the young Bruce Wayne's intense fear of bats that inadvertently brings about the murder of his parents, and it is a fear-inducing tocsin which very nearly causes the people of Gotham to destroy each other in a panic-driven state at the film's conclusion. As the duplicitous Ducard informs his pupil, Wayne, early on in the film: "To conquer fear, you must become fear. You must bask in the fear of other men. And men fear most what they cannot see." The task for the novice superhero Wayne, then, is to not only master his combat skills, but to train his mind to rid itself of phobia, and use his strength to "turn fear against those who prey on the fearful." Wayne's immediate adversary in *Batman Begins* is a psychiatrist, Dr Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy), who, under the alias "Scarecrow," creates a psychotropic drug that magnifies fear to the point of insanity once ingested. Crane originally works at the behest of a local mobster, Carmine Falcone (Tom

Wilkinson), but turns against the crime boss when Falcone threatens to reveal how Crane has been providing false testimonies for criminals, who have paid substantially to exchange a lengthy prison sentence for a brief period in Arkham Asylum, on being declared insane.

Fear is an important concept in *Batman Begins* then where the film pits the physically strong against the psychologically manipulative. To this end, Christian Bale reinvented his body by gaining a significant amount of weight between his role as Trevor Reznik in *The Machinist* (2004), and *Batman* in 2005 (Morales), and the film readily makes use of opportunities to exhibit Bale's toned body with intensive fighting sequences, and scenes showing him working out, "swimming" (fraternizing with two Swedish models who proceed to bathe in the fountain of an exclusive Gotham hotel), and dressing. By contrast, Murphy's character has been referred to as the "skinny shrink" by reviewers of the film (Travers), Murphy himself being of slight, thin, build, and with the addition of the bulbous sack-cloth "mask," the actor's body appears scrawny alongside the towering presence of the ergonomic Bat suit.

Most readings of *Batman Begins* have interpreted its use of fear as a commentary on post-9/11 America, or, what Andrew Schopp describes as, the way in which "fear threatens to function as a means of social and political control" (260). From this perspective, Ra's Al Ghul's (Ken Watanabe/Liam Neeson) extremist agenda to cleanse Gotham of corruption by obliterating a vast proportion of the population has been compared to, on the one hand, the religious zealotry of Osama Bin Laden, or on the other, President George W. Bush's manipulation of fear to justify his administration's "War on Terror." Applied to Murphy's character, fear, or its manipulation, surfaces as a form of psychological warfare, that "aims at isolating the individual from the group, to break up a society into so many frightened individuals, hiding in their homes and unable to go about their daily lives as citizens, employees, and family members" (Ganor 40).

Crane remarks upon the sense of strength he feels as the head of a psychiatric institution in which “the mind can grant you power.” His ability to terrify in *Batman Begins*, rests on his understanding of human fear, chemical warfare, and the amoral desire to use this body of knowledge to terrorise the people of Gotham. Thus, it is Crane’s mind, rather than his muscularity, which poses the greatest threat, and in this respect the critical assessment of his performance takes an interesting perspective for two reasons: firstly, the suggestion that Murphy himself possessed some unique aspect that resulted in his casting as the manipulative villain, Scarecrow, in Nolan’s film, and secondly, the repeated attempts to ground this “otherworldly” (Clarke C12) quality in some sort of physical characteristic.

Murphy came to Nolan’s attention when auditioning for the part of *Batman*, along with five other potential candidates including Bale (Didcock). For his part Nolan has repeatedly stated in interview that he was fascinated by Murphy’s eyes during his audition, to a point where he “kept trying to invent excuses for him to take his glasses off in close-ups” (qtd. in Itzkoff, 46) (see fig. 9, 10, and 11). According to the director, “[t]hey share a quiet exterior, but when you look at Cillian, you can see there are much more interesting things going on underneath” (46). The statement is quoted as part of an interview with the entertainment magazine *Spin*, and to the extent that the remark gives no indication of who is included alongside Murphy as part of “they,” the context of the comment is unclear. If, as is most likely, by “they” Nolan is drawing a comparison between Murphy and his character, what we can see in these comments is an attempt to construe the characterization as innate on Murphy’s part.

One of the most consistent aspects of Murphy’s career to date has been the repeated reference by reviewers, critics, and in this case directors, to the striking blue colour of the actor’s eyes, and, as the Nolan quotation suggests, there has been a tendency in these comments to frame this aspect of Murphy’s appearance as enigmatic, and related to his

ability to portray evil or violent characters convincingly. For instance, a 2005 article on *Batman Begins* in *The Seattle Times* entitled “American Creep? Actor Plays the Part” referred to Murphy’s “chameleon-like acting career,” and stated that “Murphy’s boyish, slightly otherworldly looks and strangely translucent blue eyes make Crane (and other Murphy characters) seem oddly dangerous” (Keogh), while other titles included “More Than Just a Cold-Hearted Villain” and claimed that Murphy’s “translucent blue eyes enable his persona to morph into an authentic cold-hearted villain in the space of seconds” (Manelis).

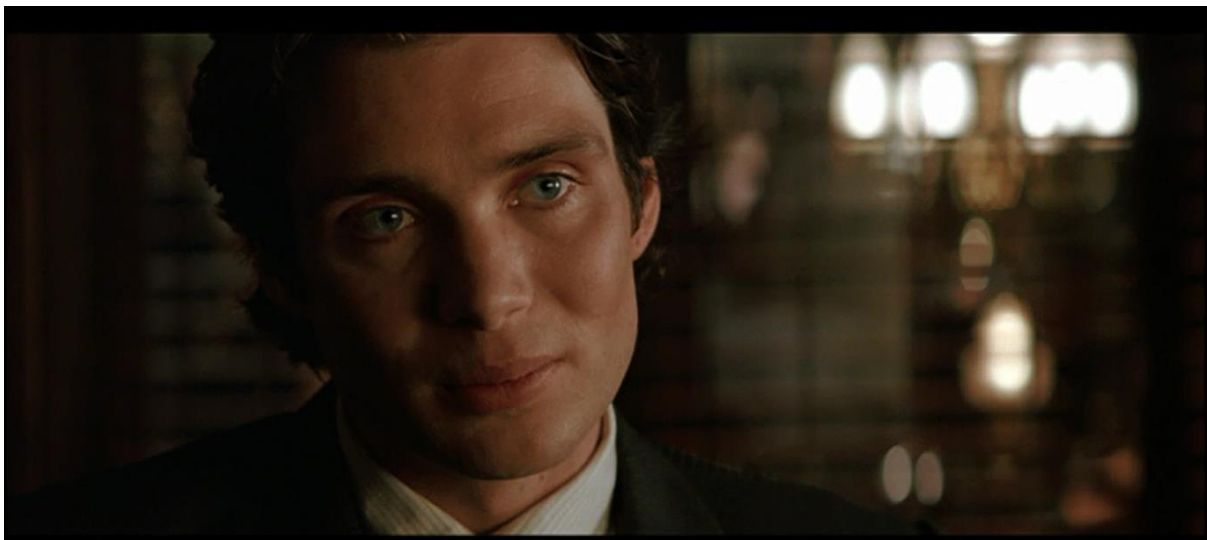


Figure 9. Cillian Murphy in *Batman Begins* (2005)



Figure 10. Cillian Murphy in *Batman Begins* (2005)



Figure 11. Cillian Murphy in *Batman Begins* (2005)

These repeated references would support the suggestion that Murphy's suitability for villainous roles, such as Scarecrow, was believed to derive from an innate quality he possessed. Admittedly there is nothing specifically Irish about blue eyes, however, the repeated reference demonstrates an attempt by reviewers and directors alike to find some tangible marker as evidence of an inner suitability for the part. As has become apparent throughout this chapter, locating violence and/or volatility as innate and emanating from a kind of psychotic metrosexual male tinged with residues of Irishness is a particularly striking and recurrent feature of the discourses surrounding Meyers, Murphy, and Farrell.

To the degree then, that contemporary attempts to bring comic book characters to the big screen, portray "a darker side of the 'superhero' mythos" and "the moral complexity and ambiguity of our own society," it is reflective of not only a superpower struggling to come to terms with its own mortality, but also an entertainment industry trying to find a medium with the capacity to express previously unthinkable forms of violence (Johnson 952). Moreover, the fact that the capacity to terrify and the uncanny aspects of Murphy's performance in *Batman Begins* is spoken of as innate, but not one-dimensional, suggests a new way of

linking Irishness, and violence, in the post troubles Celtic Tiger period. A similar use of violence, history, Irishness, and star persona is visible in the final example under discussion, *The Tudors* (2007-10), which offers an interesting case study due to the selection of an Irish actor, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, for the part of the notorious English sovereign Henry VIII.

***The Tudors* (2007-10)**

Lingering in popular memory as one of history's most violent men, Henry Tudor was infamous for marrying and executing multiple wives in succession while severing all religious ties between England and Papal Rome. On being approached by the popular U.S. Network *Showtime* to create a period soap-opera based on the Tudor dynasty, writer Michael Hirst agreed, on condition that he could rewrite Henry VIII, not so much by altering the tyrant's character, but by seriously reinventing his appearance:

I pitched Henry as young, glamorous, athletic, sexy ... etc., king because I was fed up of his English iconic version as a fat, bearded monster with a vast ego and vaster sexual appetite. Holbein's tyrant! He had everything! He was in fact a keen intelligence—and for me there was nothing more fascinating or sexy than getting him involved in the big political and religious issues of his day. (Hirst, *It's Good To Be King* xii)

It is true that the motivation to dramatize the Tudor reign is not surprising in itself. The scandalous reputation of the historical Henry VIII alone was both bizarre and outrageous enough to fuel the serialization the network desired. What is noteworthy, however, is that of all the talented and popular British (or even American) actors available, Hirst selected Irish actor, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, to render his interpretation of history:

An actor had to come along who could not only play him, but embody him. It's ironic, given the rough history between our nations that the man in question is an Irishman! But Jonathan Rhys Meyers, as an actor, easily transcends parochial borders. Indeed it was this refusal to accept limitations of any kind that connected him with the young king. And Jonathan recognized this, just as he instinctually recognised that Henry's love for his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, was never totally destroyed by his tearing passion for his second, Anne Boleyn. Such deep emotional attachments are not

necessarily guided by the script but have to be felt in the performance. (Hirst, *It's Good To Be King* xiv)

The “rough history” that Hirst refers to concerns a religious and territorial conflict that has had major consequences for both Irish and English people. In casting Meyers as Henry VIII, Hirst was not only altering a popular perception of a notorious icon in English history, but was also undermining four centuries of sectarian conflict for which that icon was responsible. With this in mind, it is useful where this thesis is concerned to isolate the kind of violent character that Meyers plays, and determine to what extent the actor’s ethnicity and star persona intersect with the Henry VIII of Hirst’s series. By considering examples from the series, it is possible to try to understand the reasoning behind Hirst’s decision to communicate the dark and inauspicious side of the English monarchic past through the commodifiable body of one of Ireland’s latest sex symbols.

When compared with previous dramatizations of Henry VIII, what made Hirst’s concept of Henry exceptional was the fact that, due to Meyers’ rather lean build, he fails to cut an intimidating figure. One of the most recognizable images of Henry VIII was the portrait created by the sixteenth century artist Hans Holbein, which portrays the king as a man of thickset build with a bearded face characterized by a broad nose and heavy-jowls. It was imperative that Hirst presented a credible Henry VIII with a capacity to threaten, if not in appearance, then with his menacing personality, and from the beginning of the series, Meyers’ Henry displays a volatile temper when events fail to go his way. For example, Henry is so outraged when defeated by the king of France in the wrestling match that he threatens to renege on signing the treaty uniting their two countries, until Thomas More (Jeremy Northam) intervenes to try and calm the situation: “All right. If you want the world to think that the king of England is easily changeable, shallow, intemperate, incapable of keeping his

word—then, of course I’ll go and tell them. After all, I am merely Your Majesty’s humble servant” (Hirst 109).

While Henry does go through with the peace agreement, a violent tantrum before departing France reveals him to possess exactly those faults that More has accused him of, and Henry makes plans to negotiate with Spain almost immediately on returning to England. Given the thorough description in Hirst’s final shooting script of the scene, it is informative to quote at length:

HENRY stands alone in his beautiful apartment, holding the Gospels in his hand. A long beat, then he hurls the book across the chambers, smashing something. Then seizing an ornamental axe from the wall, he starts to destroy the apartment. Because everything is so flimsy (the walls made of canvas and only painted to look like brick), it is easier for him to wreak havoc. He tears the illusion to bits, his cold fury so great and terrifying as he hacks about him that no servant or groom dares approach. They back off, disappear ... while HENRY grunts with concentration, destroying the dream (See fig. 12 and 13). (111)



Figure 12. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *The Tudors* (2007-10)



Figure 13. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *The Tudors* (2007-10)

As the scene demonstrates, Henry's ego frequently causes him to react in a volatile manner when denied what he wants, or is diminished in pride by a rival or peer. For instance, before challenging Brandon to arm-wrestle for his place in court in Episode Six, Henry forces Brandon, who remains his closest friend until his death, to kneel and beg forgiveness. Similarly, on an earlier occasion in Episode Four, Henry reacts violently when accused of "raving like a strumpet in a tantrum" in a pamphlet by the ecumenical reformer, Martin Luther for damning Luther and his cause (Hirst 209) provoking Henry to fling a plate across the room, while declaring that Luther "ought to be burned" (Hirst 210).

Equally revealing are the particularly cruel methods that Henry employs when dealing with those who displease him, for example, in the execution of Lord Buckingham (Steven Waddington) in Episode Two. Buckingham believes that he is the rightful successor to the English throne, and is sentenced to death once he is discovered plotting against Henry. Notwithstanding the way in which the series contains detailed scenes conveying the brutality of execution methods in Tudor England, the fact that Henry places a carriage clock in Buckingham's room on the eve of his execution, containing the inscription "with humble,

true heart,” is particularly meaningful in the context of the episode (Hirst 131). The clock was a gift from Buckingham to Henry the previous Christmas, and the placement reveals Henry’s spiteful attempt to rile the Lord over and above the fatal sentence he has imposed. Similarly, in Episode Ten, the king lulls Cardinal Wolsey (Sam Neill) into a false sense of security before removing his seal of office, and confiscating his property. Wolsey is subjected to several humiliations, and the scene in which Henry rides off leaving Wolsey begging for the king is particularly affecting. Even in the case of his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (Maria Doyle Kennedy), Henry is so incensed at the queen’s refusal to acquiesce to his wishes that he threatens to separate her from Mary (Bláthnaid McKeown), their daughter and only surviving child together, and the incident stands as another example of how Henry’s character is presented as one capable of dealing cruelly with those who displease him.

It should be acknowledged that the facts surrounding the actions of the historical Henry VIII reveal serious examples of violence, as in the execution of two of Henry’s wives, and his decision to seize the assets and subdue the occupants of Catholic monasteries in England. The occasions cited—although examples of an unstable temper—are not comparable to such severely violent deeds for which the historical figure is most infamous, but they are relevant when taking Hirst’s portrayal into account. No amount of creative license on Hirst’s part could extend to altering such documented facts as the beheading of Anne Boleyn, but how Hirst stages the way that Henry responds to less serious events, such as his defeat by Francis or Brandon, or the insult by Luther, does indicate the kind of volatile man that Hirst wished to portray, namely, a king whose fury manifested itself in his unstable temper, rather than in physical displays of prowess, and was seemingly not lost on those reviewing the film:

To fully enjoy *The Tudors*, you will have to be willing to look past some historical inaccuracies. Jonathan Rhys Meyers is far too spry and buff for Henry, but what he lacks in heft, he makes up for in volatility and animal magnetism. He may be inappropriate, but he's boisterously, enjoyably inappropriate—and considering the time you'll be spending with him, that's a fair bargain (Bianco 13D).

Thus while the series was dogged by debate from critics and historians alike that Hirst's drama took too many liberties with its portrayal of the life of Henry VIII, virtually all were in agreement about the thematic impulses driving the series: sex and violence. In this respect, descriptions of the historical drama included "naked frolicking and dramatic violence" (Zeitchik 13), "at least two sex scenes per episode" and "violence galore" (C. Scott), and a "10-part epic, full of violence and bared skin" (Shales CO1). As a result, if there was concern that *The Tudors* would succumb to the same fate as Showtime's previous investment in historical drama, *Rome* (which lasted only two seasons before being dropped by the network), the following and enthusiasm for the notorious monarch that averaged about 3 million viewers per episode by 2010 (Levine 4) would corroborate the claim that "Americans, especially, can't get enough of" Henry VIII, or indeed Meyers' portrayal of him as "the ultimate self-absorbed blowhard, deteriorating from youthful beauty and grace into declining health and mounting megalomania, culminating in murderous malevolence" (Puente 1D).

In this respect, if critics, such as Maria Puente in *USA Today*, raised the question as to "why are we Tudor junkies" (1D) is it possible to find an answer in the fact that, whatever else it may have done, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 did not seem to diminish the American public's interest in violent narratives, where, as noted by Terrence McSweeney, even American cinema itself "refused to forgo depictions of violence" (*The 'War on Terror'* 81). To be sure, by 2006, Americans were already becoming intimately familiar with political violence and the actions of a reckless ruler in the form of President Bush as a "King of Pain,"

(Krugman 27), “a commander-in-chief” with “near dictatorial power to wage war” (Taylor 25) and an “imperial presidency” (qtd. in Roberts, 2). In this light it is admittedly tempting to find similarities between the Bush’s “creeping presidential autocracy” (Taylor 26) and Hirst’s observation that “All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, which is what happens to Henry” (quoted in Kronke, U2).

Ultimately however, if Hirst himself has likened his Henry to any other personage, it has not been George W. Bush but Citizen Foster Kane of Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*, where for Hirst, “Henry’s a bit like that. I can imagine Jonny in seasons to come to be a frightening figure” (quoted in Kronke, U2). In this way, I would argue that the overriding impression of Hirst’s monarch as a volatile despot was more connected to Henry’s own legacy in general, and Meyers’ characterization of him in particular, where, for critics such as Tom Shales of *The Washington Post*

Rhys Meyers, a versatile Irish actor (he played Elvis in a CBS miniseries and starred in the films “Match Point” and “Bend it Like Beckham”) has a smoldering [sic] presence. He makes Henry complex and commanding, passionate in the pursuit of power, fame and sexual conquests.”

With his lean figure, effeminate appearance and Irish nationality, the casting of Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII challenged contemporary expectations of the series, or any previous representations of the notorious English king. The casting reveals certain interesting points regarding the uses of Irishness in popular culture, and also the meanings attached to Irishness, and Irish masculinity, in popular discourse. In presenting egocentric motives behind historical events, Hirst created a character with a penchant for warfare as a means of solving personal conflicts, particularly when taking into account the fact that Meyers’ body does not strike an intimidating figure in the series. This suggests that Hirst’s intention for the character was a man whose ferocity was communicated through his volatile personality: a personality that Hirst claimed Meyers’ “instinctively” possessed.

Hirst's Henry VIII may not be played "Irish," but the fact that Meyers was specifically selected to portray him does suggest an attempt to harness some aspect of Meyers' character which distinguished him from other eligible British actors who were perhaps more ethnically suitable for the role. According to Meyers,

They saw something in me that they liked in their Henry. They wanted the fresh, youthful, impetuousness to this Henry that makes him do the things that he does and to create something that was quite different to anything that had been seen before. Barring the physical, you know? My Henry is not Keith Richard's or Richard Burton's or Ray Winston's—it's mine. ("Becoming Henry VIII")

Conclusion

To conclude, the films and star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy are illustrative of how colonial stereotypes concerning Irishness and violence continue to reverberate in ways that adhere to traditional and localized representations of the troubles, while also intersecting with paradigms of Hollywood narrative structure. Much like the British troubles films, representations of (either past or present) violent acts by Irish characters avoid addressing the political circumstances that motivated such violent responses to begin with. Hollywood films present violence as a necessary evil by making masculinity and heroism contingent on "suffering as spectacle," and the films discussed show not only how Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have been used to portray violent Irish characters, but also the various ways that violence has been incorporated into their star personae through their Irishness. Thus, if ethnicity, or ethnic stereotypes, can be considered part of what Rachel Adams describes as "the iconography and legendry built up around the media creation" (8) that is the star, non-Irish characters have also been implicated in this process, where, as in the two examples discussed, both Meyers and Murphy's star personae were watermarked onto their roles as Henry VIII and the Scarecrow respectively.

Despite the fact that in *Daredevil*, Bullseye brutally kills the love interest of the hero, and at one stage silently murders an elderly woman sitting beside him on the airplane with a paperclip, the characterization of Bullseye through a sort of exaggerated caricature of Irishness trivializes his actions, making them a source of humor in Johnson's film. In much the same way that scandalized accounts of Farrell's drunken behavior was spoken of through his Irishness in his early career, Stone's use of Irishness in *Alexander* made Farrell's recognition as a specifically Irish actor, and the historical violence between Ireland and Britain, a key lens through which to view the life of the titular king.

However, the actions of Murphy's character Damien in *The Wind That Shakes the Barely*, suggests that film interpretations—rather than relying solely on pre-established paradigms—offer the potential to interrogate them in what might be seen as a self-conscious way. In this sense, Loach's careful characterization of Damien as a man whose socialist ideals are stronger than fraternal loyalty, was inevitably read as fanaticism once Damien shoots a sixteen year old boy in the head for being persuaded to put his own family before the Republican cause, but the "fanaticism" itself is placed in a wider, more nuanced—and hence more tragic—context.

While Cillian Murphy has managed to retain a professional image by avoiding any unnecessary media attention, the critical response to his role as Scarecrow in *Batman Begins* is one example of the repeated attempts that have been made throughout his career to frame Murphy's successful portrayals of psychologically unscrupulous characters as an innate and enigmatic quality within the actor himself, linking his ability to terrorize to a concrete physical attribute, such as his eyes. Thus, Murphy's role in *Batman Begins* can be compared to Jonathan Rhys Meyers' representation of Henry VIII in Hirst's television series *The Tudors*, to the degree that, while the character may not be Irish, the casting and portrayal owe much to Meyers' personal history and star persona.

It is Meyers' own reputation for behaving disorderly when drunk or under the influence of substance abuse that is frequently alluded to, but in such a way that draws attention to his Irishness. If his Irishness is not flagged as being an overt aspect in his casting, it is consistently referred to with descriptions such as "the Irish stud from the Tudors" (Sheffield 30), "one of Ireland's best known actors" (Pogatchnik) or by drawing attention to Meyer's "hard scrabble boyhood in County Cork" (Guthrie).

Insofar as stereotypes, like star personae, can be considered mobile and mutable, what these examples illustrate is how ideas about Irishness and violence are influenced, and adapted, by changing constructions of masculinity. Irish actors have been recognized as embodying individual, but related, characteristics of Irishness, and the popularity of these actors can be attributed to the currency of Irishness in the U.S. during the Celtic Tiger period. In this respect, it is the difference between Celtic Tiger Irishness, and earlier representations of Irishness, that shall occupy the focus of the following chapter.

FATHERS, SONS, AND IRISH MASCULINITY

Breakfast on Pluto (2005) directed by Neil Jordan, and based on the novel of the same name by Patrick McCabe, tells the story of Patrick Braden, a young Irish boy abandoned as a baby by his mother on the doorstep of the parochial house of the priest who fathered him. Patrick is fostered out to a local woman, and the film traces his attempts to be reunited with his birthmother who left Cavan to form a new life in London. From the opening credits it is apparent that Patrick, played by Cillian Murphy, is no ordinary Irish boy growing up in 1960s Ireland. Despite ill treatment by a foster mother, and the sectarian troubles that increasingly impinge on Patrick's life, he remains optimistic by using his imagination to recreate his identity and the world around him. Patrick renames himself "Kitten" and dresses in women's clothing, and her subversion of her name, dress, and sexuality place her at odds with the surrounding community. This behaviour—examples include requesting information about a sex change during a school retreat or pestering Irwin, a militant republican, for a pink uniform during an IRA march—is performed to humorous effect throughout the movie. But it is also through this identity that Patrick, as Kitten, rejects the "traditional" notion of Irish masculinity as inarticulate and impervious to emotion and sexual expression, the behaviours which have prevented her biological father, Father Liam (Liam Neeson), from publicly acknowledging his love for both Kitten and Kitten's mother, Eily (Eva Birthistle).

Set in the historically turbulent years of the Northern Ireland troubles, the 1960s and 70s, *Breakfast on Pluto* was well received by critics and audiences in both Ireland and in the U.S. at the time of its release. The movie epitomizes the particular Oedipal complexities that have typically been associated with Irish fathers and their sons, namely, the son's struggle to disassociate himself from the, often ineffective or stunted, masculinity of the father. In this respect, the theme of fathers and sons has been connected with Irishness for two related

reasons. Firstly, tension between Irish fathers and their sons has largely been understood as reflecting the despondency of one generation with another following centuries of colonial oppression. Secondly, and related to this, representations of fathers and sons in Irish literature and film have tended to operate as a metaphor for the nation state.

This chapter will consider fatherhood in two ways: firstly, in regards to the representation of fathers and sons as a biological and/or emotional relationship between a man and his male offspring, and secondly, in terms of generational inheritance as it applies to Irish stardom, in particular the shift from one generation of male Irish actors from the late 1980s and early 1990s to the present generation of younger Irish actors, who came to the fore during Ireland's Celtic Tiger period. That is not to suggest that Irish actors from the 1980s do not continue to enjoy some currency within Hollywood. Rather than being inhibited by their age, veteran actors such as Liam Neeson have capitalized on the new arena of male identities presently available in popular culture to positive effect in their later acting careers. As shall be discussed in greater detail below, fatherhood—in the form of postfeminist paternity—has become an effectual subject position in mainstream cinema that has brought about a diversification of the roles available for older actors, and furthered potentially flagging careers. That being said, the rejuvenating potential of postfeminist paternity is restrained by the fact that these men no longer fulfil the criteria of ideal masculinity in terms of youth, in the sense that “youthfulness,” as Gabriela Spector-Mersel has remarked, is “a major trait of the Western ‘perfect body’” (70).

But *Breakfast on Pluto* reveals more about the era of its creation than that of its setting. Jordan's film promotes a more progressive attitude to sexuality to the extent that Kitten resists complicity with hegemonic formations of Irish masculinity. In this way, Kitten embraces what Debbie Ging describes elsewhere as “the feminine within, as an enabling and progressive force which affords sons the space to be creative and emotional and to reject the

oppressive aspects of traditional masculinity” (*Men and Masculinities* 90). It is this performance of a masculinity which fashions new hegemonic paradigms of the male that distinguishes the Celtic Tiger actors of this study, such as Cillian Murphy, from Irish actors of the previous decade such as Liam Neeson or—age-wise—Brendan Gleeson or Stephen Rea, who also play characters in *Breakfast on Pluto*. Thus, the film is used to open the present discussion as it epitomizes the arguments that will be tested throughout the following chapter.

Whether in Hollywood or Irish cinema, narratives of filial succession have tended to bespeak historical or social upheaval. The films starring Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Cillian Murphy that will later be referred to address the—more often than not—conflicted transition of one generation to another through a filter of masculinity, where fathers and sons serve as standard bearers for competing ideologies. The present argument intends to track the way that Irishness and Irish masculinity came to register a break from the past during the Celtic Tiger period by looking, firstly, at the way that two generations of Irish actors were cast in four Irish films, *In Bruges* (2008), *Perrier’s Bounty* (2009), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005) and *Michael Collins* (1996), as characters who, although not always positioned along a paternal and filial axis, relate to each other in a way that illustrates a generational rupture, or a division, in how these men engage with the world around them, that comes about as a result of the conditions of a particular historical moment. R.F. Foster’s work on the pre-revolutionary period in Irish history, 1890-1923, is valuable in this respect for providing a historical context to generational crisis, and will be discussed in detail. Secondly, the chapter will look at the extent to which this pattern of Irish generational conflict re-emerges beyond Irish cinema, namely, in the cinemas of Britain and America, in *Bend It like Beckham* (2002) and *Alexander* (2004) respectively. What we shall see is that Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity, as characterized by the three Irish actors studied in this thesis, is differentiated in

positive terms, where there is an onus upon the young male characters of these films to choose an alternative perspective or life course to the example set by the paternal figures in their lives.

Whether in Irish, British or American cinema, the films discussed below frame the transition of one generation of Irish actors to another, and it is the meanings attached to both groups, particularly the more recent troupe of stars, Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Cillian Murphy, which this chapter will examine at length. In this respect, the chapter puts forward the argument that it is the actors themselves, insofar as their star personae are associated with different forms of Irishness, who are recognized as breaking from stereotypes attached to traditional Irish masculinity. We see this most explicitly below in the cases of Farrell and Meyers where there is a conscious effort in the discourses surrounding their film performances to draw connections between the actors' "private" lives, and the fictional characters they portray. It is in respect of these instances that the argument put forward throughout this thesis—that the particular kind of Irishness which forms the substance of these actors' star persona always lingers as a watermark throughout their film performances—becomes most apparent. The final section of this chapter then, will consider films in which these three Celtic Tiger Irish actors are cast as progressive father figures who deviate from the established paradigms of reserved, withdrawn, or emotionally and sexually repressed Irish fatherhood, by providing a positive role-model and/or successfully sheltering the children within their care from neglect or endangerment. Hannah Hamad's study of cinema paternity will inform some of the arguments that will be put forward throughout this chapter, and, as the final film in particular will illustrate, fatherhood has also made available new scripts of masculinity for younger actors such as Colin Farrell. In the case of the Irish actors in question, the tensions between new and traditional forms of Irishness are worked out

in dialogue with global trends where they are subsumed within a wider narrative focus on fatherhood in Hollywood cinema.

In keeping with more general trends of Irish emigration to the United States in the past two centuries, numerous Irish actors have sought and achieved recognition in Hollywood. Ruth Barton's study *Acting Irish in Hollywood* (2006) for example, has examined the careers of ten Irish stars dating back to the 1930s, including Barry Fitzgerald, George Brent, Maureen O' Sullivan, Constance Smith, and (of direct relevance to this discussion) Colin Farrell, while Áine O'Connor has concentrated on leading Irish players of the 1990s including Patrick Bergin and Aidan Quinn, in her collection of interviews, *Leading Hollywood* (1996). In the present case, a comparison with earlier Irish actors must, by necessity, be limited. The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, as the focus of this study is to assess the discourses associated with Irish masculinity during the Celtic Tiger period, it is appropriate to restrict consideration of films to those released within this approximately ten year period. Secondly, and related to this, the present chapter shall focus specifically on films in which Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy have performed alongside Irish actors of the previous decade, most notably, Liam Neeson, Brendan Gleeson, and, to a lesser extent, Gabriel Byrne. This is due to the fact that analysing actors of the previous generation provides a means of establishing contrasts and comparisons to highlight the differences affecting representations of Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity on the screen.

Generational Difference and Irishness

As what constitutes a generation has been variously interpreted (Vincent 580), it is necessary to begin with some cursory clarifications. Widespread use of the term "generation" alludes to "the succession of parents by children" whereby popular culture conceptualises the human lifespan in terms of three distinct phases: youth, middle age, and maturity, while within academia, usage has been specific to the discipline in question (580). With this in

mind, the discussion to follow takes heed of both popular and academic use. It recognizes that the actors in question—Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers on the one hand, and Liam Neeson, Gabriel Byrne, and Brendan Gleeson on the other—have been distinguished along generational lines when appearing alongside each other in film, to the extent that they are cast in filial and paternal roles respectively. But this chapter also considers a generation as a cohort or “a set of people born at the same time” (580), in this case the Celtic Tiger. To this extent, history and also location are important factors. While the Celtic Tiger was notable as an era of excessive consumption and its attendant pleasures, the period, grounded in a specific location, nonetheless functions much like a trauma in terms of generational experience insofar as it provides a fulcrum around which memories pivot (Edmunds and Turner 572).

R.F. Foster’s *Vivid Faces* is a useful reference point for the discussion to follow. Considering the “revolutionary generation in Ireland” from the years 1890 to 1923, he positions his book as a preliminary foray into the absence of studies of generational tensions and conflict, addressing this vacuum by analysing the letters, diaries, and political writings of a cohort of militant young men and women from the period. Foster defines a generation based on the premise of a division or break from past ideology, and distrust in official authority which, in terms of his study, is played out in the form of the revolutionary politics that led to the Rising in 1916, and culminated in the Civil War of 1922-3. He links the revolutionary mentality of this collection of radical figures who both supported and participated in the Rising to a youth culture informed by theatre, politics, and inspired by insurrectionary movements across the globe, providing what Eugenio F. Biagini describes as, “a window onto ‘the culture of pre-revolution’” (127).

Foster’s perspective displays the influence of Karl Mannheim’s essay, “The Problem of Generations” where Mannheim defines a generation as a collective whose consciousness

of the world corresponds with other individuals who are located at a similar point of history, and are informed by the same experiences. According to Mannheim, “[t]he fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of location; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data, etc., and especially that these experiences impinge on a similarly ‘stratified’ consciousness” (297). Foster’s approach, then, is to trace “the motivations that propelled a dedicated minority into revolutionary attitudes” (*Vivid Faces* xvi-xvii) to their origins in popular and political culture as well as at the level of private and public life that include “education, journalism, agit-prop theatre, relations with their families and each other, and the dramas of their personal lives” (xxi). In what is marked out as a pre-revolutionary period from 1890-1916, it can be seen that “enough people—especially young people—changed their minds about political possibilities to bring about a revolution against the old order, which included not only government by Britain but the constitutional nationalism of the previous generation” (xv-xvi).

Key to Foster’s argument then, is tracking the development of this revolutionary mentality amongst a cohort of young people, who came of age at a specific moment in Irish history, in an effort to establish how a revolution is “not born, but made” (7). In the many newspapers, pamphlets, plays, novels, and letters that they wrote, the confederacies, marriages, and friendships that they formed, the arming, conspiring, and rebellion that they engaged in, Foster traces how a particular generation of youth responded to the socio-political context they grew up in. He frames this reaction as one brought about by intense frustration that the militant response of their parents’ generation had brought with it forbearance towards British rule, rather than revolt against it. In this respect, the prospect of Home Rule—a system of government in which Ireland would have an independent parliament but would ultimately remain a part of Britain—took on symbolic importance as an insult to the

revolutionaries and martyrs of previous generations who had fought for national independence. The response of these young adults was one of historical reclamation, one that drew inspiration from the past in an effort to prevent the future from taking on the stultifying complacency they saw as defining the Anglicized Ireland of the present: “By the turn of the century the policies put in place by the British government, and apparently to be continued by its Home Rule spin-off, would—in the minds of the young idealists—impose a materialistic, Anglophone, unspiritual, provincial identity on the island as a whole” (329).

Thus Foster’s particular line of investigation is informative in the present case, not so much due to the way he positions generational conflict in terms of political discord, but as it was played out in both the private/domestic and public/political sphere. The grievances of the young people he considers not only lay with British presence in Ireland, but with the complacency of their parents’ generation towards British authority:

In an earlier era Ivan Turgenev wrote *Fathers and Sons*, reflecting on the way radicalization happened within the family as well as in society at large. Thirty years on, a cohort of people emerged in Ireland who, like Basarov in that novel were determined to destabilize the worlds they were born into: believing, like their contemporary Jose Ortega y Gasset in early twentieth-century Spain, that they were a generation “without fathers in the spiritual order,” whose duty was to create a transformative sensibility in the minds of their contemporaries. (xxiii)

Foster is not alone in reducing national struggles such as the 1916 rebellion to a clash of generations, nor is such an approach unique to historiography: cinema in particular is a medium that has frequently been noted for its use of the family unit as metonymic for the nation (Barton, *Jim Sheridan* 77). Irish films of the past several decades have been intensely character driven and, more often than not, male-centred, and to this extent, many critics have interpreted the Oedipal scenarios that have been prevalent within them in terms of national trauma. Oedipal dramas are by no means the preserve of Irish cinema. But as we shall see by briefly considering several Irish films from the 1990s, they have often been interpreted as

cyphers for events particular to Irish history, and draw from an existing archive of tropes within Irish literature. While none of the films in question star the Irish actors who are central to this thesis, they are important insofar as they constitute a reservoir of images, figures, and roles that have become synonymous with Irish masculinity. The next section then, will examine this representational paradigm of the ineffective or absent Irish father, and his dysfunctional relationship with his son, in greater detail.

Oedipal Anxiety, Catholicism and Irish Cinema

The Greek tragedy of Oedipus Rex, the ancient King who murdered his father and married his mother, was used by Freud to explain the comparable filial relationships unconsciously present between children and their parents. Within this process the male figure moves from a state of adolescence to maturity by union with his (female) other. The transition is completed only following the severance of the son's ties to his mother, identification with his father, and subsequent selection of his own sexual partner (Hayward 286). A crisis of masculinity occurs within the narrative structure if the paternal figure is in some way impaired, damaged, or absent, so as to provide an inadequate role-model for the son, hence resulting in the son's failure to assume his own role as a patriarch (240).

This emotional structure is not confined to the private sphere, but, in Irish and Hollywood cinemas (and other national cinemas), has looked to the family as a microcosm of the nation state. In Irish cinema in particular, Oedipal dramas have been read as analogous to the country's particular political, social, and familial circumstances. As Debbie Ging has pointed out, a preoccupation with father-son relationships has origins in the earlier creative output of Irish writers and dramatists (*Men and Masculinities* 81), a phenomenon that Declan Kiberd has explained in terms of Ireland's former position as a British colony. Kiberd has contended that in colonial contexts such as Ireland's, Irish fathers were depicted as

ineffective due to their compliance with an external order, in this case, the English crown. Kiberd takes his lead from the model put forward by Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* where Memmi applies his own experiences of the French occupation of Algiers into a working hypothesis about colonization. Memmi's conclusions regarding the impact of colonization on succeeding generations are of relevance here, as they bear on male experience. Memmi describes both the first generation or "father's" gradual internalization of, and apathy towards, his subjugation, and the desire, but ultimate failure of the son, to move beyond the limitations of a colonized identity, and the emasculation that was a result (143).

In an Irish context, rebellion of the son against the father has been interpreted as synonymous with revolt against the occupier, and inevitably proved futile due to the lack of authority afforded to Irish men in social or political affairs (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 381). Inadequate Irish father figures begot equally impotent sons to the extent that the only option available, "is for the son, thus emasculated, to take the place of the weak and ineffectual father" (381). According to Kiberd, "[t]he classic texts of the Irish renaissance read like oblique meditations on this theme" (381).

Gerardine Meaney makes a similar observation by arguing that parricide has been decisive as a leitmotif "defining a specifically Irish literature" ("The Sons of Cuchulainn" 242) insofar as the drama and prose of some of Ireland's most prolific writers has acutely reflected the extent to which "the failures of Irish history have been one of a failed patriarchy" (255). Meaney traces the origins of the Oedipal complex, that Kiberd refers to in the writing of James Joyce and John Millington Synge, back to W. B. Yeats' *On Baile's* itself an adaptation of Augusta Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*, to illustrate the way that fiction and myth become analogous to history within canonical Irish texts. In this respect, the death of Conlaoch at the hands of his father, Cuchulainn—a legendary figure from Irish

Celtic mythology who turns to pound the waves in grief following the filicide—prophetically prefigures the failures of Irish nationalism. According to Meaney, “Cuchulainn’s misguided battle with his son becomes a recurrent paradigm of the impossibility of a national, civil society—that is, one that can bequeath posterity to a new generation” (243).

The arguments of Meaney and Kiberd then, go some way towards explaining the similarly bleak portrayal of father-son relationships in Irish cinema. Much like how Meaney carries her discussion of Oedipal themes at the heart of Irish modernist literature into twentieth century Irish cinema in Johnny Gogan’s *The Last Bus Home* (1997), Ruth Barton, in *Irish National Cinema*, also draws attention to the prevalence of the figure of the failed patriarch in Irish film. Jim Sheridan’s 1990 film version of the classic play *The Field*, written by J.B. Keane in 1965 for example, depicts a land struggle which is raised to tragic status, and in which the fatal actions of farmer Bull McCabe (Richard Harris) have been regarded as an ominous statement about Irish history, and the patriarchal culture that it bequeathed to future generations.

It is McCabe’s obsession with the land he rents which ultimately drives him, albeit inadvertently, to bring about the death of his sons. Bull’s elder son, Seamie, committed suicide at the age of thirteen on learning from his father that the income generated by working the “field” of the film’s title was only sufficient to financially support one of the brothers in adulthood. The suicide haunts Bull McCabe, who becomes fixated on purchasing the land for his surviving son, Tadgh (Sean Bean), when it comes up for auction. Such is the extent of Bull’s obsession that he murders Peter (Tom Berenger), a returned immigrant from America who outbids him for the field. After coming to terms with the gravity of his actions, Bull descends into madness and drives his cattle off a cliff, ignorant of the fact that his son is caught up in the stampede and falls to his death along with the frenzied herd.

For Dermot Cavanagh, the field of the film's title takes on allegorical status as a symbol of Irish soil, that is, "the romantic-nationalist conception of the soil, its identity with the nation, its ownership by the people, its priority over all administrative and commercial systems that transform it into land ..." (qtd. in Cavanagh 95). In this regard, the field bears the weight of Irish history, and the losses of land and life brought about by the Irish Famine. Equally, as Ruth Barton argues, the field, and the planned development of it by the American businessman, symbolizes "Ireland as a historically contested space, the 'real' Ireland, located in the Celtic West and threatened by hostile modernity (the Yank)" (*Jim Sheridan* 46).

But to the extent that *The Field* recognizes Ireland's historical losses then, they are shown to be brought about by the "failed patriarchy" that Meaney mentions above, and it is in this way that the film condenses the failures of Irish history into a narrative of patriarchal, filial, and Oedipal crisis. It is through the figure of Bull McCabe that *The Field* is experienced, and, as the film's "moral center" (Cavanagh 96) he is as much a symbol as the field he goes to desperate lengths to possess. In Bull it is possible to see an impotent patriarchal culture, one that "turns men into monsters" and in which fathers and sons are caught in an endless cycle of violence (Barton, *Jim Sheridan* 56). In this way, the film "draws on a range of archetypes from other fictional representations of Ireland" (Barton, *Jim Sheridan* 55) where "the younger generation of *The Field* must all die as a result of the tyrannical father figure" (57). Reminiscent of Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*, referred to above, the closing scenes in which Bull thrashes the waves away from his dead son's body offer one of the most poignant depictions of paternal failure in Irish cinema, and is illustrative of how Oedipal crises have been linked to totalizing narratives of Irish historical experience.

The 1992 production *Into the West*, directed by Mike Newell, and also written by Sheridan, is a further case in point. It is absent the tragic conclusion of *The Field*, but *Into the West* similarly recounts a narrative of a deficient father figure, and, its fantastical elements

notwithstanding, has been widely interpreted as a social commentary on Ireland past and present, most notably, the position of Travellers and, what Jim MacLaughlin describes as “their radical exclusion from contemporary Irish society” (417). Once welcomed within rural Irish society for a specific skillset that made them integral to rural communities, relations between Travellers and settled people have more recently been characterized by hostility, and anti-Traveller prejudice. To this extent, “material disadvantage has been one key and ever present feature of Traveller life” (Mulcahy 311) in modern Irish society. It is this “historical legacy of hostility and antagonism” (313) that marks the opening of *Into the West*. The film stars Gabriel Byrne as the widowed Traveller “Papa” John Riley, an alcoholic parent of two young sons Tito (Rúaidhrí Conroy) and Ossie (Ciarán Fitzgerald). Papa Riley moves his family away from their ties to the Travelling community and into a desolate tower block in Dublin’s city centre, spends his dole money on alcohol, and severely neglects his sons. It is only when the two boys discover the reincarnation of their mother, Máire, in the form of a white horse, and take off to become cowboys in the “Wild West” of Ireland, that Riley is forced to soberly confront the trauma of his past. With the aid of the Traveller tracker Kathleen (Ellen Barkin), Papa Riley reconnects with his Traveller origins, and succeeds in reuniting with his sons as they are about to be arrested for horse theft. In a climactic ending reminiscent of *The Field*, Papa Riley looks on impotently as the horse carries his youngest son Ossie into the ocean in an effort to flee capture by the Gardaí dispatched to return the animal to its unscrupulous owner. Much like Bull McCabe, Papa Riley thrashes against the sea in a desperate attempt to reach the body of his son, but it is the spirit (in what appears to be a literal sense) of the boys’ mother who saves Ossie from drowning.

In a similar way to *The Field*, *Into the West* also dramatizes the figure of the ineffective Irish father, albeit with a more redemptive ending. For Barton, the film uses the family to symbolic effect whereby the “foregrounding of family narratives invites a parallel

reading of family and nation” (*Jim Sheridan* 124) with Ireland as the nation in question. Unlike some of the films we shall see in the next chapter, *Into the West* presents a very bleak and negative vision of Ireland’s capital city. The Dublin where Papa Reilly has chosen to rear his family as a widower disconnects Ossie and Tito from a maternal presence: both the spirit of their Traveller mother Máire, and the Celtic West that links them to their Traveller heritage. Thus, while it is possible to view the film’s idealization of the west of Ireland as an effort to make it more commercially attractive to foreign audiences in general, and Irish American audiences in particular, the journey from city to country has also been aligned with the unification of the family, in which paternal failure is only remedied by the maternal nurturing mythically associated with the authentic Ireland of the Western seaboard. According to Ruth Barton, “[t]he broken family emerges as the broken nation, divided by violence, recoupable, in this instance, through a fantasy of the all-caring mother” (*Jim Sheridan* 124).

If another film, *In the Name of the Father* (1993) would seem to offer an interpretation of Irish society based on factual, rather than mythological, narratives from Ireland’s past, the film has also been noted for refracting the events through a prism of male experience, in this case, the relationships of Gerry Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis) with the paternal figures in his life: his biological “good” father Giuseppe (Pete Postlethwaite), and the “bad” father figure offered by the IRA leader, Joe Mc Andrew (Don Baker), in prison. *In the Name of the Father* is a compelling dramatization of the real-life false conviction of the Guilford Four for IRA offences in 1974, and, unlike *Into the West*, was directed by Sheridan. The film caused much controversy during the time of its release due to the political tensions still in existence in Northern Ireland. But for many, *In the Name of the Father* was political only due to the use of the family as “metonymic for the nation” (*Jim Sheridan* 77), and part

of the criticism levelled against the film at the time was its prioritization of the father-son relationship over the specifics of British and Irish politics (*Jim Sheridan 71*). For Barton,

The rejection of the bad father for the pacifist is also an ideological trajectory, the point where Gerry abandons his (misplaced, the film suggests) admiration of IRA tactics. Gerry's other symbolic father, police officer Dixon, is an unremittingly evil character. . . . The film's rejection of Dixon as a father figure for Conlon, which he might well have become in a standard police drama is not just an oedipal one but a political statement: a denial of British authority and, in a secondary manner of its reinforcement through the official media. (*Jim Sheridan 75*)

Lance Pettitt claims that to criticize *In the Name of the Father* based on several factual inaccuracies that occur throughout it is to miss the point of a film that, he argues, "imaginatively focused on a redeemed father-son conflict and the implications of this as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland" (259). An important element that both Pettitt and Barton pick up on here is the film's sympathetic treatment of the central father figure, Giuseppe, and, to this extent, it is the son, rather than the father, who bears the brunt of emotional repression. It is this alternative configuration of the Oedipal scenario that differentiates the film from much of the Irish fiction mentioned so far, but the distinction has also been interpreted as a reflection on the society of the time: on this occasion, the cease-fire currently in place in Northern Ireland between opposing paramilitary forces. In this respect, Fidelma Farley has argued that Gerry's decision to use language, in the sense of letter-writing and legal strategy "echoes the same trajectory followed by republicanism during the Peace Process" (206).

The final Irish film in need of mention here is Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997), based on the novel of the same name written by Patrick McCabe. The film centres on the mischievous, but tragic, figure of Francie Brady, a young boy neglected by his manic depressive mother, alcoholic father, and nearly every adult and social institution he comes into contact with. Throughout the film, Francie (Eamonn Owens) must contend with his estrangement from his only friend, abuse by a clerical figure, and the death of both his

parents, as a result of which, he subsequently turns to violence against those around him. Francie is incarcerated, first in a reform school, and then later in a mental institution, before finally being imprisoned for murder.

If the Irish films so far discussed confirm Stella Bruzzi's comment that, for all his importance in an "individual's unconscious . . . so often, in life as well as in movies the real father is a disappointment" (viii), then *The Butcher Boy* is a telling example of this. For Martin McLoone, *The Butcher Boy* offers "the most complete example [of] the seeming obsession of Irish cinema with dysfunctional or incomplete families and especially with the interweaving themes of Oedipal anxiety, child-abuse and incest" (*Irish Film* 219). With this statement, McLoone draws attention to the pervasive way that the Oedipus complex and father/son relationships in Irish film have been interpreted as cyphers for deeper issues relating to Irish history, society, and culture. In this respect, McLoone sees Francie Brady—with all his hallucinations, fantasies, and traumas—"as a metaphor for Ireland (the abused child of history)" ("The Abused Child of History").

Each of the films mentioned above illustrates the extent to which Irish cinema of the early 1990s was notable for its stark depiction of emotional reserve between fathers and sons. However, it is important to acknowledge that while Oedipal dramas are not, unique to Irish cinema, they have been allegorically connected to socio-historical circumstances particular to Ireland. Insofar as some of the films referred to later address themselves towards Hollywood, it is necessary to also take account of the discourses attending to fatherhood in the U.S. during the 1990s, and most particularly of the privileging of new aspects of fatherhood in mainstream American cinema. For this, the next section will offer a preliminary consideration of Hannah Hamad's discussion of postfeminist paternity.

The Fatherhood Responsibility Movement and Postfeminist Paternity

Throughout the 1990s, concerns about the breakdown of the nuclear family and the increasing number of single-mother households moved fatherhood to the forefront of the social policy agenda in the U.S. With “virtually every major social pathology . . . linked to fatherless children: violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, suicide, and psychological disorders. . . .” several federal initiatives aimed at remedying what was widely held to be the most significant social crisis of the generation attempted to directly intervene in the private sphere of the American family (Baskerville 485). Programmes included Bill Clinton’s “Presidential Fatherhood Initiative,” “Project Save Our Children,” as well as the “1998 Deadbeat Dads Parents Punishment Act” that was intended to prosecute fathers found in arrears of child support payments (486).

Beyond such government machinery, the concurrent debates about fatherhood coincided with the establishment of the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement (FRM). It sought to promote conscientious parenting and redress what was presented as the feminization of the domestic sphere by emphasizing the importance of fathers as *men* in the lives of their children (Gavanas 1). Groups within the FRM included the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement, The Promise Keepers, the million man march and the fragile-families wing, each of which advocated men’s involvement in the home as instillers of moral values and social responsibility, in their respective ways. The Mythopoetic Men’s Movement voiced their arguments from essentialist positions with reference to innate and natural masculine qualities, while The Promise Keepers emphasized Christian ethics “as a unifying rhetorical foundation across a wide range of constituencies involved in fatherhood politics” (14). Both spoke in universal terms from a white heteronormative position, as distinct from the million man march and fragile-families movements, who addressed “socioeconomic grievances,” the

former through spiritual dogma addressed at African American communities, and the latter by calling for “civil rights for minority men” (14). While most of the subsidiary groups lost popular support by the turn of the millennium, the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement remained at the forefront of political debates concerning family values throughout the 1990s (18).

As an appropriate lens through which to view debates about masculinity in the United States, the particular emphasis placed on the value of fathers as providers and paradigms of behaviour created a favourable atmosphere for Hollywood to co-opt the figure of the father to both diversify the heroic appeal of male actors, and add greater longevity to the careers of veteran stars. For Stella Bruzzi, the

... diversification of the father’s image is entirely compatible with what is going on in the 1990s-2000s in terms of gender politics and with the emergence of a significant body of theoretical, psychological and sociological work into masculinity, a hitherto largely ignored field. In both films and theory, traditional masculinity and fathers are in crisis and new more flexible alternatives are being sought. (xi)

In this respect, Hannah Hamad in *Postfeminist Paternity in Contemporary US Film: Framing Fatherhood* (2013), refers to a construction of male identity she describes as “postfeminist paternity” through which narratives about fatherhood are expressed in terms of “the cultural normalization of postfeminist discourse” (1). Postfeminist studies identify a social culture in which the goals of feminism, such as advocating that women be placed on equal status with men in both the domestic sphere and labour force, is posited as having been achieved, and is therefore in no further need of endorsement (Negra and Tasker 1). Within this rhetoric, the particularities of feminist politics are erased, and feminism is commodified by targeting women as consumers of a lifestyle based upon disingenuous articulations of female empowerment (1-5). According to Angela McRobbie, “postfeminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is

achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed. It is a spent force” (28).

While postfeminist paternity is articulated by way of various media across popular culture, it is cinema and television which Hamad predominantly focuses on throughout her study. It is also the mode of address that is of greatest relevance where the present thesis is concerned. As an extension of postfeminism, postfeminist paternity operates under the premise of female emancipation, and articulates a mode of masculinity that is emotionally assured, and domestically adept (Hamad 2). In this way, it gestures towards a “feminist ideal of masculinity” (4), and the calls made by second wave feminist critics for an equal dispersal of parental responsibility between men and women in the home and a more favourable environment for women to enter the workforce (8).

Narratives of postfeminist paternity then typically feature male characters who are either presented as, or by the conclusion of the film become, sensitive and responsible role models, and devoted father figures. They thus nod towards a cultural context that has achieved a parity of the sexes, and in which the domestic sphere and labour opportunities are equally accessible for men and women. However, these films predominantly achieve this through a scenario in which the mother figure is disinterested in her children, preoccupied by conspicuous consumption, or, alternatively, detrimentally career orientated. She may also be dead at the beginning of the film, or dies early in the narrative, but in all cases, her position leaves a parental vacuum for the leading male to occupy, and he more often than not becomes heroic in the eyes of his child/ren (and the audience) through his efforts. For Hamad, postfeminist paternity is a proxy formation of idealised masculinity that furthers, rather than dismantles, male hegemony (26). In this respect, widowed fatherhood, for example, is invested with stoicism, gravitas, and pathos and often portrayed through a melodramatic

register while genres such as action films and comedy have also been used to accommodate a vast array of paternal narratives. “Dominant iterations,” according to Hamad,

. . . tend toward a model of fatherhood that is (or becomes) emotionally articulate, domestically competent, skilled in managing the quotidian practicalities of parenthood and adept at negotiating a balance and/or discursive confluence of private sphere fatherhood and public sphere paternalism. Furthermore, hegemonic formations of postfeminist fatherhood configure this model at little cost to the legibility of fathers’ more traditionally masculine traits. Fatherhood is thence dually articulated through a mutually constitutive binary of strong sensitive, patriarchal-postfeminist masculinity, with a correspondingly circuitous relationship to feminism. (2)

To the extent then that postfeminist paternity circulates through normative discourses of masculinity, it is particularly advantageous for older actors formally privileged as idealized archetypes of manliness. Unlike biological motherhood, fatherhood is a subject position achievable beyond middle age. As well as enabling a diversification of the roles through which young male actors can access the benefits of male hegemonic influence, Hamad cites examples of veteran stars of the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, who came to the fore during the heyday of such hard-bodied heroes as Clint Eastwood, Sylvester Stallone, and Bruce Willis to argue that postfeminist paternity also serves as an appropriate identity formation to circumnavigate the debilitating impact of aging on male agency and star power: “As aging is articulated through the personae of white male stars with manifest market appeal,” she contends, “some of the pitfalls of later life masculinity, such as diminished social power, physical decline, and social obsolescence, are time and again transcended via recuperative narratives of paternal redemption and revalidation” (89).

Although the discourses Hamad refers to operate within the context of U.S. popular culture, they have greatly influenced the careers of the earlier generation of Irish stars previously referred to, such as Liam Neeson, Gabriel Byrne, and Brendan Gleeson, who have each, in discrete and individual ways, sustained their popularity in Hollywood through paternal roles. The careers of these three veteran stars show that age becomes a relevant

factor in determining how the discourses of postfeminist paternity are negotiated. But, as we shall see below, like their American counterparts and Irish precursors, Irish actors of the Celtic Tiger generation have also been implicated in the way that representations of masculinity in Hollywood cinema have “increasingly tended towards fatherhood” (1).

What Hamad’s study reminds us is that father figures, and their relationships with their sons, have often been used to interrogate the particular discourses of the male operating in any specific period or location, and, if the concerns about fatherhood and the establishment of social and governmental initiatives alluded to above communicate anything, it is that a good relationship with the father is commonly accepted as a formative aspect of child development, and lays “the foundations for more positive involvement for the next generation” (Geddes 408). If Foster takes a more gender balanced look at a generation reacting against their fathers, as Bruzzi makes clear in her consideration of post-war representations of fathers in Hollywood film, “it is usually through a turbulent relationship with his son that a father’s role is scrutinised and explained” (xv). This observation can also be said to apply to the following analyses, and, to this extent, the majority of the films discussed below—the first six in particular—are as much concerned with *sons* as they are with fathers.

The four films considered, *In Bruges* (2008), *Perrier’s Bounty* (2009), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), and *Michael Collins* (1996), star two generations of Irish actors alongside one another, and to the extent that they each address fatherhood symbolically, as well as aesthetically, they continue the tendency towards Oedipal conflict in Irish literature and film that has been discussed extensively above. But, they do so in ways that also appear to take influence from the particularly postfeminist staging of paternity that Hamad claims has taken hold within contemporary Hollywood cinema. These first four films are grouped as Irish films. Two of these, *Perrier’s Bounty* and *Michael Collins*, are set in Ireland and contain a

predominantly Irish cast. In another of this group, *In Bruges*, only the leading characters are Irish, but, as we shall see, Irishness is key to an interpretation of the film. It is also important to acknowledge that, while the fourth film, *Michael Collins*, was heavily financed by the American film studio Warner Brothers, all four of the films discussed below were under the creative influence of Irish screenwriters and directors (or in the case of Martin McDonagh, born to Irish parents in Britain).

Each film, *In Bruges*, *Perrier's Bounty*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, and *Michael Collins*, references the Oedipal complex that has so heavily governed interpretations of Irish history as well as the output of many Irish writers and filmmakers, and they achieve this by presenting narratives that foreground generational conflict, transition or flux, much like that described by Foster and outlined above. The films also resonate at a generational level by drawing momentum from bringing together two generations of Irish actors who made their careers during two very different periods of Ireland's recent past. Their designation here as Irish films notwithstanding, these films also betray an external influence, not only on account of their generic hybridity, but also through the way that they bear characteristics of Hamad's postfeminist paternity. *In Bruges*, *Perrier's Bounty*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, and *Michael Collins* then, demonstrate, play on, and take meaning from, the generational differences between Gleeson, Byrne, and Neeson on the one hand and Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy on the other. In this way, they indicate an awareness of contrasting types of Irish masculinity configured through tropes of generational conflict, the Oedipus complex, and postfeminist paternity.

***In Bruges* (2008), *Perrier's Bounty* (2009), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005),
and *Michael Collins* (1996)**

In Bruges is a black comedy written by Martin McDonagh in which Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell play Ken and Ray respectively, hitmen who are ordered to lie low in Bruges

following a botched assignment in which Ray inadvertently killed a little boy while carrying out an assassination on a Catholic priest. The film was described as “a medieval morality play” by *The Boston Phoenix* (Clay), and despite—or to a certain extent as a result of—the gravity of the subject matter, *In Bruges*’ main feature is its humorous perspective which is imparted through the sardonic repartee that takes place between Ken and Ray, and serves to give the movie an overstated, politically incorrect attitude.

It has been said of gangster films that “every instance of the genre poses an opposition, the conflict it gives rise to and, by extension, the likelihood of violence” (Shadoian 19). In the case of *In Bruges* then, the conflict that structures the film is generational in origin: the abrasive results of a transitioning between succeeding orders, old and new. This generational conflict resonates on several levels within the narrative, the two most obvious being interpersonal antagonism, and societal change (which amounts, in the case of *In Bruges*, to the end of a criminal enterprise). It is in this respect that the film, despite its excessive sarcasm, lends itself to the kind of interpretation that Foster takes from the revolutionary period in Irish history between 1890 and 1923.

Foster outlines what he sees as the generational shift that took place during these years, whereby “the fracture between old and new broke along lines of age as well as of ideology” (*Vivid Faces* 1). He describes a feeling on the part of the young that the ways of their parents were “outmoded” (1), and that they were “living at a time of flux, of transformation” (6). For Foster, the young were men and women overwhelmed by “a sense of frustration” (8) who extricated themselves as a generation by “conscious processes of identification and rejection” (7) with and from the order of life that preceded them.

The impulse Foster describes here can be seen played out through the interpersonal relationship between Ken and Ray as well as in their roles in the demise of Harry’s crime

organization. Ken and Ray's incessant bickering extends from their polarized attitudes towards life in general and their situation in particular, and, on the surface, these alternate perspectives become obvious through their varying appreciation of Bruges as a hide-out-come-holiday destination. While Ken embraces the opportunity to take in the sights of the picturesque town by visiting tourist attractions such as the medieval bell tower or taking a gondola tour of the canals, Ray proves himself to be "the worst tourist in the world" by insulting other sightseers, and offending every marginalized social group he comes into contact with. He refers to the mentally handicapped as "retarded," calls the overweight "elephants," and is particularly offensive towards people affected by proportionate dwarfism, such as the actor Jimmy, by telling anyone who will listen that "midgets" have a tendency to commit suicide.

But at a deeper level, Ray's constant need to verbalize his politically incorrect opinion is indicative of, what Debbie Ging describes as, "the use of words to draw protective discursive boundaries around a fragile or threatened sense of masculinity" (105). Ray's depression and suicidal inclinations are the result of the guilt he feels at having taken what he perceives as an innocent life: that of a little boy on his way to confession who accidentally got caught in the crossfire during the execution of the intended mark (the Catholic priest). It gestures towards a deeper issue, namely, that Ray is not able to carry the moral baggage demanded of those who kill for a living: "He's dead because of me. And I'm trying to ... I'm trying to get me head around it, but I can't."

But perhaps most significantly where the correlation between *In Bruges* and Foster's theory of generational rupture are concerned, it is Ray who is subsequently the catalyst that brings about the downfall of Harry's business, and the code of "honour" and "principles" that both he, and Ken, have abided by since their youth. It is Ken's realisation that, in Ray, resides the possibility of a better future, and his conviction of Ray's potential "to do something

decent with his life” is encapsulated in his final conversation with Harry: “The boy had to be let go. The boy had to be given a chance. And if to do that, I had to say ‘Fuck you, and fuck everything that’s gone on between us, then that’s what I had to do.’”

But if *In Bruges* seems to thumb its nose at respect and political correctness through its irreverent humour, it plays out both the demise of a system (Harry’s mercenary business), and the differences between Ken and Ray, through an Oedipus complex that positions the film within a representational and literary tradition that is part of the history of Irish storytelling. In keeping with the roughly twenty years between the actors, a paternal/filial dynamic separates the behaviour of Ken and Ray, and according to Farrell, “there was a little bit of a ... kind of a parental responsibility that his character has for mine because he was the one that brought me into the fray ... you know? The one that gave me the opportunity to do what I did with such horrendous results” (“In Bruges Interview Colin Farrell Brendan Gleeson”). Here, Farrell’s Ray becomes the son whose manhood depends upon the death of the father. That this is achieved through suicide, rather than patricide, is in itself significant: it suggests an awareness of the need to move forward, rather than backward, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, progression, and burying the trauma of the past, has been recognized as a defining narrative of Celtic Tiger culture. *In Bruges* closes with Ray being taken off by ambulance with Chloe (Clémence Poésy), and the possibility that, in keeping with Ken’s earlier advice, Ray will atone for his taking of innocent life by a determination to “save the next little boy.”

A similar set of relationships can be identified in *Perrier’s Bounty*, directed by Ian Fitzgibbon, and based on a screenplay by Mark O’Rowe. *Perrier’s Bounty* is an “urban Western,” and stars successful Irish actors of the previous generation such as Brendan Gleeson, and to a lesser extent Gabriel Byrne and Liam Cunningham, alongside the younger Irish actor Cillian Murphy, who plays the film’s leading man, Michael McRea. Michael owes

money to a Dublin gangster by the name Darren Perrier (Brendan Gleeson). When in the attempt to collect on the debt, one of Perrier's henchmen is killed by Michael's suicidal neighbour Brenda (Jodie Whitaker), both Michael and Brenda go on the run with his feckless father Jim, who has suddenly returned following a prolonged estrangement brought about by a family argument. Jim, played by the British actor Jim Broadbent, believes he will die on falling asleep, and has come to make peace between himself, Michael, and Michael's mother, before he dies.

Perrier's Bounty is replete with ineffectual and bad father figures each of whom is starkly differentiated from Murphy's Michael in generational terms: a deity/heavenly father or "Death" (Byrne), a criminal "Godfather" (Gleeson), and also a biological father, Jim (Broadbent). As God, Gabriel Byrne's character is positioned as an omniscient influence over the film's proceedings. He is never physically present on screen, but his character is nonetheless significant, to the extent that he acts as a narrator while also providing brief insights about the events which unfold throughout the course of the film. Byrne's character is generally referred to as "Death," or the "reaper," and while never explicitly connected to him, we can assume he is the figure who has appeared to Jim to warn of his impending death. Byrne's voice bookends the narrative, and, as an all-knowing observer, "Death" is an immovable force, and a figurehead of tradition, aware of the outcomes before they happen, but content not to intervene "cos that's me way, man."

Byrne's casting grounds the film's representation of God within an Irish context. The actor is renowned for retaining his Irish accent regardless of the setting in which he is cast, or the accents of the actors/characters around him. As a result, the musings of Byrne's God place him ethnically as a specifically *Irish* deity through his accent. Equally the slang included here is significant. If sociolinguistic variation decreases as a speaker gets older Nguyen et al (446), the idioms used by "Death" date him to an earlier era, possibly the 1970s,

and this is reinforced by the fact that Michael's father, Jim, speaks with a similar turn of phrase.

Dated and placed, Byrne's *Death* is a remnant of 1970s Irish patriarchy, and, in this respect, can be closely compared to Gleeson's *Perrier*: also a figure of authority who presides over life and death, but in this case by inflicting grisly injuries on those who cross him. Unlike *Death* who appears to remain impartial towards persons and events, *Perrier* prides himself on his "hep"—a 1970s synonym for the slang expression "cool"—perspective, which he attempts to demonstrate by seeking revenge for the murder of Orlando (Don Wycherley): the gay lover of Ivan (Michael McElhatton). Both men work for *Perrier* as debt collectors cum hired thugs. However, any semblance of a liberal side to *Perrier*'s character is soon revealed to be superficial: he recoils in distaste when approached with the possibility of physical contact with Ivan, which, we can assume, hints towards his underlying homophobia. With this gesture, *Perrier* is exposed as a standard of traditional and archaic masculinity, and is subsequently devoured by animals as savage as himself when he is mauled to death by dogs.

Perrier's Bounty is one example of the way that both Irish and British cinema have appropriated elements of the Hollywood gangster genre. Films such as *Trainspotting* (1996), *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), *Snatch* (2000), and *I Went Down* (1997), *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (2000), *Veronica Guerin* (2003), and *Intermission* (2003) are all examples in which elements of the gangster genre, particularly in the way of costumes, gritty urban settings, graphic violence, and drug smuggling, are transposed from the U.S. boroughs and Italian-American enclaves of their origin, onto European capitals such as Dublin or London. Throughout the film, women are repeatedly referred to in crude terms with descriptions ranging from "bitch" and "heifer" to "horsey" and to this extent, *Perrier*, "The Mutt," and other males in *Perrier's Bounty* illustrate Debbie Ging's observation that, "[t]he

high octane displays of machismo that characterize so many of these films seem to try to assert an authentic, pre-feminist masculinity uncomplicated by the complexities of postmodern, multicultural Ireland. Yet the artificiality inherent in such attempts at cultural reconfiguration and reconstruction is difficult to conceal” (*Men and Masculinities* 180).

On one level, Michael is differentiated from Perrier, “The Mutt,” and other males, in generational terms by his resistance to similar attitudes towards women. As discussed above, Foster separates generations in terms of “conscious processes of identification and rejection” (*Vivid Faces* 7), whereby age groups are “carriers of intellectual alternatives to the status quo, acting under the constellation of factors prevalent at the time of their birth” (6-7). We saw in the case of *In Bruges* how this is played out through Ray’s rejection of the gangster lifestyle. *In Perrier’s Bounty* then, Michael McRea presents an alternative version of masculinity through his relationships with female characters. Michael’s masculinity is cast in relief by his resistance to the attitudes of misogynistic characters that populate the film, most notably, in his protracted concern for Brenda despite her obsession with her unfaithful boyfriend, Shamie (Pádraic Delany). It also emerges that Michael’s estrangement from his parents was the result of an incident in which Michael defended an unnamed woman from attack, and Michael’s mother was assaulted in revenge. Thus, both details work to distinguish Michael from the older men through his sensitive masculinity.

But, it is important to note that Michael’s sensitivity is still at no cost to the “traditionally masculine traits” that Hamad has described in relation to postfeminist paternity (2), notwithstanding the fact that, in this case, Michael is placed as the son, and not the father, in the film. To this extent, despite surface attempts otherwise, the overriding portrayal of masculinity in *Perrier’s Bounty* would seem to be the “pre-feminist masculinity” that Ging speaks of in relation to the Irish and British gangster genre. Michael’s solution to dealing with Brenda’s boyfriend Shamie is ultimately a violent one, and his sensitivity does not stop

him from borrowing money for drugs. Similarly, in keeping with the characteristics of postfeminist paternity outlined by Hamad above, the women in the film (namely the suicidal Brenda and the farmwife who accuses Michael of rape for simply looking at her) are marked by hysteria while the mother figure (Jim's wife) is both absent and—unlike Byrne's *Death*—voiceless. She is literally relegated to the periphery of the film by appearing only in its closing minutes where she appears as a blurred figure waving at Michael and Brenda from the sea.

Although *Perrier's Bounty* reworks generic patterns from mainstream cinema, it ultimately replicates the Oedipal scenario that has been so prevalent in interpretations of Irish history, literature, and film. It may not be by Michael's hand, but it is only with Jim's death that Michael can be reconciled with him, find his own partner in the form of Brenda, and recuperate a healthy bond with both of his parents. In this way the film enacts the Oedipus complex that Warren Akin locates in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, whereby for Michael, "attaining manhood involves a 'killing' of his father that ultimately includes a reconciliation between the two" (55).

The next Irish film, *Breakfast on Pluto*, is slightly different from the two already discussed. Like *In Bruges* and *Perrier's Bounty*, *Breakfast on Pluto* also foregrounds generational conflict but rather than demonizing the figure of the father, the film instead presents a more nuanced Oedipal trajectory, in which, the son, through his resistance to national and gender norms takes on a pedagogic role.

Perhaps more than any of the Irish films discussed thus far, *Breakfast on Pluto* plays out Foster's generational conflict in terms of a reaction against fathers. The idea of the father as representative of the nation is a crucial component of Foster's generationalism to the extent that the generation that he describes is rebelling, not only against fathers but also the

establishment that the fathers' generation have allowed to come into being. Thus, according to Foster, "to those who embodied the Irish radical imagination, the British government seemed to be imposing on Ireland a grubby, materialist, collaborationist Anglicized identity, with the collusion of their parents' generation; and that is what they fought to eradicate and replace with a purer new world" (*Vivid Faces* 28). Set during a particularly heightened period of political violence between Ireland and England, *Breakfast on Pluto* concerns a young protagonist fighting against multiple fathers: biological, spiritual, and national. This particular narrative schema is structured by the fact that the transgender Kitten/Patrick's biological father is also a Catholic priest, and, as such, a representative of the Church and pillar of the insular and conservative Northern Ireland community in which Patrick/Kitten is reared.

Understanding the way that Kitten's transgendered subjectivity disrupts hegemonic categories, institutions, sexualities, and structures then, involves an appreciation of queerness as a mobilizing subject position, and mode of resistance. The term "queer" was coined by film scholar, Teresa Lauretis in 1991, and queer theory developed from the concerns of feminists like Lauretis, and others such as Judith Butler, that lesbian experience was inevitably being subsumed within rigid categories such as "'woman' and 'gay or homosexual'" (W. B. Turner 5). As noted by William B. Turner, "queer theory itself entails a thoroughgoing questioning of existing categories, and even the very process of categorization" (4), and according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "queer"— derived from "the Indo-European root – *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*" (xii) appropriately conveys the idea of cutting across categories. In *Breakfast on Pluto* then, it is Kitten's queerness that becomes the weapon with which she mounts a reaction against fathers such as Foster describes: a rebellion against her father,

Father Liam, and against totalizing narratives of Irish experience as they relate to masculinity, Catholicism, and nationalism.

From the very first scene of *Breakfast on Pluto*, Kitten's refusal to abide by hegemonic and heteronormative gender scripts is accentuated by a wardrobe that obscures identifying markers of masculinity as Kitten is introduced wheeling a pram down a suburban street, dressed entirely in stylish women's clothing. While chatting absentmindedly to the baby in the pram, workmen on a nearby construction site are visible in the background, and, assuming from the silhouette that the person is an attractive young woman, they begin shouting sexually suggestive comments in Kitten's direction. As the builders are stunned into silence by Kitten's enthusiastic response to their chauvinism and propositioning, Kitten continues the retort while talking into the pram:

Not up to it then? You innocent, shovel-wielding horny-handed sons of the native sod. Not many people can, Munchkin. Not many people can take the tale of Patrick Braden, AKA St. Kitten, who strutted the catwalks, face lit by a halo of flashbulbs as "Ooh" she shrieked, "I told you from my best side darlings."

This opening moment encapsulates Kitten's rebellion throughout the film as, at an emotional level, her queerness enables Kitten to resist containment. She refuses to be "a boy and not a girl," and in so doing, she subverts the order of the foster household into which she has been placed and ultimately, the attempts made by her biological father, Father Liam, to keep hidden his own sexual indiscretions with his housekeeper Eily Bergin.

Charlotte McIvor argues that Jordan's critique in *Breakfast on Pluto*, "is predicated upon a rejection of compulsory whiteness, Catholicism/Christianity, heterosexuality, and Republicanism for Irish subjects, north and south, with queer characters as the catalyst for their dissolution" (176). Kitten first confronts Father Liam about his role in her conception in the confessional, itself a symbol of Church authority, and a space where Catholic dogma is

enforced through regulated acts of contrition. Kitten is not only confronting her father, but also the religious and state body through which he Fathers and dictates heteronormative codes of behaviour in the form of sexual, familial, and spiritual relationships.

When he does eventually come to Kitten's aid in London with the new address of Kitten's biological mother, Father Liam is unable to verbalize personal events from the past that link the three of them together. The priest's narrative is related with a screen dividing him from Kitten's view, and even then it is spoken in the third person, so as to remove himself personally from the story (see fig. 14).



Figure 14. Liam Neeson and Cillian Murphy in *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005)



Figure 15. Liam Neeson, Ruth Negga and Cillian Murphy in *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005)

In this way, *Breakfast on Pluto* confirms Debbie Ging's contention that "[i]n recent Irish cinema, men appear to be talking incessantly or not talking at all, and ... male crisis in recent Irish films is signalled through an unease with language and communication" (*Men and Masculinities* 113). In this respect, it is possible to relate Father Liam's inability to openly discuss his wants, needs, or desires with the "pathologising" effect of the Catholic Church in Ireland which, according to Claire McLoone-Richards, attached feelings of shame to the body and sexuality, and "did much to oppress and control the congregations" (400) and, in this case, stunt the emotional maturity of Father Liam himself.

For Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, in *Breakfast on Pluto*, much like in the earlier film *The Crying Game* (1992), "the alliance of gender and nation is, we see, a tightly wound knot which has functioned, along with colonialism and Catholicism, to wind nationalism into the force it is, and, for Jordan, gender is the string which, when pulled, unravels that binding" (17). In this respect, Kitten forces Father Liam to reassess his perspective on sexual norms:

the priest accepts, shelters, and forms an unconventional family unit with his transgender child and an unwed pregnant mother, challenging not only his own personal behaviour, but also the Catholic ideology he espouses. But, it is important to note that while Kitten does to a certain extent “kill” the father who refused to acknowledge and so obstruct her autonomous identity, their reconstructed nuclear family is not permitted to remain in place. The parochial house is burnt to the ground, Father Liam is assigned to a different parish—one where the parishioners are presumably oblivious to his fatherhood—and Kitten is forced to emigrate with Charlie and her new-born baby. Moreover, when finally face to face with the long-lost mother who has occupied her thoughts and movements, Kitten is unable to reveal herself to Eily as son or daughter. Eily’s past is kept hidden and her nuclear family kept intact, and, in this way, while *Breakfast on Pluto* does not demonize mothers, the film ends safe in the knowledge that the heteronormative familial structure is left firmly in situ. Thus, in keeping with the orthodoxy of other postfeminist films about paternity that Hamad mentions, the family of two mothers, a baby, and a religious Father (see fig. 15) is obliterated in preference for one compliant with “a normative family frame, commensurate with the persistent reluctance of contemporary popular cinema to queer or otherwise trouble this ideologically charged formation of the family” (144).

In the films discussed so far, generational difference is expressed through conflicting forms of masculinity in such a way that, by each film’s conclusion, the future generation has been configured in positive terms. It is interesting then to conclude this section with a different example: the juxtaposition of Meyers’ minor role in Neil Jordan’s *Michael Collins* alongside Neeson’s Collins. Unlike *In Bruges* and *Perrier’s Bounty*, the succeeding generation that Meyers represents in Neil Jordan’s historical epic is presented ominously, a harbinger of the escalation, rather than the cessation, of violence, and future political conflict between fathers and sons. In this respect, if scholars such as Elizabeth Butler-Cullingford

have drawn attention to a scenario in which de Valera is “the symbolic father and Collins the son” (231), an equally valid reading shows this Oedipus complex repeated in the next generation, where patricide becomes a necessary stage of male development for the youths who followed in Collins’ footsteps.

In *Michael Collins*, Meyers plays the young sniper who fires the shot that kills Collins in the assault upon his contingent at Béal Na Bláth. The night before the ambush, Meyers’ character, who is referred to as “Collins’ assassin” in the film credits, and as the [smiling] “youth” in Jordan’s film diary, acts as messenger between Collins (Liam Neeson) and Eamon de Valera (Alan Rickman) when Collins requests a meeting with his former chief. Having overheard the conversation, de Valera is visibly upset by Collins’ moving speech, and, with no response from his leader, the youth goes back to Collins on what may, or may not be, his own initiative, and arranges the rendezvous between Collins and de Valera to take place the following day. As it transpires, the meeting is a tactic to stage an attempt on Collins’ life, which ultimately proves successful. Amongst the rain of bullets from each side the youth is shown aiming his firearm with consideration and shooting Collins squarely in the forehead (Jordan 163).

While the scenes just described are based on historical fact, insofar as Collins *was* assassinated at Béal Na Bláth, the sequence of events leading up to his death—Collins’ reason for travelling through Cork when many republican “Irregulars” were known to be moving across the country in the same direction—is the result of conjecture on Jordan’s part. As the director tells it in his film diary, the whole concept of a “kid” conveying negotiations between de Valera and Collins on the eve of the latter’s death, or indeed the detail that it is this same youth who fires the fatal shot, is “a surmise. A fiction, based on historical surmise, which is all one can do given the murky nature of the known facts” (11-2). But, it is a surmise which reveals a clue to Jordan’s perception of events, or at least how he wished to present the

conclusion of Collins' life to a global audience. It is only then by studying these closing scenes in further detail that it is possible to ascertain what Collins, the young sniper, and the actors playing them, reveal about the way masculinity is constructed in *Michael Collins*. In this respect, pausing to consider some of the aspects leading up to Collins' assassination in the film, as well as Jordan's framing of history provides some insight.

Terms such as "kids," "gits," "sonny," "go home to your mothers" all feature throughout the post-Treaty development of the film, and each one is used by Collins to air his frustration at the next generation of soldiers on both sides, where youth holds little value beyond a marker of inexperience. As Jordan puts it, for Collins, and those he fought side by side with, "the machine they have created destroys them one by one" (10). It is a young "kid" who shoots Harry Boland (Aidan Quinn) while he is making his escape by the Liffey, and another who earlier attempts to shoot Collins in conversation with Boland in the latter's hotel room before the escalation of Civil violence, "the fore-ghost of the 'parricide' of Collins" according to Alan O'Leary (121). What we see in the closing scenes outlined above in Jordan's *Michael Collins* then is the re-enactment of a version of history in which de Valera and Collins "are both victims of the revolutionary children—the forerunners of today's IRA they have given birth to" (Hopper 28).

As shall be discussed further in Chapter Four, Jordan had specific reasons for casting Meyers as the young assassin, which, like his choice of Aidan Quinn for Harry Boland, would appear to have been based on physical attractiveness, but for the present, it is important to acknowledge that the insistence that Meyer's character, the youth, is shown "smiling" is of significance. Jordan states that "there is no knowing what this smile means" (159), but it is without question unsettling, placed as it is in such close proximity to the death of the film's hero, and on the face of the young man soon to bring about his demise. With this decision, Jordan proposes Neeson and Meyers as political, and generational, inversions of

historical figures, where, as O’Leary points out, “Collins is murdered in the film by a counterpart, a boy, a republican gunman, like Collins himself, from Cork: Collins’ spiritual son” (121).

Although there is evidence to suggest from his film diary that Jordan clashed with the historian R. F. Foster over their different interpretations of history, Foster’s perspective on the generational succession that took place in the years leading to the 1916 Rising parallels Jordan’s portrayal of Civil War violence, which, even if it is orchestrated by veteran rebels, is shown to be carried out by a generation of young men raised on the legends of “The Big Fella” Michael Collins, “minister for gun-running, daylight robbery and general mayhem.” Foster speaks of Collin’s generation as one that “decided to make a revolution—which for many of them may not have been the revolution that they intended or wanted” (*Vivid Faces* 323). Jordan’s portrait of a smiling young soldier symbolizes, not the peaceful future that Collins’ cohort dreamed of, but, is instead, an ominous indication of history repeating itself with another generation “reacting against their fathers” (7).

It is also necessary to point out the marked differences between Foster’s analysis of history and Jordan’s representation of it, and it is in the difference between the two that it is possible to discern traces of the postfeminist attitude to women, that Hamad has located in numerous Hollywood films that focus on paternity. As Emmanuel Kehoe observed in his *Sunday Business Post* review of Foster’s *Vivid Faces*,

Women have a well defined [sic] place in Foster's narrative, revealing a world beyond the simplistic portrayal of revolutionary women as republican enragedes and irredentists (and of “comely maidens” too). These are intelligent women of their time with wide-ranging political, social and artistic concerns. O'Casey's plays, highly critical of the national struggle, presented women of the period as victims of malign or violent men or as wrong-headed fools. But by and large O'Casey was writing about women who had not the educational or social advantages of those who appear here.

But none of the women Foster follows throughout *Vivid Faces*—Grace and Muriel Gifford, Rosamond Jacob, Constance Markievicz, Maud Gonne, Geraldine Plunkett, or Máire Comerford amongst them—appear in Jordan’s *Michael Collins*. Thus, if it is possible to think of the film metaphorically in terms of paternity, in which “revolutionaries, having symbolically killed their fathers, become ‘founding fathers’ themselves” (Foster, *Vivid Faces* 25), *Michael Collins* also portrays its father figures in accord with what Hamad describes as the “representational imperative of postfeminist culture” (2). There are no revolutionary mothers (or indeed daughters) here. Instead, the revolutionary period is, with the exception of one non-combatant character played by Julia Roberts, enacted through a male drama. In this way, the Dublin of 1916 “is figured as a safe space in which to locate and idealize archaic formations of masculinity” where the “cultural recidivism” it displays—namely a world in which women are naturally excluded from politics—“is naturalized by ... historical settings” (Hamad 29).

The four Irish films discussed above replicate Foster’s analysis of generational conflict, by presenting narratives that divide age and youth through conflicting actions, mentalities, and behaviour. But, what we shall see in the next two films is that this scenario, namely, one that involves antagonism between succeeding generations of Irish men, and/or enacts an Oedipal trajectory that pits sons against their fathers, is not confined to indigenous representation. *Bend It like Beckham* is a BrAsian “feel-good cross-cultural comedy” (Raschke 123), while *Alexander* is an epic action film inspired by historical events and figures. Neither film is set in Ireland, but each brings into focus dynastic antagonism when representing Irish masculinity in terms of father/son relationships. There is a qualification to be made here in the case of *Alexander* to the extent that the Macedonian regent is not Irish per se. But, as we have seen, Irishness serves a relational function throughout Stone’s film, and, for this reason, *Alexander* is included here alongside more traditional or straightforward

representations of Irish masculinity. If both *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Alexander* repeat the patterns of representation outlined in the cases of *In Bruges*, *Perrier's Bounty*, *Michael Collins*, and *Breakfast on Pluto*, they also reveal the extent to which generational conflict, Oedipal tension, and postfeminist paternity extend beyond the local during the Celtic Tiger period to permeate representations of Irish fathers and sons from the national cinemas of two countries, Britain and America, that come from external or non-Irish origin.

***Bend It like Beckham* (2002) and *Alexander* (2004)**

In *Bend It like Beckham*, Jonathan Rhys Meyers plays Joe, the Irish football coach and love-interest to the film's two female leads: Jesminder "Jess" Bhamra (Parminder Nagra), a second generation Punjabi Sikh whose love of football infringes upon her family's traditions, and Juliette "Jules" Paxton (Kiera Knightley), a tomboy of white middle-class background with an equally ardent passion for football. The film was written and directed by Gurinder Chadha, and *Bend It like Beckham* was widely welcomed for "its capacity to provoke thought and discussion about a large scope of important issues surrounding cultural differences and identity" (Raschke 126) through its portrayal of the British Asian community in London.

Anjali Gera Roy describes the football field that serves as the home grounds for the girls' team, the Hounslow Harriers, as one of the film's many border-zones, a "liminal edge at which marginalities might freely converge on a similar interest" (64). It is within the football grounds that Joe and Jess share their common ethnic marginalization (58): he an Irish migrant, she the daughter of Indian migrant parents. Both ethnicities, the film suggests, reside on the periphery of the wider British community. In this respect, the final scene in which Joe, once excluded from the Bhamra household based on his colour, plays cricket with Jess' father, concludes the film with an optimistic image of cultural dialogue, where, as Karen

Nairn and Johanna Wyn have noted, “[w]e interpret this final scene as one of hope, of an idealized ‘interplay’ between Punjabi and Irish at the level of individual families, that also represents the possibility of greater intercultural exchange between Indian and Anglo communities” (828).

But, if, as Anjali Gera Roy suggests, *Bend It like Beckham* does present British and Punjabi households as “mirror images of each other to situate differences as adjacent not oppositional” (63), it also offers an ambiguous portrayal of ethnic parent-child relationships in which a disparaging Irish father is juxtaposed with a postfeminist representation of Punjabi parenthood.

In one particular scene, Jess and Joe bond through a discussion of the physical and emotional scars they sustained in their respective pasts, where Joe relates how his father pressurized him into playing when injured, and ultimately cost him a professional career in football. Throughout the film, similar conversations between the two occur, during which Joe cites examples that allude to the destructive masculinity of his father, in an effort to convince Jess to contradict the orthodox traditions of her family, namely, that she concentrate on her studies, and attract a suitable husband from the Punjabi faith by behaving demurely, that she develop her knowledge of Indian cooking, and refrain from exposing her body by wearing her sports kit. However, according to Joe, “parents don’t always know what’s best,” and this is most particularly expressed throughout the film in terms of the need to transgress gendered stereotypes. While Jess learns to be herself by becoming successful through a sport dominated by men, Joe’s disappointment at being unable to play professionally is eased by raising the profile of the Hounslow Harriers, despite the criticism that would arise if his father “found out I was coaching girls.”

Joe's willingness to talk and share his experiences with others, such as Jess, presents the progressive alternative to Ging's argument regarding men at the margins of society who are characterized by the way they are "exiled from the linguistic order" (111). As Ging notes in the case of *Fight Club*'s Tyler Durden in her discussion of speaking and silence by male characters in mainstream films, Tyler's distrust of therapy as a talking cure extends from the way that he perceives it as a feminized activity (*Men and Masculinities* 112). In this sense, Joe's willingness to share his feelings is framed as not only cathartic but also as a sign of his "New Man" masculinity (mentioned by Hamad and discussed in further detail in Chapter Four) that is characterized by both strong/masculine and sensitive/feminine traits.

Thus, Joe is set up in the movie as a paradigm of the need to sometimes re-evaluate cultural traditions that no longer benefit the younger generation, and this is achieved through his more flexible masculinity, and the way in which it contradicts the example of the hard masculinity promoted by his father, when Joe was a contender to play football professionally. It is in this respect that Joe's relationship with his father reproduces the generational conflict that Foster identifies in the actions of the radical youths in the preceding years of the 1916 rising. For Foster, "part of recapturing their world must involve prospecting the ties of affection, and the patterns of tension, between families, friends and lovers" (*Vivid Faces* 116) where "many decided to destabilize the order which they had inherited" (117). Joe's refusal to abide by the patriarchal order of his father transcends the Oedipus complex. To this extent, the airport scene, in which Joe triumphantly relates that he has confronted his father with the truth about his choice to coach girls' football, confirms Joe's autonomous identity as a grown man by announcing the metaphorical slaying of the oppressive Irish father.

But for all that Gurinder Chadha's film does attempt to emphasize the analogous topographies of Punjabi and Irish cultures, it is notable that the film presents two very different images of Punjabi and Irish fatherhood. Mr Bhamra is never presented as an

unloving father, but a stern authoritarian within the Bhamra family home. In contradiction to its otherwise credible portrayal of racial inequality and migrant life in contemporary London, *Bend It like Beckham* engages in a postracial fantasy in its denouement whereby, much like several of the films starring Will Smith that Hamad discusses in relation to ethnic paternity, “anyone can succeed, irrespective of their personal circumstances, socioeconomic position or cultural identity” (130). In this respect, the father who had refused the *gora* Joe entry to the Bhamra household, suddenly reverses this decision, and also allows Jess to move to America on a sports scholarship with her white best friend. In this way Mr Bhamra’s less-than-hospitable British Asian masculinity is redeemed through a narrative of progressive fatherhood. His benevolence, flexibility, and rationality is not only cast in relief against the restrictive fatherhood of Joe’s father, but also counterpoints the hysteria and repressive femininity that has marked the figure of the mother, both his wife, Mrs. Bhamra and Jules’ mother, Mrs. Paxton. He thus becomes comparable to Jules’ father—a man throughout the film who has been supportive of his wife and daughter, and attendant to both through his postfeminist paternity.

Overall then, *Bend It like Beckham* presents two contradictory images of fatherhood. On the one hand, Joe’s sensitivity and resolve to pursue a career as the coach of a girls’ amateur football team is part of a generational conflict in which he must overcome the Oedipus complex to become his own man by standing up to his restrictive Irish father. On the other, despite the film’s repeated representation of hysterical motherhood, by its conclusion it has conceptualized British fatherhood as “appealing, thanks in part to the apparent accommodation of feminist discourse, and the normalization of an ostensibly feminist ideal of masculinity” (Hamad 4).

Like *Bend It like Beckham*, Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* has also been discussed in some detail. But despite the fact that the eponymous lead is not actually an Irish character, it is

necessary to return to it once more owing to the substantial Oedipal element that pervades the film. As we saw in the previous chapter, *Alexander* is noteworthy for the way it employs Irishness as an allegory for Celticness by using a cast of Irish actors speaking with pronounced Irish accents, and, for this reason, the film is an effective example of popular perceptions of Irish behavioural norms. The fact that the film uses Irishness as a mode of address at all suggests an assumption that its viewers share a certain perception of Irishness as an identity, and it is the paternal and filial relationship within this perception that is of particular interest here.

The parallels with the myth of Oedipus Rex are explicit throughout *Alexander* and begin in the scenes of Alexander's (Colin Farrell's) childhood in which he is shown lying in bed with his mother, Olympias (Angelina Jolie), before the entry of his drunken father. As Philip (Val Kilmer) attempts to rape Olympias, unaware that his son is witness to his actions, it is only Alexander's innocent intercession to protect his mother that shames Philip into retreat. In this way, the scene recreates the classic Freudian complex in which a boy's "love for his mother becomes transformed into sexual desire" and "his father, formerly an ally, becomes a rival for his mother's affection" (L. Franklin 75). It is also the earliest example in the film in which the masculinities of father and son are contrasted. They are marked as rapist and protector/lover respectively, but their differences also hint towards the divine paternity that Olympias claims for Alexander. In this respect, the movie begins with a monologue by the aging Ptolemy (Anthony Hopkins) who describes Alexander as "a Prometheus; a friend to man." Ptolemy continues by saying that, "some called his mother, Queen Olympias, a sorceress and said that Alexander was the child of Dionysus; others, Zeus. But truly there was not a man in Macedonia who didn't look at father and son, side by side, and wonder."

Thus, Philip and Alexander not only hold contrasting perspectives on life and leadership, but are written into history by Ptolemy as dynastic opposites, divided by the base

humanity of the father as distinct from the professed divinity of the “son,” and these opening scenes stage the family drama that Verity Platt describes as “the psychological heart” of Stone’s film (291). The parallels with tragi-heroic figures from Greek mythology return in the scenes beneath the Macedonian palace where Philip reveals a gallery of primitive cave paintings, and instructs his son in the lessons to be learned from heroes of the past (see fig. 16). According to Platt, the paintings become an interpretive framework through which the audience comes to make sense of Alexander’s psychological motivation—his relationship with Olympias and Philip—as well as providing clues as to the tragic fate that awaits him (286). Foremost amongst these images are the myths of Oedipus and Prometheus, each experiencing eternal damnation as Oedipus blinds himself for the heinous acts of incest and murder, and Prometheus is tormented by Zeus’ eagle for revealing the divine power of fire to mankind. The reference to Oedipus points not only back to the traumatic rape scene but also forward to the struggle that Alexander will face in trying to surpass and destroy the paternal spectre that will haunt him throughout the remainder of the film. In this sense, major battles—at Gaugamela or crossing the Indus for example—become psychological as well as physical obstacles that will come to define Alexander’s place in history.



Figure 16. Val Kilmer and Connor Paolo in *Alexander* (2004)

Read in this way, the cave painting of the damnation of Prometheus that adorns the catacombs beneath the palace also becomes invested with narrative significance. The eagle—in the image representative of king of the gods, Zeus—is a symbol of the father, “the ‘No’ against which Alexander, like Prometheus must struggle in order to define himself, and to which he must ultimately submit” (Platt 295). The eagle also comes to represent Philip in the film: it appears overhead at significant battle scenes, an augury that Alexander reaches for on his deathbed, and a final taunting reminder of the father who has dominated Alexander’s psychological engagement with the ancient world. For Platt, the cave paintings

... make the audience aware of the cultural paradigms shaping Alexander’s destiny while drawing attention to a certain intergenerational tension, expressed by the contrast between the drunken, disillusioned king and his ambitious, wide-eyed son. In the events that follow, Alexander will transcend the limitations imposed on mortal achievement by the divine status quo, surpassing the success of his father. Yet he will be forced to suffer the consequences, repeatedly coming up against limiting factors in which the figure of Philip is ever present.... (294)

It is difficult then, not to draw parallels between Stone’s biopic and the films so far discussed, each of which, as we have seen, foreground the “intergenerational tension” that Platt alludes to here, particularly in light of the lengths that Stone goes to use Irishness as an allegorical device, through which the film can be interpreted. In this respect, if *Alexander* stages the Oedipal scenario that has dominated indigenous representations of Irish fathers and sons, it also re-enacts the intergenerational conflict that Foster locates as the basis of the revolutionary period in Irish history. Foster’s emphasis on the existence of a rebel “generation” extends from the degree to which he ascribes the acts of the rebels as one against “inherited hierarchies” (“100 Years in the Making”) which he traces at the “personal level of individual lives” (*Vivid Faces* xiii). Like the deeds of the 1916 radicals, the feats of Alexander carry a “symbolic weight” that come to mean more than the “practical methods”

employed (Foster, *Vivid Faces* 231). As Platt reminds us, “rather than following a traditional historical narrative, the film’s primary focus is on ‘the sign of the soul,’ as Stone attempts a coherent exploration of Alexander’s inner journey, structured not only by his martial achievements, but also by the episodes exploring his familial and romantic relationships” (286). Just as Foster identifies “a ‘generation of 1916’ in Ireland, reacting against their fathers” (*Vivid Faces* 7) so too are Alexander’s feats told in a narrative of paternal rivalry, conflict and succession.

Bruges, *Perrier’s Bounty*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, *Michael Collins*, *Bend It like Beckham*, and *Alexander* are examples of films made during the Celtic Tiger period that, with their specific focus on fatherhood, fall within the rubric of the tendency within Hollywood towards what Hamad has described as “paternally oriented” cinema (13). These films are not only of Irish origin, but are also examples of films from other nations, such as Britain or America, that have connected Oedipal and generational tension or conflict with Irishness. But, with the exception of Jordan’s *Michael Collins*, it is also possible to suggest that a recurring paradigm within these films starring the Celtic Tiger actors of this study—Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers—has been to configure the younger generation in positive terms.

The chapter will close with a consideration of three final films, *28 Days Later* (2008), *August Rush* (2007), and *Ondine* (2009) that cross British, American, and Irish national cinema respectively. Like all of the films already discussed, in their representation of paternally signified Irish male characters, they bring together themes of generational conflict, Oedipal tension, as well as significant characteristics of Hamad’s postfeminist paternity. But, unlike the films mentioned above, *28 Days Later*, *August Rush*, and *Ondine* star one of the Celtic Tiger actors of this study within a paternal role, and, while the paternal failure that we saw in pre-Celtic Tiger Irish cinema extends the possibility of history repeating itself in the

next generation, the young fathers in the three films discussed below go against this model by becoming caring, competent father figures themselves. In this respect, the final two films are particularly interesting, to the extent that, while *August Rush* and *Ondine* foreground the stories of paternally signified young Irish men, they also express Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity in idealized terms at the level of characterization *and* star persona.

***28 Days Later* (2008), *August Rush* (2007) and *Ondine* (2009)**

28 Days Later is an apocalyptic zombie movie set in present day Great Britain, in which a viral contagion has turned the majority of the population into savage cannibals of superhuman strength. The leading character is the Irish cycle courier Jim, played by Cillian Murphy, who, on emerging from a coma following a traffic accident, awakens to find London abandoned, in ruins, and overrun by “infected” citizens. Along with a chemist and fellow survivor, Selena (Naomie Harris), a cockney cab driver, Frank (Brendan Gleeson) and his daughter Hannah (Megan Burns), Jim travels with the group from London to Manchester, where they believe a military barracks with an antidote for the infection has been established, all-the-while attempting to evade the savage and “infected” zombie-like figures inhabiting the countryside.

Much like the other films discussed above, *28 Days Later* combines Oedipal crisis, Foster’s generational conflict, and Hamad’s postfeminist paternity in its portrayal of fathers and sons. The fact “that the future of Britain appears to lie in the hands of a young Irish cycle courier” (Barton, *Irish National Cinema* 11) makes it a good example of how cinema has represented Irish masculinity during Ireland’s Celtic Tiger period, and, to this extent, the character of Jim makes for an interesting case, configured as he is in terms of Irish, British and American cultural contexts.

Notwithstanding the apocalypse that engulfs him, both the film's director, Danny Boyle, as well as its writer, Alex Garland, were adamant that the foremost crisis facing Jim is an Oedipal one:

This thing about a father figure for him [Jim] is crucial. He will not believe that his father, especially his Dad, is dead and that will have to be proved to him. And then throughout the film he has a whole series of different father figures that he relates to really, as he searches for himself I suppose in some way ("Feature Length Audio Commentary by Danny Boyle and Alex Garland").

In this respect, Jim's character arc develops as he proceeds to identify with several different paternal figures throughout the film, each of whom proves to be ineffective or inadequate in some way. It is only when he becomes responsible for his potential love-interest in the character of Selena, and the subsequently orphaned teenager, Hannah, that Jim proves his masculinity as an autonomous male presence in the film.

The first two paternal figures presented, Jim's biological father, and the cockney cab-driver Frank, do not transpire to be "bad" fathers, so much as ineffective ones. On the contrary, they are constructed as figures of warmth and security. But despite, or because of, this characteristic, they are unable to fulfil their paternal responsibilities. Jim's father abdicates his role by committing suicide, while Frank, despite being "this big injection of warmth into the film" (ibid.), proves to be too governed by his emotions. After snapping at Jim, Hannah, and Selena when their search for the British Army forces is initially unsuccessful, Frank storms off in a temper, and is subsequently infected by coming into contact with contaminated blood.

Major West (Christopher Eccleston) is the third paternal presence in the movie, and while he imparts a vastly different temperament when compared to the earlier real and surrogate father figures, he also proves to be an unsuitable male for Jim to identify with and

emulate. Described by Boyle as a “patrician figure” (ibid.), West is marked by his rigidity and maintains a clinical perspective upon their present situation. He chains up an infected soldier in order to assess the length of time it takes him to starve to death, and approves the gang rape of Selena and Hannah by his soldiers for the purpose of procreation on the basis that, as possibly the last remaining humans on the island, there is an onus on his battalion to procreate to protect the human species, or at least the British population, from extinction.

This succession of inadequate father figures and ongoing apocalypse sets the stage for Jim’s heroism, and, what Hamad refers to in her discussion as, “the recuperative enactment of protectorate fatherhood” (57). According to Hamad, post-9/11 culture is a particularly receptive context for films in which regressive configurations of masculinity are excused by a crisis that jeopardizes the nuclear, or surrogate family unit. The male protagonists of these films are redeemed through “protective fatherhood” where they battle alien (extra-terrestrial or human) invaders, or natural disasters that propel them into hyper-masculine action (51).

Notwithstanding the fact that *28 Days Later* began filming prior to the 9/11 attacks that form the basis of much of Hamad’s argument regarding disaster films, it is possible to situate *28 Days Later* within this context. The film was shot more or less in sequence, and, while the first thirty minutes reflect a pre-9/11 context (Boyle was allowed to include a red London bus on its side, something he claims was subsequently prohibited following September 11), the remaining two-thirds of the film were shot in the immediate aftermath of the New York terrorist attacks (“Feature Length Audio Commentary by Danny Boyle and Alex Garland”).

The climax of the film then, revolves around Jim accepting the role of the alpha male, by choosing to oppose the army’s ethos, and taking responsibility for Selena and Hannah, thus becoming the surrogate paternal presence himself. According to Boyle, Jim “has to do

that work himself really in the end. He can't keep relying on the father figure" (ibid.). While Jim begins the film as an unsuitable partner for Selena, and positions himself filially into Frank's family, by the conclusion, having fought violently for their safety (in one instance gouging a soldier's eyes out with his bare hands), he asserts his feelings for Selena, and assumes a paternal responsibility for Hannah's welfare.

Overall, *28 Days Later* presents an apocalyptic scenario in which the previous generation, characterized by Jim's father, Frank, and Major West, prove ineffective archetypes of masculinity, while the future generation, encapsulated in the character of Jim as a post-millennial Irish male, is framed in terms of strong, sensitive, and paternal heroism.

The next film concerning an Irish character in a father/son relationship is the Hollywood family movie, *August Rush*, starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers. Meyers plays Louis Connolly, an Irish immigrant living in New York as a musician in a rock band who, on a single encounter, meets and falls in love with Lyla Novachek (Keri Russell), a highly-regarded classical cellist. After spending the night together, Lyla becomes pregnant but is forced to leave before being able to tell Louis of her pregnancy, and, as a result, he is left distraught over her departure. When, months later in San Francisco, a traffic accident causes Lyla to go into labour prematurely, her father (William Sadler) secretly arranges for the baby to be adopted under the guise that the infant has died. Lyla and Louis' son, Evan (Freddie Highmore), is placed in a home, and grows up to be a highly sensitive boy with an affinity for music.

Due to the numerous parallels between both stories, *August Rush* is to all intents a modern retelling of Charles Dicken's classic novel *Oliver*, but with the addition of music as the force uniting the orphan with his parents. Notwithstanding the fact that the film's affective register is more keeping with a romance/family drama, *August Rush* displays

characteristics that Hamad finds active in many comedy, Bromance, and road movies released throughout the first decades of the twenty-first century. These films foreground the immaturity of their male protagonists: frequently young men reluctant to relinquish the freedom of adolescence for the world of work and the responsibility that it entails. Often in tandem with the arrival of a romantic interest, impending fatherhood or a paternal vacuum in need of fulfilment subsequently necessitates the acceptance of adult responsibilities, reforming erstwhile wayward male characters as ideal men. Thus, as Hamad makes clear, “the dilemma of maturing the perpetual adolescent is resolved through paternalization, priming the immature protagonist to embody postfeminist fatherhood, thereby recuperating his masculinity from the abjection of immaturity” (93).

If the film can be differentiated from some of the earlier films discussed above due to the absence of Oedipal or generational crisis, as in *28 Days Later* discussed above, *August Rush* presents the leading character’s paternal transformation against several other ineffective father figures. Lyla’s father is reserved and emotionally detached, and puts his ambition for Lyla’s career ahead of her emotional and psychological welfare, while the Wizard—initially a mentor figure to Evan—is motivated by greed, and exploits the boy’s talents for his own personal gain. By contrast, Meyers’ character Louis is impulsive, emotional, and expressive, (he strikes up deeply intimate conversations with complete strangers and expresses his feelings through love songs) but in such a way that does not compromise his virility or capacity to provide a positive, heterosexual model of masculinity for his son to follow. This is verified at various stages throughout the film, as Louis is shown in t-shirts that make the most of Meyers’ toned biceps, and several scenes entail his character running athletically through New York traffic. As a consequence, his character is represented as a potentially loving father for Evan, by embodying a male identity composed of both emotional *and* physical strength, exemplifying what Hamad refers to as the “strong/sensitive dualism” of

postfeminist patriarchy (15). In one particular scene, Louis comes across Evan busking in Washington Square, and father and son, although unaware of the other's identity or the relationship between them, stage an impromptu performance whereby each phrase played by Louis on guitar is repeated back to him by Evan. This presents an innate synchronicity between father and son, who are connected both biologically, and harmonically, in their mutual affinity for music (see fig. 17). While both Lyla's father and The Wizard manipulate music for prestige and financial reward respectively, Louis counsils Evan to "never give up on your music" and "have a little faith." It is in this way that *August Rush* conflates music with spirituality, most notably through the discovery of Evan's talent when he begins playing on a church organ.



Figure 17. Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Freddie Highmore in *August Rush* (2007)

But notwithstanding the way the film positions Louis' as an ideal lover/man/father, he only achieves this domestic fantasy after setting aside his adolescent lifestyle, and accepting adult responsibilities. At a later stage in the film, the audience is informed that Louis, traumatized after losing Lyla, has given up gigging professionally for a more stable white-collar profession (see fig. 18 and 19). In this way, *August Rush* can be situated obliquely within the context of Hamad's discussion of postfeminist paternity as it concerns "narratives

of immature masculinity transformed through fatherhood” (93), whereby fatherhood brings about the necessary circumstances for maturity and redemption. In the case of *August Rush*, Louis’ transition from amateur musician to businessman becomes the catalyst that brings about the unification of the nuclear family.



Figure 18. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *August Rush* (2007)



Figure 19. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *August Rush* (2007)

To the extent then that Meyers is cast as the father and not the son, *August Rush* offers much scope for consideration within the present discussion. In positioning Louis as “the good father” figure rather than the bad, the film uses the character of an Irish immigrant in America during the Celtic Tiger period, and the actor playing him, as a medium to promote a

more open-minded and emotionally accessible masculinity. The film thus reiterates the concept of Irishness as heritage fantasy that, according to Negra, “enables a hard, masculine Americanness a foray into sentiment and recollection without engendering any deviation of identity as stipulated” (“Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics” 363). Louis is constructed as essentially different from the other males in the film through his Irishness which is here connected to his sensitivity, and free-spirited nature.

It is also music and Irishness, as opposed to yearning for fatherhood, that featured strongly in several interviews that were conducted with Meyers regarding the film, as well as in the reviews generated by its release. Headlined “August Rush Strikes a Chord with Jonathan Rhys Meyers,” Vikki Campion’s review for Melbourne’s *Herald Sun* begins by stating that “Jonathan Rhys Meyers has one addiction he will never go to rehab for—music. It’s what drew the Irish actor to his latest movie, *August Rush*. ‘Music is just an intrinsic part of my life,’ Meyers says.” Similar statements appear in articles posted on entertainment webzines like “accesshollywood.com” and “straight.com,” both of which also refer to the fact that the scenes in which Louis sings on stage were actually performed by Meyers. Most interesting of all is the way that, much like his character Louis, Meyers’ makes his particular love of music an intrinsic part of his identity by linking it to his Irishness. In this way he presents an image of himself as idiosyncratic and distinctive while also, as the following example illustrates, attempting to avail of the cultural currency that has long been afforded to members of the Irish diaspora:

“I can sing and play guitar, but I have some brothers, and one of them was the drummer in the band, and I played with them for fun,” Rhys Meyers explains. “They play properly, and I was one of those kids that felt, ‘If I can’t do it to where I could be something else at it, I am not that interested.’ But I think everyone’s life has a soundtrack. I am sitting here talking to you, but I can hear the traffic and I know that I am in New York because the music is telling me that. That sense of how strong sounds can be is an important element of the film, and one I could definitely relate to. I have always loved listening to everything, and the range is pretty broad. I listen to Van Morrison and to [Johann Sebastian] Bach, particularly to the Goldberg

Variations. I have listened to choral stuff and felt a little highbrow, but then I would get over that by turning to the Pogues so that I could feel that sense of being displaced Irish.” (Caddell)

As Barry King has noted, if stars of early cinema during the Hollywood studio system, maintained a successful acting career based on their ability to define “the essence of a type” yet never surpassing “the notion of type altogether” (15), contemporary stars are differentiated based on their own particular brand identity, in which, what he refers to as, an actor’s “veridical self” eclipses the character he or she plays. Stars,

... are no longer habitually associated with particular genres that invest them with particular personalities but rather with the concept of efficient performance in any genre, which is the creative analogue of financial performance. Stars as pure celebrities are not tokens of a type but indices of an individual singular presence. No longer signatures of a definite cultural locale (Hollywood) or ambiguous social types, they appear as self-sufficient *brands* that stamp their presence onto fiction and actuality as existential signatures (15).

What we see in the case of Meyers then, is a concerted effort on his part to claim Irishness as a distinctive part of his star persona. Rather than fatherhood or an inner desire to fulfil a paternal role, it is Irishness here that functions as the point of contact between the actor and the character. In this respect, the interview is one example that effectively shows how Irishness is being watermarked onto Meyers’ “brand,” as King describes it. In this instance however, the incorporation is one Meyers himself colludes in.

The final film to be considered from this perspective is *Ondine* (2009), which, as well as being a film starring a Celtic Tiger actor as a positive paternal influence, is also interesting for the discourses that circulated before, and after, its release. Unlike in the case of Meyers in *August Rush* though, these discourses would seem to be more forcefully diffused by popular media, rather than by Farrell himself. While just beyond the parameters of the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland, *Ondine* is particularly important for the fact that the life of the leading character, Syracuse, contained many parallels with Farrell’s own star persona. As such, his

performance was interpreted as having greater depth or realism, not least of all because Farrell subsequently began a relationship with the leading actress who plays his love interest in the movie, Alicja Bachleda. Although the relationship was short-lived, the couple had a child together, Henry, the same year the film was released. The addition of Henry to Farrell's life, much like the birth of his first son James, has been received as a stabilizing influence on the actor. While Farrell was notorious for his persistent partying, alcoholism, and drug use in his early career, Farrell has in more recent years become noted for his reformed life style of yoga, abstinence, and, most particularly, his dedication to his sons. For example, a recent article in the popular men's magazine *GQ*, began its interview with Farrell stating:

Sobriety and fatherhood have been good for him. They have also coincided with one of the most fruitful periods of his career, with brilliant comic turns in the likes of **In Bruges** to last year's **Seven Psychopaths**. In this weekend's superb **Saving Mr Banks**, Farrell puts in a devastating performance as the alcoholic father of **Mary Poppins** creator PL Travers—made all the more powerful as it's a hint of what might have been. (O. Franklin)

The quote, one of many to focus on Farrell's new role as a father-figure, such as articles printed by *TV3*, *The Daily Mail*, and *People Magazine*, illustrates the way that Farrell's star persona has been amended to align with his personal circumstances. What is particularly important to note is the fact that Farrell has not so much renounced his "bad-boy" image, as moulded his roguish reputation to portray a sort of new-age approach to fatherhood. As stated in the same interview:

There was a time, around ten years ago, where anything could follow: when Farrell was still Hollywood's token bad boy, the unrepentant Irish rogue, and every interview was full of candid new revelations about the drugs, the drinking, the many (occasionally ill-gotten) women. Today though, when Farrell says it a few minutes after **GQ** sits down with him in London's Savoy hotel, it's an illustration of how far he's come. "I'm not saying I'm really good," he says, with a wry smile, "but literally the worst thing I've done in the last eight years is sneak a f***ing sandwich into the cinema that was not bought on the property."

Occurring at the beginning of Farrell's reformed lifestyle, *Ondine*, is useful to consider due to the fact that it effectively demonstrates one of the first of many examples in which Farrell's rebel persona is shaped to portray an unconventional, but functional, approach to fatherhood. Much like the aging stars that Hamad refers to, fatherhood has served to "positively inflect" Farrell's stardom. Moreover, the film epitomises the arguments that have been made throughout this chapter, where, as we shall see, Farrell's character Syracuse is an amalgamation of Hamad's immature adult masculinity recuperated through fatherhood, and a sensitive paternal presence amidst the array of ineffective parental alternatives that feature throughout the film. He exists on the margins of society, but, through his devotion to his daughter, Syracuse is ultimately reformed, inspiring both the trust of his daughter, and the love of the mysterious Ondine.

Ondine tells the story of Syracuse, an Irish fisherman who lives in a small Cork town. Syracuse is regarded as a figure of ridicule due to his previous addiction to alcohol, and consequently nick-named "Circus" for his former clownish behaviour. Despite his relatively modest income as a fisherman, Syracuse is a devoted father to his nine-year-old daughter Annie (Alison Barry), who is suffering from kidney failure. Syracuse's life takes an unexpected turn when he finds the body of a woman caught up in his nets following a day's fishing. After resuscitating her, she claims to have no memory of her life but begs Syracuse not to let anyone see her. Syracuse, himself a sort of recluse, reluctantly agrees and takes the woman, who names herself Ondine, to an abandoned caravan that previously belonged to his late mother.

Syracuse later weaves the bizarre experiences of the day into a story for Annie, who believes the woman to be a "selkie," a mythological figure that is part human and part seal. While initially sceptical, Syracuse begins to be taken in by the folklore when Ondine's singing coincides with good fortune for him while out fishing. The two grow closer,

particularly as Annie, whose own mother (Dervla Kirwan) is an alcoholic and living with a violent, possibly abusive alcoholic partner, develops a rapport with Ondine. Despite the repeated suggestion that Ondine is in fact a selkie, the reappearance of Vladic (Emil Hostina), known to Ondine but a stranger to the village, forces her to confess the truth to her new surrogate “family”: Ondine was actually a prisoner and drug-mule working for Vladic. The two were attempting to smuggle a kilo of heroin into Ireland until discovered by the coast guard, forcing Ondine to swim for shore with the drugs where she was picked up in Syracuse’s fishing net.

Ondine is thus a blend of fable and drama, but ultimately it is a film about redemption, both in terms of Ondine’s former life as a drug-mule but more specifically here, in terms of Syracuse/Farrell’s renunciation of alcohol for the sake of his child[ren]. Throughout the film, Syracuse is portrayed as a deeply caring, if unconventional, father figure who ultimately makes the best of his circumstances in the hopes of providing stability for his daughter. Although not remotely religious, he attends weekly confession with the local priest, played by Stephen Rea, as no AA meetings are held in the remote Irish town. Here, talking signals Syracuse’ psychological stability and the fact that, for the most of the film, he has rejected his shambolic lifestyle. He abstains from drinking and, unlike Annie’s mother (who is variously portrayed as irresponsible, hysterical and an incapable addict) or her partner, Alex (Tony Curran), Syracuse cares for his daughter by picking her up from school, telling her stories, and constantly checking on her welfare. Thus, while he is shown to have faults (he steals lingerie for Ondine and lapses into a drunken stupor to the point that he awakens the following morning up a tree) Syracuse is ultimately a very responsible parent. As a consequence, rather than detracting from him, Syracuse’s flaws make him a more likeable figure, and, in this way, the character was seen to correspond with Farrell’s own personable public image. *Ondine* then, is an example of a film in which Celtic Tiger Irishness

is equated with an unorthodox masculinity that resists complicity with traditional and hegemonic archetypes on parallel levels of character and star text.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the way that iconic Irish films of the late 1980s and early 1990s have interwoven Oedipal themes into their stories, in such a way which verifies Stella Bruzzi's comment that, for all his importance in an "individual's unconscious," "so often, in life as well as in movies, the real father is a disappointment" (viii). Hannah Hamad's discussion of postfeminist paternity points to the way that fatherhood has become one of the more recent formations of hegemonic masculinity, and for younger actors, diverse narratives of progressive fatherhood employ paternity as a way of working out the softer side of masculinity, in response to the limited gains of feminism. This argument, whether in Irish, or American cinema, has framed the transition from one generation of Irish actors to another. In this respect, Foster's method of analysis illustrates the way that the conflict between generations is not only understood in terms of age, but also in ideology, and it is the meanings attached to both groups, particularly the more recent troupe of stars, Colin Farrell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Cillian Murphy, that this chapter has gone at length to identify.

But, notwithstanding Hamad's contention that "fatherhood has become the dominant paradigm of masculinity in mainstream U.S. cinema" (1), these final three films in particular indicate that fatherhood has been secondary to the Irishness of both the characters portrayed, and the actors playing them. What can be concluded is that while both generations of Irish actors continue to enjoy success in Irish and U.S. films, whether as sons, fathers, or both, the more recent generation of actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy, have played male characters whose actions and behaviours challenge regressive mores of "traditional" tropes of Irish masculinity. If these two generations of Irish actors must compete with systemic Irish

stereotypes in both their “personal” lives and professional roles, Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy are implicated in discourses that respond to the notion that, as opposed to the historical depiction of stoic Irish males, the Celtic Tiger heralded a more progressive way of performing Irish masculinity which, as we shall see, must be understood as part of the ideology of change and progress attached to the master narrative of the Celtic Tiger.

In this respect, it is to the importance of urban development, particularly the way that sexuality and sexual mores were implicated in discourses of the city as a globalized space, that the final chapter of this thesis shall now turn its attention.

SEXUALITY AND THE CITY: THE IRISH METROSEXUAL

The present thesis has undertaken to investigate the characteristics that furthered the popularity of several Irish actors within Hollywood cinema during Ireland's Celtic Tiger period. To this end, it has demonstrated how the specific context of post- 9/11 America, combined with the so-named "crisis of masculinity" within white U.S. popular culture, augmented the attraction of Irishness as a means of reinvigorating white U.S. masculinity. This was influenced by the notion of Irishness as a form of ethnic whiteness, and the use of Irishness as a conduit for violence within Hollywood, where, as John Hill has noted, violence "is central to the positivism and dynamism characteristic of American cinema" ("Images of Violence" 151). What remains to be determined however, is to what extent did the juxtaposition of traditional markers of Irishness, together with a massive level of urban development in Ireland during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, have a bearing upon the popular appeal of the Irish actors in question?

Key to this discussion is the theory that the economic development identified as the Celtic Tiger complicated pre-established ways of thinking about or understanding Irishness, in a way that bore substantially on representations of Ireland, the Irish, and most specifically in this case, Irish masculinity, at a local and global level. If, as Benjamin Forest states, "it is the symbolic value of place that makes it an effective organizer of identity" (136), then in order to fully identify the specific characteristics of Celtic Tiger masculinity, it is necessary to appreciate the material and conceptual changes in the Irish landscape, during a period when "[m]any involved wanted to overcome the negative stereotyping perpetuated by American and British filmmakers who colonized Irish screen space and apparently characterized the Irish as a backward, rural community with a propensity for violence and alcoholic excess" (Brereton 28). It is only necessary to consider the farcical farmyard scene in *Perrier's Bounty*, when the ill-fated hero Michael (Cillian Murphy) is accused of rape by a

demented farmwife, for attempting to take shelter in a barn, despite the fact he is sitting on a bale of hay some distance away from her, to appreciate the dualistic position of rural Ireland within the contemporary Irish psyche. Far from just a change of scenery, the countryside within this context stands as a loaded symbol of social backwardness, and immaturity, with severe proscription around sexual identity, to the extent that it has been repeatedly subject to ridicule within Celtic Tiger Irish cinema.

The first part of this chapter will establish the integral relationship between Irishness and agriculture since the foundation of the state, and will include a discussion of rural inflected representations of Irishness in U.S. culture at this time. This is done so as to fully acknowledge the degree to which elements of the Celtic Tiger considerably challenged previously established discourses of Irishness in America. The chapter will then consider the particular characteristics of Celtic Tiger Ireland, and this will be followed by a detailed discussion of the gradual amalgamation of Irish masculinity with a more globally circulated metrosexual identity. Finally, the development of the star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy will be discussed in relation to the Celtic Tiger period. It was during this time that substantial changes in what constituted indigenous identity formations of masculinity, such as the metrosexual, materialized in Irish popular culture. By situating the early careers of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy within the cultural context of Celtic Tiger Ireland, it is possible to trace the underlying discourses central to the formation of a metrosexual identity that is heavily qualified by stereotypes of Irishness.

Irishness: Colonialism, Nationalism and an Agrarian Economy

As a starting point, the extent to which pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland was linked, ideologically, culturally, and economically, to agriculture must be recognized. Without such an acknowledgement, the implications in terms of the formations of Irish masculinity

imported into Hollywood cannot be fully appreciated. The actors considered represent a metrosexual masculinity predominantly shaped by urbanization, and it is here argued that a major aspect of their appeal within Hollywood is based on the way in which they each respond to previous notions of Irishness, solely associated with an agrarian economy. This is not to suggest that the Irish were an agricultural people before the Celtic Tiger, and an urban population following. The progressive urbanization of the country arose from policies initiated in the 1960s, and, as shall become apparent, the response of several filmmakers of the 1970s and 80s convey a profound disenchantment with the tropes of rural Ireland. However, global recognition of this change was not so emphatically articulated until the period marked as the Celtic Tiger. An awareness of such shifts in image culture and socio-political discourse has had broader implications for the type of Irish masculinity absorbed by Hollywood, and contributed to the international success of Irish actors such as Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy. Therefore, the significance of agriculture for the concept of Irish identity pre-dating this period must be fully acknowledged in cultural, and economic terms if such a shift is to be demonstrated.

It is necessary to begin then by returning to consider further an aspect raised in Chapter One, namely, the particular way that rural Ireland served an important ideological function for nationalists trying to construct an idea of the nation which was divorced from British colonial rule. According to D. George Boyce, the “solid core of Irish nationalism from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was the Irish tenant farmer, a conservative, yet tenaciously nationalist, class” and opposition to the use of Irish cities as British industrial centres within the island was a major factor driving the nationalist movement in Ireland (378). Thus, as Kevin Rockett has noted, for Irish nationalists, rural Ireland was privileged as “the site of authentic Irishness,” whereby “choosing the country was a rejection of the trappings of the colonial Other as well as an attempt to enter a romantic Arcadia with man in

dialogue with nature rather than man” (“(Mis)-Representing the Irish Urban Landscape” 217). According to Seamus Deane, all nationalist movements are driven by an objective of discovery, an attempt to locate an “intrinsic essence in some specific and tangible form,” an ideal that is perceived to be located in a pre-colonial past (8). The task of Irish nationalism was to re-inscribe colonial history with a narrative for, and of, the nation, whereby “the Edenic moment was displaced back into the pre-Christian (and therefore presectarian) past” (Deane 8-9). As a consequence, rural Ireland has frequently figured as a loaded symbol of “the nation” within the Irish literary, and later cinematic, tradition.

Additionally, rural Ireland had a material basis in the value of agriculture to the Irish economy. The early policies of the new government of the Irish Free State were directed towards the cultivation, and development, of a confident agricultural sector (Bielenberg and Ryan 49), most notably, through the promotion of free trade, which, according to Joe Durkan, arose from a “belief that Ireland’s comparative advantage lay in grass-based production (cattle and milk) and that the objective should be to maintain a low domestic cost base in order to ensure the profitability of these agricultural activities” (270). This situation remained in place until the newly elected Fianna Fáil government, that came to power in 1932, focused on a protectionist strategy in line with global trends responding to the Great Depression (Donnelly 94). Protectionism, with its emphasis on self-sufficiency, and the development of indigenous industry did succeed in boosting industrial growth and employment. However, this success was short lived, predominantly due to the fact that any competitive advantage within the state lay in agricultural exports. Thus, agricultural subsistence remained an integral aspect of Irish fiscal strategies, until economic stagnation necessitated that the government take measures to revive the flagging economy that was marked by high levels of unemployment and emigration in the 1950s (C. McCarthy 12).

In 1958, the Secretary of the Department of Finance, T.K Whitaker, published the “White Paper Programme for Economic Expansion” detailing a series of five year plans intended to address the sedentary Irish economy by altering the focus of economic policy (12). The publication of Whitaker’s dossier is important, as it marked Ireland’s decision to abandon the previous intention to isolate the Irish economy through protectionism, and protect the Irish economy with tariffs and quotas. From this point on, any fiscal programme was formulated to take account of Ireland’s position within a wider system of global markets. As noted by E. M. Trauth,

The first of several industrial development plans to follow, the Programme for Economic Expansion represented a rupture from the past as it reversed the protectionist policies then in place. The assumption that Ireland would prosper by promoting the interests of small farmers and native industry serving local markets was cast aside. It was replaced with an agenda which opened wide the doors of foreign investment as Ireland began to participate fully in the world economy. (29)

Lemass’ brief tenure lasted only until 1966, when ill health forced his retirement, but he is credited with changing the direction of Irish economic policy (Girvin and Murphy 2). A major legacy of Lemass’ term in office was that Ireland acquired membership of the EEC in 1973. It was hoped that Ireland’s economy would improve with access to the markets and free trade between member states, but it is worth noting that the welfare of the Irish agricultural sector was a major impetus behind this decision (Murphy 45). Lemass’ belief that the future of the Irish economy rested on its ability to compete commercially within the wider markets of Europe, and America, marked a change in economic policy, and a recognition of the need to develop Irish industries through foreign investment, but, in such a way as to enhance and complement Ireland’s agricultural sector.

In this way, the period is relevant from the perspective of the current thesis for two, seemingly contradictory reasons. Firstly, the development of the Celtic Tiger was in many ways a legacy of the decision to find alternatives to Ireland’s insular nationalism, and

protectionist policies, by considering the potential economic gains from foreign investment (Girvin and Murphy 4). Secondly, entrance to the EEC also brought about the advancement of Irish agriculture, where Irish farmers benefited from access to funds, and recognition of more profitable farming methods within Europe. According to Daniel Webster-Hollis, “[f]arm income doubled from 1973-1978” and “EEC subsidies relieved budget pressures” previously felt by the Irish government (184). Thus, the significance of rural Ireland in nationalist consciousness, and the continued relevance of farming from an economic perspective, both point to the way in which agriculture remained an inherent discourse of Irishness as an ideological and material base.

However, the Irish economy contracted further during the 1980s, with high levels of unemployment and emigration. In response to the fiscal crisis, the Irish government, under the direction of Taoiseach Charles Haughey, introduced substantial tax increases in the early 1980s, but these proved insufficient to counter the massive deficit in the Irish budget (Hakizimana 53). By 1984, further measures became necessary inciting radical cuts in government spending, and these, alongside the closing of government institutions, voluntary redundancies, and early retirement schemes, reduced public sector employment by 10,000 jobs (53).

Such extensive deviations in the condition of the Irish economy, and their impact upon Irish culture, invariably influenced the establishment, production, and cultivation of an Irish film industry, most notably, in terms of funding. The consolidation of an Irish film industry as a commercial pursuit with the potential for economic benefit was being considered by Sean Lemass from 1937 (R. Flynn 166). However, the Department of Finance persistently rejected any proposal submitted in this regard, mostly, due to the limitations of the domestic market, and the need for substantial State financing or foreign investment (170). The decision to build a national film studio at Ardmore Place in Bray, County Wicklow,

ultimately resulted from the conjoined interest of “cinema owner and impresario” Louis Elliman, producer, Emmet Dalton, and chairman of the Abbey Theatre, Ernest Blythe, on the basis that there existed a “potential US market for Irish-produced material,” or more specifically, for “Abbey plays as made-for-TV movies” (184-5). Ideally placed within reach of the sea, and surrounded by both mountainous and flat terrain, the location provided much scope for possible filming sites (Rockett, “An Irish Film Studio” 99). However, despite the obvious potential for indigenous employment as film technicians and crew, the actual leasing of Ardmore as a studio for predominantly British use in the years following resulted in much controversy (100).

A body to fund indigenous productions, the Irish Film Board, was not established until 1981. However, relaxing of censorship codes, and the passing of The Arts Act in 1973, provided grants for novice filmmakers (Rockett “Breakthroughs” 128), and produced a body of films marked by “formal experimentation,” and “political engagement” (Barton, *Irish National Cinema* 87). From the late 1970s to 1980s, Irish filmmakers sought to dismantle the stereotypes produced by mainstream cinema, and were influenced by socio-political movements in the way of feminism, Marxism, structuralism, and semiotics, as well as the aesthetics of “unpleasure” found in European avant-garde cinema (Barton, *Irish National Cinema* 88), and the work of filmmakers such as Jean Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub, and Daniele Huillet, Pierre Perrault, and Jean Rouch (White 101). Of interest here is the particularly bleak way in which Irish directors of the period approached rural Ireland in their films. For example, in the Irish language film directed by Bob Quinn, *Poitín* (1978), two thieves who double-cross their supplier, ransack his cottage, and molest his daughter are left to drown when the distiller sabotages their boat in retribution for their betrayal. But, as noted by Kevin Rockett, “[a]lthough the poteen-maker is located outside the law he remains within

a set of social values and while the countryside is presented more harshly than before it nonetheless remains a repository for traditional values” (“Breakthroughs” 130).

It would be wrong to suggest that rural Ireland pervaded the subject matter of all the films produced with Quinn’s earlier film *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire* (1975), Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (1978), Pat Murphy’s *Maeve* (1982), Cathal Black’s *Our Boys* (1981), and *Pigs* (1984) taking on a range of themes such as the authentic representation of history, institutional abuse, feminism, and homophobia. In the case of the latter themes, experimentation was not only qualified, but severely limited, to the extent that “few of the early independent filmmakers were concerned with critiquing gender representations or the gendering of history/history of gender” with the notable exception of Pat Murphy who tackled the sidelining of women from versions of Irish history (Barton, *Irish National Cinema* 94). While homosexual characters did feature in several films such as *Pigs* (1984), or *Reefer and the Model* (1988), they were partitioned as “part of a deviant culture” (100), and it was not until the 1990s that commodified forms of gender such as metrosexuality became overtly celebrated.

Those who did seek to interrogate the stereotypes of rural Ireland were arguably responding to the changes taking place in Irish life. However, the thematic resilience of rural Ireland in these films is unavoidable, as Rockett’s in-depth analysis would suggest:

The countryside is also seen as a locus of repression and violence in contemporary society in Kieran Hickey’s *Exposure* (1978) while in Tommy McArdle’s *The Kinkisha* (1978) rural life is explored in the framework of inherited superstition. Robert Wynne-Simmons’ *The Outcasts* (1982), while set in pre-Famine times, also represents the countryside as a locale of conflict and instability (“Breakthroughs” 130).

Thus although Lemass’ tenure set the course for significant economic, industrial, and cultural developments in the country, agriculture continued to be a major aspect of Irish life until the 1980s.

The diversity of conflicting stereotypes encompassed within Celtic Tiger Irishness, such as a celebration of urban Ireland as cosmopolitan that was also marked by a nostalgia for rural culture, ensured a prolonged fascination in Hollywood for young Irish actors during the Celtic Tiger period. By embodying an identity marked by sentimentality, traditionalism, and consumerism without any depreciation of manliness, these actors have made acceptable a form of Irishness that reconciles the effects of globalization on the Irish landscape, but does not disturb the consolatory way that Irishness functions as, what Diane Negra calls, a “heritage zone for middle class white Americans” (“Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics” 358). It is therefore important to consider the perception of Irishness in the U.S. during the twentieth century, in order to fully emphasize the impact of Celtic Tiger Irishness from an American perspective.

Pre-Celtic Tiger Irishness in America

Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* is perhaps one of the most informative texts specifically concerned with the assimilation of Irish immigrants into America across the nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Ignatiev’s primary argument—that the efforts of the immigrant Irish to be accepted as white “was a strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society” (3) which had to be earned through the definitive declaration of allegiance to particular social groups (and the antagonistic treatment of “others”)—has been dealt with briefly in the first chapter of this thesis. It is nonetheless important to identify those characteristics and traits associated with the Irish as an immigrant caste. Further consideration of the period covered by Ignatiev proves useful in illuminating the role of Irishness in the U.S. preceding the economic upturn in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Before the Irish were deemed eligible for inclusion within white society, they were bracketed within a subordinate social order that was soon marked by a range of derogatory

stereotypes in print, on stage, and subsequently, cinema. As noted by Ignatiev, early Irish immigrants to the U.S.,

. . . commonly found themselves thrown together with free Negroes. Irish– and Afro–Americans fought each other and the police, socialized and occasionally intermarried, and developed a common culture of the lowly. They also both suffered the scorn of those better situated. Along with Jim Crow and Jim Dandy, the drunken, belligerent, and foolish Pat and Bridget were stock characters on the early stage. (3)

Initially highly offensive, such characters gradually took on more jovial forms that, while admittedly not flattering, bore more positive than negative connotations on a par with a transition from buffoon to affable rogue (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 12). This transition was in many ways accomplished as a result of two primary factors. Firstly, the dramatist “Dion Boucicault was the key figure in Irish-themed entertainment” (Rhodes 25) with his plays *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1865) and *The Shaughraun* (1874) understood as “genuine” or “authentic” portrayals amidst competing side-and-stage shows (33). In this respect Boucicault was one of the most prolific dramatists of the period to initiate a way of representing the Irish through a set of tropes that were, most notably, grounded in a particularly rural understanding of Irishness. As noted by John P. Harrington,

One of the most persistent factors in this series of productions over nearly a century is an evolving but consistent set of expectations for an “Irish play.” Boucicault first defined that genre by the criterion of the Irish subject matter, but from the beginning of this century to the present, the “Irish play” has come to imply a specific kind of Irish subject matter, invariably rural and Catholic. (7)

Another factor that brought about a change in the meanings attached to Irishness was vaudeville, which can in many ways be considered a progenitor of the stock Irish characters that would feature in early twentieth century silent cinema. Vaudeville was an evolution of the minstrel show, and from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gradually evolved to become a “mass entertainment industry of national proportions” (Snyder 408) by presenting a variety of performances such as comedy acts, songs, and dances, often involving

“blacking up, ethnically and racially charged humour” (406). Irish immigrants actively participated as performers and spectators, with acts that achieved their humour by exaggerating unfavourable stereotypes of Irishness such as alcoholism, violence, and loquaciousness, and vaudeville’s longevity depended upon its ability to cater to the wide variety of immigrant members in its audience. In this way, it was, as described by W. H. A. Williams, “a theatre of assimilation” (130):

On-stage ethnic differences were not being celebrated, nor were they simply being satirized. Joke by joke, the more extreme manifestations of ethnicity were being rendered unimportant by being made ridiculous. They were the differences that ultimately made no difference, providing they were eventually shed. For underneath their variegated exteriors, all urbanities shared the same goal—to survive and, if possible, get ahead. (129)

By the 1920s, the Irish as an ethnic group was being gradually assimilated within the melting pot of the American population. Many Irish had married and intermarried, with the result that there were numerous descendants of second and third generations of Irish living within the U.S. (Negra, *Off-White* 26). As noted by Rockett, the number of Irish in the U.S. had reached five million or approximately six percent of the American population during the silent era, and it is within this context that film representations of Irishness began to be offered (“The Irish Migrant” 18). Films of the 1920s took on a civilizing duty in the sense that stories stressed the necessity of cohesive assimilation, not only between immigrants and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant’s (WASPs), but more importantly, assimilation between different immigrant minorities (21). This was followed by the Depression era of the 1930s, the heyday of the gangster genre, and with it, the rise of its most popular star, the Irish American James Cagney.

However, it is important to emphasize that, although the majority of Irish immigrants established new lives in American cities, most were from an agricultural background, and originated in rural areas (Williams 92). Thus, media of Irish interest catered to the nostalgia of emigrant Irish with narratives dominated by rural themes. As noted by James R. Barrett,

“[t]o the extent that the Irish *were* moving up, it was precisely this distance from their roots that produced such nostalgia in the second and third generations” (175). Consequently, it is impossible to discuss the representation of the Irish in Hollywood without reference to the Irish American director John Ford whose westerns, and particularly his 1952 immigrant drama *The Quiet Man*, encapsulate the definitive representation of the Irish from an American perspective (Gibbons, *The Quiet Man* 3). From the beginning of Ford’s career, Irish characters featured in his westerns, becoming progressively more developed between 1920 and 1960 (14). For many, Ford’s *The Quiet Man* is the quintessential Hollywood Irish film due to its nostalgic portrayal of the rural Irish community, its romantic subject matter and pastoral setting, from the perspective of the returned emigrant Sean Thornton (John Wayne). The film coincided with the establishment of the Irish Tourist Board, Bord Fáilte, and the film trades heavily on “tourist and immigrant fantasies of a golden age in the past” (3). According to Luke Gibbons, “*The Quiet Man*’s euphoric blend of comedy and romance belongs to the pastoral genre, an idealization of rural life that dates back to Greek literature” (10).

In this way, then, the proliferation of images and representations of Irishness in the U.S. were derived from an idea of Ireland that was characterized by a rural landscape and an agrarian community. This concept was significantly challenged by the alternative discourses that circulated during Ireland’s Celtic Tiger period that not only brought urban Ireland into focus, but also significant changes in terms of idealized forms of masculinity. By the 1960s, the Irish in America had become cohesively assimilated (Meagher 50). This was reflected in the greater frequency of representations of Italians and Jews in the 1970s to 1990s (50-1), and similarly, by the fact that ethnic traces of Irish ancestry within film and television became increasingly more subtle, with a distinctively Irish surname often acting as the only indication of the ethnic origins of American characters (Rockett, “The Irish Migrant” 36-7). However,

the 1990s corresponded with a renewed interest in Irishness within U.S. popular culture, where Irishness, as Diane Negra has noted, became “a form of discursive currency, motivating and authenticating a variety of heritage narratives and commercial transactions, often through its status as a form of ‘enriched whiteness’” (“The Irish in Us” 1). Negra’s in-depth reading of this period has made perceptible how elective claims to Irishness served as a panacea for Americans concerned about the demise of traditional and familial values within a hyper-consumerized and capitalist U.S., and even more so following the national trauma of September 11 (“The Irish in Us” 3).

This period roughly coincided with the rising success of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland, which, as already referred to, brought about a change in previously established discourses of Irishness. While, as Natasha Casey has pointed out, there was a certain reluctance to accept such changes in the U.S. (92), particularly for Irish Americans eager to retain the nostalgia associated with a rural, pre-modern Irish heritage, this period did bring about a significant transformation for the indigenous Irish. As shall subsequently be demonstrated, these changes had implications beyond the industrial development, and greater levels of foreign direct investment that gave rise to a more buoyant Irish economy, most notably coinciding with a marked shift in the performance of gender identity by Irish men and women (Ging, “All Consuming Images” 52). But it is first necessary to identify the nature of the transformation that occurred during the Celtic Tiger period, in order to ascertain the specific changes to conceptions of Irishness, and Irish masculinity, that accompanied substantial economic growth.

Celtic Tiger Irishness

As Casey has indicated, most consumers of Irish products in the U.S. hold a fairly rigid and predetermined vision of Irishness that is characterized by sentiment, nostalgia,

romance, and pre-modern living (91–2). From an indigenous perspective, a dominant impulse of Celtic Tiger Ireland was the need to challenge most of the conservative traditionalism with which Irishness was previously associated, in such a way that connected urbanization with the adoption of a male sensibility more ideologically in tune with feminist discourses of sensitive manliness. As a result, this repulsion for the conservatism of de Valera’s Ireland became a feature of contemporary Irish films such as *About Adam* (2000), *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2001), and *Goldfish Memory* (2003). As noted by Martin McLoone, “these films represent a new sensibility. They attempt to construct a new cityscape for the cinema and the starting point is the changing contexts of affluence and consumption. The drive is to bring to the screen the city as lived experience” (*Film, Media and Popular Culture* 38). The Celtic Tiger period was characterized by the need to present an alternative version of Irishness by challenging the dominant signifiers pre-dating the contemporary moment, namely, by fostering secularism over devout Catholicism, encouraging foreign direct investment, and by promoting the expansion and development of urban areas. It is therefore important to recognize the substantial implications of globalization upon contemporary Irish life.

As previously mentioned, the foundations for Ireland’s economic boom between 1994 and 2007, were laid as far back as the 1960s, when the then acting government advocated a liberalization of the market in an attempt to attract foreign investment: “This opened a new boom phase in Ireland’s development from 1960 onwards, with a swift growth in foreign enterprises establishing themselves in Ireland for the export market, reflecting the new buoyancy in the global economy” (Kirby and Murphy 17-8). With a low corporate tax rate, substantial potential for industrial development and manufacture, and an educated, English speaking workforce, establishing business in Ireland offered a lucrative opportunity for conglomerates eager to take advantage of the country’s intermediary location between America and the rest of Europe (Flanagan 6). By 2006, there were over six hundred U.S.

firms with Irish headquarters employing five percent of the Irish workforce, leading some to conclude that the country was effectively “an Irish version of America” (5). This was accompanied by greater emphasis upon cosmopolitanism, and a focus on Ireland’s position within the context of a global community (Donovan and Murphy 17). On the one hand, Dublin garnered worldwide attention by being voted the best place in the world to live in 2005 (Ging et al. 3), while on the other, a price index for luxury goods revealed items sold in Dublin up to 63 percent more costly than many U.S. cities (Flanagan 56).

Such statistics demonstrate a further characteristic of Celtic Tiger Ireland, namely the privileged place afforded to consumerism and industrialization. The former had major implications on indigenous identity formations in general, and, as shall be discussed below, Irish masculinity in particular. At its most basic level, a consumerist society, in reducing individuals to consumers, has a detrimental impact upon human culture in that access to social resources becomes dependent upon financial factors rather than necessity (O’Halloran 214-5). With the shift in social capital from the Catholic Church to the market as an arbiter of communal values and behaviour, Tom Inglis makes the point that the Irish, “[i]nstead of being called to pray” were “called to consume” (179):

The world capitalist system thrives on difference, providing an enormous range of products and services, stimulating people to purchase these to fulfill their needs and have new experiences, explore new tastes and in doing so, develop a portfolio of choices that constitute not just a unique lifestyle but an ongoing unique sense of self. (164)

Such capitalist ideologies are traceable to the neoliberal approach of government bodies that came to power during the Celtic Tiger period.

With the economic crisis of the 1980s countered by a series of conservative fiscal policies aimed at reducing Ireland’s substantial debt, the economy had stabilized sufficiently to avail of the newly established European single market and the expansion of the U.S. market which began in the 1990s. These favourable global conditions aided in the indigenous

development of an Irish software sector between 1992 and 1997. According to Peadar Kirby and Mary Murphy, it was the political strategies of the coalition governments that came to power between 1997-2007, such as excessive state subsidies and tax reductions, that created the ensuing fiscal crisis from 2008 (74). This neoliberal approach effectively aligned the mutual interests of the political and corporate sector (Kirby and Murphy 8). With political decisions dictated to a large degree by profit rather than by the propagation of resources, and the development of public services, the financial rewards of Ireland's expanding economy were for the most part redirected towards maintaining the mechanisms of their production in the first place (7). As a consequence, Ireland's political, corporate, and industrial sectors were directed from the outset by a logic of conspicuous consumption that led to a greater disparity between the affluent and the impoverished members of society (Flanagan 37-38).

This disparity was to a large extent facilitated by the property bubble, a scenario created by the combination of low unemployment and a favourable economic climate (Norris and Redmond 4). According to Michelle Norris and Declan Redmond, there was an excessive rate of new house building by 2002 with 14.7 per 1000 inhabitants, the highest in the European Union at that time (2). A rise in property prices by 220 per cent between 1993 and 2003 left many house owners in positive equity, and this, accompanied by favourable mortgage lending by Irish banks, enabled many to purchase more lavish homes or acquire a second residence within or outside the Irish state (2). As noted by Donovan and Murphy,

The acquisition of property was higher on the agenda of the Irish, than for example, the Germans, ... unlike in most other countries, as the boom gathered pace, many segments of the Irish population appear to have concluded that the easy path to wealth lay in the acquisition of even more property, whether in the form of holiday homes, buy-to-let properties or participation in bank financed consortia that could leverage further acquisitions in Ireland or elsewhere. (76-7)

This created two scenarios. Firstly, the low level of income tax, although crucial in attracting foreign investment, proved insufficient to fund the social services for those in need, with the

result that the welfare of private citizens was placed secondary to sustaining Ireland's competitiveness at a corporate level, as Kirby and Murphy have noted (77). Furthermore, the increase in property prices had a parallel effect upon rented accommodation, with higher rents putting pressure on many, often low-income, tenants. While unemployment markedly decreased in a favourable economic climate, the number of homeless people in Ireland doubled during this time (McVerry 19).

Thus, a second consequence of Ireland's economic affluence was the perception that it had a degenerating impact upon the mores of the Irish themselves with the development of what Inglis refers to as a keen "commitment to self-realization through consumer choice" (8). Ireland became known in international financial circles as "the Wild West of European Finance" due to the country's "light-touch regulation" (qtd. in O'Toole 16) which enabled foreign corporations to establish headquarters in Ireland while availing of substantial tax incentives. It was suggested that centuries of colonial subjugation by the British had left the Irish with an "emotional attachment to property, and more viscerally to land," thereby explaining the excessive numbers of Irish acquiring new homes or second houses (Murray Brown). According to Colin Coulter,

The course that it has taken over the last generation has begun to gnaw at the very fabric of Irish society. Increasingly there are signs of atomisation among people who were formerly known for their connectedness. As individuals in the twenty-six counties have grown less attached to one another, they have inevitably grown more attached to things. ("The End of History?" 24)

The Celtic Tiger had substantial repercussions upon Irish culture, particularly in the areas of house building, corporate and private industrialization, globalization, and consumerism. However, of greatest relevance where the present thesis is concerned, is the correlating impact of Celtic Tiger Ireland upon Irish people, and, more precisely, how Celtic Tiger culture re-informed the way in which gender identities were understood in Ireland at this time. If, as Flanagan has suggested, a "national consensus philosophy went a long way

towards bolstering the image of a positive and stable investment environment that appealed to foreign capital” (39), then the combination of affluence, and the influence of global neoliberalism, produced a similar positivism that was discernible amongst the rising middle class of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Robert Latham sees the figure of the vampire as a “potent” symbol of the bourgeois’ libidinous thirst to consume, a metaphor first deployed by Marx, and invoked by many critics since to describe the “vampirism” of the “capitalist factory system” (1-3). Of interest in this regard is the extent to which the vampire-as-consumer with its “aggressive orality” threatens gender distinctions by eroticizing “biting and drinking” or “acquiring and consuming” and replacing “the libidinal charge of conventional genital sexuality” (97).

Latham cites the example of the literary progenitor of the figure made famous with the success of the novel *Dracula*, where the gender of Bram Stoker’s titular character is presented ambiguously with “masculine (penetrative teeth) and feminine (enveloping lips)” (97). When considered in relation to capitalism and consumption, according to Latham, “[u]ltimately, vampires are voracious androgynes driven by an indiscriminate longing” (97). It is interesting to note then, that a direct consequence of a heavily inscribed consumer culture, and the perception that Dublin was as globalized as any modern metropolis, was the way in which these developments substantially altered how Irish masculinity was understood and represented. According to Ging:

Over the past ten years, conspicuously new images of and discourses on gender have appeared in Irish shopping malls, on Irish billboards, in the Irish news and entertainment media and on the shelves in Irish bookshops. Radio shows, television programmes and online chat-rooms, magazines, daily newspapers and self-help books are all increasingly populated by a range of new male and female typologies: from new men, new lads and metrosexuals to domestic goddesses, desperate housewives and yummy mummies.... the recent rise in consumerism is affecting the ways in which we mediate and talk about gender behaviours, identities and relationships in contemporary Ireland. (“All Consuming” 52)

Of particular relevance here is the fact that Ging relates this diversity of gender formations to developments brought about by urbanization, namely in terms of more widespread exposure to media strategies, and retail opportunities. In this respect, it is one of these identities, specifically, the metrosexual, that must be considered in greater detail. But, the shifts in what constituted an idealized form of masculinity within an Irish context cannot be considered in isolation. In order to fully probe the defining features of the Irish metrosexual, it is first important to situate these developments within the broader shifts in gender identities across Britain and the U.S., most specifically, the appearance of “the New Man” and “New Lad.”

The “New Man,” introduced in the previous chapter, is central to the generational distinctiveness of the actors in question. The next section then, is intended to detail the specific origins, and characteristics, of metrosexual masculinity.

The Metrosexual

It has been widely recognized by Susan Jeffords and others that the subtle arrival of “the New Man” as a manifestation of idealized masculinity began just as the male icons of the Hollywood action genre of the 1980s were succeeded by less “muscular” heroes of the 1990s. Jeffords’ classic text *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity during the Reagan Era* (1994) reads the changes in idealized manhood as a response to the social crises experienced in the U.S. following the Vietnam War. To this extent, Jeffords identifies characteristics of the Reagan administration and the presidential persona of Ronald Reagan, himself a former Hollywood icon, reiterated within the action films of the period. While the 1980s, in tandem with Reagan’s early years in the presidency, valorized “hard body” characteristics such as strength, endurance, and toughness, movement within the administration from foreign to

domestic policy in the 1990s brought about a corresponding transfer in focus on the family unit as an integral factor in maintaining social stability. According to Jeffords,

In such a context, it would seem quite logical that the hard body that had been so closely affiliated with the foreign policy imaginary of the Reagan era would now shift toward domestic policies, emphasizing the family and personal values over market achievements. With a good deal of bravado, these new male heroes would thumb their noses at an economic superiority that they did not have and return to the families they had neglected before. (*Hard Bodies* 141)

The 1990s, then, corresponded with a change in ideals of manliness that privileged sensitivity, attentiveness, and the capacity for emotion alongside traditional markers of manliness such as resilience, courage, and strength. Taking up Jeffords argument, Brenton J. Malin's book, *American Masculinity under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties "Crisis of Masculinity"* (2000), considers the meanings attached to social constructions of masculinity within the U.S. under Bill Clinton. According to Malin, Clinton's presidency, and his presidential persona, embraced the image of the "New Man" then circulating within popular discourses, a tactic that was subsequently used to demean him by his political opponents (1). Clinton embodied sensitivity, through widespread publicity around his marriage, and later affair with, Monica Lewinsky, and also strength, through his Southern background, and political policies. If not specifically singled out as part of Malin's argument, it is also possible to include Clinton's role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process as an example of the "strong-sensitive" binary that Malin refers to here. In this respect, Clinton's role as arbiter between the then British Prime Minister, John Major, and Gerry Adams, as representatives of the British government and Sinn Fein (the political faction connected to the militant Republican terrorist organization the IRA) respectively, necessitated that the U.S. President push "the intransigent British government and pan-unionism towards accommodation" while also "Greening" the White House to facilitate Adams in encouraging the cooperation of the IRA in a peaceful resolution to the Troubles (Dixon 61-2). For Malin,

Clinton's presidency is a clear example of the conflicting discourses of masculine ideals that circulated throughout the 1990s:

Sensitive to our pain, but tough on crime, wealthy graduate of Yale, but down-home Arkansas boy; Clinton's persona remained a bundle of conflicts that embraced and overturned different stereotypes of American masculinity. Clinton's masculinity was thoroughly conflicted—embracing a kind of new, sensitive, non-traditional masculinity at the same time that it sought to demonstrate a powerful, thoroughly established sense of “real American manhood” the sort conventionally depicted in advertisements for pickup trucks by Ford, Dodge and Chevy. (7-8)

Malin's arguments, while focused on Clinton himself, bring to light several aspects in need of acknowledgement when considering the development of an Irish metrosexual male identity.

Firstly, his arguments suggest an appeal for alternative figurations of masculinity in response to social change. As Diane Negra has demonstrated, such a demand would become acute following the terrorist attacks of September 11:

In such a climate, the embrace of Irishness as a psychic defense capitalized on popular cultural associations between Irishness and an anachronistic experience of peace, serenity and innocence. The theme of removal to an experience of past serenity coded as Irish illustrates in part the depth of craving for innocence in contemporary American culture and the further fact that when it cannot generate innocence internally that culture will appropriate other national/ethnic categories to do so. (“Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics” 365)

Malin's emphasis on the conflicting standards articulated by, and expected of, the “New Man” of the 1990s is illustrative of the delicate balance required of men of the time to be both “hard” and “soft” in equal measure. This is particularly important from the Irish perspective, due to the fact that, as we have seen throughout this study and as will be considered in greater detail presently, the star personae of Meyers, Murphy, and Farrell in Hollywood have been structured around their ability to exemplify a sensitive, groomed, metrosexual identity, while simultaneously embodying an Irish ethnicity loaded with traditional markers of Irishness such as violence, rebelliousness, and bravado.

Secondly, Malin connects the conflicting ideals demanded during the period to the American “crises of masculinity” whereby society circulates popular perceptions of the self “in ways that tend to empower some groups and disempower others” (1). In this way, popular culture participates in embracing certain ideals of masculinity that can be exploited for commercial benefit, and this was a crucial aspect in the developing popularity of both the American, and Irish, metrosexual paradigms. According to Malin:

Masculinity, as an artefact of popular culture, is used to sell television programmes, automobiles, stereos and nearly every other imaginable consumer good (not to mention political candidates, laws, wars etc). The idea of the metrosexual, which has developed in an early part of this century to describe men preoccupied with their appearance, has created a marketing windfall for companies attempting to sell male cosmetics, shaving accessories, and other products that have previously been seen as “unmanly.” (5)

While Malin’s argument focuses explicitly upon the popular and political culture of America during the 1990s, the incentive for advertisers to exhibit, and support, a specific form of masculinity that was honed by an obsession with personal grooming, and sartorial flair, was also emerging in British, and subsequently Irish, popular culture. In this way, the “New Man” is understood within the broader arena of gender identities, particularly in relation to the parallel developments in feminine representation, whereby female-designated fashions such as mini-skirts and bright make-up were coupled with masculine accessories such as Doc Martin boots (Nixon 328). According to Sean Nixon, it was through the marketing of menswear and personal grooming products such as Levi jeans and Brylcreem that the image of the “New Man” was communicated (294-5).

Nixon’s comments draw attention to two important aspects of the New Man. Firstly, Nixon’s argument identifies the inherent contradiction entailed by an idealized version of masculinity loaded with typically effeminate traits, in conjunction with more standardized signifiers of masculine virility. Secondly, Nixon draws attention to the way in which various media, such as television and print, proffer the heterosexual male body as a product for

consumption for both the male and female consumer, and this aspect is also perhaps the most characteristic aspect of the phenomenon of the metrosexual male:

... the images were distinctive in sanctioning the display of masculine sensuality, and, from this, opening up the possibility of an ambivalent masculine sexual identity; one that blurred fixed distinctions between gay and straight-identified men. In this sense, much of the significance of this imagery related to the way it redrew relations between groups of men through the codes of style and consumer spectatorship. (328)

Such findings correspond with the observations of Steve Neale, whose earlier article “Masculinity as Spectacle” (1983) was one of the first to challenge Laura Mulvey’s contention that “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (Mulvey 12). Neale’s essay demonstrated the numerous ways in which the cinematic categories that Mulvey claimed operated to objectify female characters, and spectators were also complicit in destabilizing male subjectivities by way of sadomasochistic themes (Neale 12).

War films, Westerns and gangster movies, for instance, are all marked by “action,” by “making something happen.” Battles, fights and duels of all kinds are concerned with struggles of “will and strength,” “victory and defeat,” between individual men and/or groups of men. All of which implies that male figures on the screen are subject to voyeuristic looking, both on the part of the spectator and on the part of the male characters. (12)

“Masculinity as Spectacle” was amongst the first to bring masculinity into critical assessment in a way that had previously been applied to discussions of women. Furthermore, Neale’s arguments can be situated within a wider cultural context across the U.S. and U.K. where, as Nixon’s and Malin’s discussions demonstrate, certain expectations and stereotypes of masculinity were being redefined in such a way as to problematize an obvious distinction between male and female archetypes of appearance, and behaviour. As discussed throughout this thesis, and as shall be developed further in the coming pages, a particular feature of the Irish actors of this study is the way in which they each embody, to varying degrees, a form of masculinity that is supported, rather than compromised, by characteristics previously coded as feminine.

While discourses of “New Mannism” and also of metrosexuality materialized in European and North American popular culture, the “New Lad” as a male type has most prominently been treated as a British phenomenon, despite its overlapping characteristics with the American “gross-out” genre typified in films such as *There’s Something About Mary* (1998), *American Pie* (1999), and *The Hangover* trilogy (2009, 2011, 2013). The “New Lad” emerged partly as an antagonistic response to feminism, and backlash against the “New Man,” where, as Rosalind Gill has noted, “the figure of the new lad, constructed around knowingly misogynist and predatory attitudes to women represents a refusal to acknowledge the changes in gender relations produced by feminism and an attack upon it” (47). In her genealogy of the term, Gill notes several contributory factors in the promotion of the New Lad, such as through the growing popularity of men’s magazines like *Loaded*, *Arena*, or *FHM* which target a male readership through the mass marketing of female nudity, and discussions relating to football and pub culture. Similarly, television series such as *Men Behaving Badly* (1992-1998) and *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps* (2001-2011), and the films of British director Guy Ritchie such as *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and *Snatch* (2000), can be considered quintessential portrayals of lad culture with their irreverent humour, ironic undertones, and idealization of hedonism, hooliganism, and hard drinking. However, such portrayals circulate within clearly defined class boundaries which are distinguished, not only in relation to personal recreation, but also, in terms of purchase power.

In direct contrast then, the metrosexual, with its investments in luxury fashions and personal grooming, can be considered a narcissistic and middle-class counterpart to the New Lad and the working-class discourses of laddism just described. It is an engagement with processes of consumption that distinguishes the “metrosexual” from alternative constructions of masculinity. The term was first coined by Mark Simpson in 1994 to describe a new type of

male consumer, whose self-obsession, dress, and personal spending challenged the expected norms of male behaviour in popular culture. Most specifically, according to Simpson:

Metrosexual man, the single young man with a high disposable income, living or working in the city (because that's where all the best shops are), is perhaps the most promising consumer market of the decade. In the Eighties he was only to be found inside fashion magazines such as GQ, in television advertisements for Levis jeans or in gay bars. In the Nineties, he's everywhere and he's going shopping.

... the metrosexual man contradicts the basic premise of traditional heterosexuality that only women are looked at and only men do the looking. Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might prefer men, but when all's said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection.

Simpson's definition and the arguments earlier referred to by Malin and Nixon point to the fundamental link between the metrosexual and product consumption. It is this obsession with consumerism that proved appealing to the middle classes of Celtic Tiger Ireland, where, as noted by Ging et al., by being "wholly subsumed by the discourse of corporate profit," any social or political objectives became secondary to the interests of the commercial market (8). In this way, evidence of, and discourses concerning New Mannism, New Laddism, and metrosexuality from the most recent decades have surfaced in response to socio-cultural developments, and the academic response engendered by them. While it is important to distinguish the critical arguments of Neale, Nixon, Malin, and Gill from the print journalism of Simpson, when considered together, their arguments offer informative commentaries on the changing discourses of masculinity in popular culture. Such debates have had a substantial impact on contemporary understandings of Irish masculinity.

However, what distinguishes Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy from other white actors of a similar age or appearance such as Christian Bale, Tobey Maguire, Elijah Wood, or Jared Leto, is the fact that their metrosexual masculinity is heavily qualified by their Irishness. Therefore, although it is necessary to make note of the defining criteria of a contemporary metrosexual, it is equally important to draw attention to the particular distinctions that derive

from the specifics of culture, time, or place such as ethnic stereotypes. For example, an important characteristic of the metrosexual is the fundamental role of the city in the formation of metrosexual identity: “because that’s where all the best shops are.” It is most frequently urban, metropolitan centres that serve as opportunities for consumption. As a commercial phenomenon, the characteristics of Celtic Tiger Ireland and its discourses were grounded in the growth of Irish industry, and an investment in the urban development of Ireland. Thus, the city in general, rather than the country, emerged as a new arena for Irish masculinity to be negotiated and proved, and this is discernible in numerous Irish films of the period such as *Flick* (2000), *Intermission* (2003), *Cowboys and Angels* (2003), *Adam and Paul* (2004), and *Perrier’s Bounty* (2009).

Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game* can in many ways be considered a forerunner in this respect, insofar as Jordan confronts the pities of traditional Irishness—foremost among them paramilitary nationalism and the violent masculinity it inspires—by destabilizing sexual identity or, as Wartenberg phrases it, through “the subversion of the hetero/homo distinction itself” (Wartenberg 218). Indeed, while Jordan’s film appeared to herald a new form of Irish cinematic critique, and introduce a more sensitive and fluid form of Irish masculinity, later contemporary Irish films lacked much of the complexity that marked *The Crying Game*.

This destabilization of sexual identity is achieved through the film’s protagonist, the sensitive IRA member Fergus (Stephen Rea), and his relationships with both the captive British soldier Jody (Forrest Whitaker), and Jody’s beautiful lover Dil (Jaye Davidson). After an attempted prisoner exchange ends prematurely when Fergus allows Jody to escape and the soldier is inadvertently killed by the British military convoy sent to rescue him, Fergus is traumatized by the death and, questioning his paramilitary involvement, leaves Ireland to find Dil, who works as a hairdresser and bar-singer in Britain. After locating and falling in love with her, Fergus’ momentary happiness is jeopardized by the re-entry of his former IRA

associates (Jude and Peter) into his life when they threaten to harm Dil unless Fergus agrees to participate in the assassination of a British judge.

The crux of the film turns on a plot twist that was suppressed both before and during the film's theatrical release, namely, that Dil is biologically male. Admittedly there has been due criticism of the film: it reinforces stereotypes pertaining to race to the extent that both Jody and Dil are black and portrayed as childlike. It also puts forward a wholly negative representation of biological womanhood in the extremist IRA member Jude. Similarly, as noted by John Hill "Fergus, for better or worse, is the character at the heart of this narrative, and the other characters, black, white, male, female, Irish, British, do exist in the occasion of education into a new more complex world, a new more complex self" ("Crossing the Water" 94). But it is also this third aspect that is the film's greatest strength, namely, the way that *The Crying Game* refuses to commit to a binary division of sexual orientation. The intimacy shared between Fergus and Jody leading up to his execution blurs the boundary between homosociality and homosexuality. Fergus identifies as a heterosexual male, but this heterosexuality is such that it accommodates an erotic attraction to Jody, and through Jody, to the transvestite Dil. For Maria Pramaggiore,

The Crying Game links problematics of sex and gender, race and nationalism through a crisis of masculinity that is irresolvable through a traditional narrative of wartime heroism and romance. The attempt at resolution involves the "hero's" strong bonds of identification with and desire for another man. Fergus's relationship with Jody must be forged across race, culture and sexuality. Fergus assumed Jody's role as Dil's protector, thus realizing his identification with Jody. Dil's feminine gender identity—despite her "penis"—allows for the possible reinstatement of Fergus's masculinity. Fergus is finally able to understand the multiple possibilities for masculinity because of his rejection of IRA politics, his strong identification with Jody, and his desires for Jody and Dil. ("I Kinda Liked You as a Girl" 96-7)

It is thus the way that the character of Fergus destabilizes sexuality identity that marks Jordan's film as a precursor to the Irish metrosexual, insofar as it "represents a demand to

live in and with the “in-between,” to resist the rigid assignation of stereo-typed ... identities on which much of our “knowledge” about the world depends” (“Crossing the Water” 89).

It is important to recognize however that, unlike the metrosexual of films such as *About Adam* (mentioned above), Jordan’s protagonist exhibits no apparent links to consumer culture—Irish or otherwise. Nor can Fergus’s crisis of masculinity be resolved within the Irish woodland where the film begins, but in the metropolitan urban centre in Britain. As both Pramaggiore and Hill rightly observe, Fergus must cross the water, and “in the process he crosses many another boundary” (“Crossing the Water” 94). In Jordan’s narrative, Ireland has not yet become an idyll of conspicuous consumption that came to characterize Irish cinema of the early 2000s.

But what is specific in the case of the Irish metrosexual is not only the role of the city as a conduit of metrosexual masculinity. Equally important is how this urban identity exists in combination with previous stereotypes of rural Irishness. This argument has been developed by Carmen Kuhling and Kieran Keohane in *Cosmopolitan Ireland: Globalisation and Quality of Life* (2007), and it is useful to consider their findings in some detail before proceeding further.

Cosmopolitanism and the popularity of the Irish Metrosexual

According to Kuhling and Keohane, in the Ireland of the 1990s “the shift from rural to urban living patterns accelerated,” and coincided with a dramatic elevation in living standards, and consumer spending (1-2). Their thesis sets out to interrogate the exact meaning of cosmopolitanism, its potential to indicate a globalized, often superficial identity, and also, the egalitarian definition of the word as a conscious embrace of peoples and societies irrespective of race, class, sexuality, or religion (2). They question the extent to which the

buoyant economy of the Celtic Tiger produced a more contented Irish population by considering the rise in racism, depression and self-harm amongst Irish people during the period, and conclude by suggesting alternative, and more inclusive ways, of living in an affluent society (6-7). As the text was published before the dramatic economic downturn, their arguments lack the benefit of hindsight. However, their assessment of Celtic Tiger Ireland is immensely useful when taking into account the development of Irish identity, particularly as it relates to the three Irish actors under consideration and the ways in which past and present definitions of Irishness operate simultaneously. According to Kuhling and Keohane:

The diverse and antagonistic character of the transformations that have accompanied Ireland's experience of globalisation have produced a variety of cultural and social collisions between local and global, traditional and modern (or perhaps between traditional and postmodern), between Catholic and secular, and between rural and urban, tensions experienced as polar opposites but which are intimately interconnected in complex and fluid ways. (5-6)

For these authors, the cosmopolitanism that resulted from the country's profitable economy created a situation in which the notion of rural Ireland as a pastoral idyll, defined by a simple but conservative Catholic peasantry, became a marketable commodity for the Irish tourist industry. In this way, the image of Celtic Tiger Ireland, and that of traditional Ireland, are conjoined through the process of consumption, with the economy of the former profiting from the marketing of the latter. Tom Inglis makes a similar point in his explanation of how a shrinking of the global community, and the mass homogenization of Western living patterns that it implies, gives rise to "a desperate search for difference" where "[c]ultural entrepreneurs search for authentic local differences that can then be marketed globally" (163). To this extent then, it is the conjunction of polarities attached to Irishness during the Celtic Tiger, particularly as regards the conflict of connotations between "local" and "global," "traditional" and "modern," and "Catholic" and "secular," which has accounted for

the immense popularity of Irish actors as icons of white masculinity within Hollywood, of which Meyers, Murphy, and Farrell are archetypal case studies. These differences extend from the larger antagonism between the “rural” and the “urban,” and it is for this reason that the present chapter considers in such detail the greater emphasis within Celtic Tiger discourses, on the city rather than the country.

In this respect, the metrosexual, or more precisely, the Irish metrosexual, has proven to be the most popular form of masculinity absorbed by Hollywood. While Debbie Ging sees “[t]his trope of liberated (metro)sexuality as a kind of shorthand for cool Hibernia” (*Men and Masculinities* 189) within an Irish context, her discussion of “‘New Men’, Metrosexuals, Celtic Soul and Queer Fellas” (182) considers the metrosexual as a more general acceptance of queerness in the sense of “economic,” “cultural,” and “political capital” (206). In keeping with earlier work, her primary interrogation of Celtic Tiger archetypes of masculinity has concentrated on the valorization of underclass masculinity, and representations of laddism in Irish film in which “the high-octane displays of machismo that characterize so many of these films seem to try to assert an authentic, prefeminist masculinity uncomplicated by the complexities of postmodern, multicultural Ireland” (*Men and Masculinities* 180). But Ging’s arguments are culturally specific to the extent that they focus on representations, and discourses, within Ireland alone. As a result, her discussion lacks a detailed engagement with U.S. culture insofar as she does not take account of indigenous Irishness, or Irish masculinity, from an American purview.

It is the contention of this thesis that the typologies of underclass Irish masculinity outlined by Ging are different from the metrosexual construction of indigenous Irishness embraced by Hollywood. The commercial appeal of Irishness, and a recognition of the ethnic body as spectacle is key to this distinction, where it is symptomatic of what Ging herself has acknowledged as “American culture’s need for an ethnicity that is both traditional and sexy”

(*Men and Masculinities* 206). The actors here considered are a product of the urbanized, affluent economy, but their appeal in terms of cinema, and its related discourses, is reliant on the tension between urban Ireland, and the romanticized image of pastoral Irishness, and a key aspect of Celtic Tiger Irishness is the complex relationship between both facets. Despite desperate efforts to celebrate urban Ireland, the marketability of rural nostalgia cannot be underestimated as a form of cultural currency. In this respect, a significant feature of Celtic Tiger Irishness is the commodification of the rural in a pseudo-celebratory way, and this aspect has also informed the star personae of the young Irish actors who emerged at this time. Due to the fact that popularity is difficult to measure, the next section will put forward the reasoning behind the present argument.

As a derivative of the greater phenomenon of metrosexuality that was identified by Mark Simpson, the Irish masculinity of Farrell, Murphy, and Meyers is rooted in an urban sensibility that celebrates the multiple possibilities of the city, particularly as it is experienced through capitalism, retail, and conspicuous consumption. In individual ways, each of these actors offers a version of masculinity that is valorized in terms of class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Their particular kind of Irishness serves as a discourse that allows for a diverse array of often conflicting male identities to coexist by insulating difference in a set of recognizable stereotypes. It is this Irish identity, determined by elements of a specific time and cultural zeitgeist, that lingers as a watermark—what David Lusted describes in another context as a sort of “biographical recognition” (253)—and which is picked up by the fans of these actors and the audiences of their films.

Colin Farrell has benefitted from a range of understandings which relate a working-class or “gurrier” identification with rebellion, and are inflected with connotations of traditional Irishness and sentimentality coded as “sexy” within a rubric of Celtic Tiger Ireland. As shall become apparent, Farrell’s working-class background is for the most part

fabricated, or borrowed, from the experiences of his parents, unlike that of fellow Irish actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers. However, Meyers has used the social deprivation of his childhood as cultural capital to legitimize the emotional integrity of his performances, and also his repeated struggles with addiction. Of all three actors, Meyers is most recognized for his androgynous look, particularly as a result of his early career when he was frequently shot with varying degrees of shoulder-length hair in modelling stills and films such as *The Maker* (1997) and *Alexander* (2004) (see fig. 20 and 21). Meyers' star persona is informed by the globalization of Irishness in the sense that he has become as much a symbol of the transformation of Irish society due to the Celtic Tiger, as an embodiment of the overextended stereotype that associates Irishness with alcoholic excess.



Figure 20 and 21. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *Alexander* (2004) and *The Maker* (1997)

At the opposite end of the spectrum Cillian Murphy has attempted to avoid affiliations with any particular social bracket. However, much like Meyers and Farrell, his past has also been moulded into a narrative which has subsequently structured his star identity. Murphy's refusal to engage with the superficial discourses of stardom has become bound to his original decision to forgo the potential stability, and respectability, of a law degree in favour of the

artistic expression offered by an acting career. This decision, rather than solely associated with rebellion, as in the case of Farrell, has been intensified by Murphy's androgynous and unconventional appearance to the degree that the actor has frequently been presented as an enigma. As shall be discussed presently, his reluctance to market himself as a celebrity has been framed as artistic bordering on eccentric on the one hand, or indicative of his solid middle class upbringing on the other: "Just a sensible Irish bloke, the son of educators, married with a son, and proud of his work personality" (Heller). Much like Farrell and Meyers, Murphy's Irishness has greatly informed the course of his celebrity, particularly as the actor has repeatedly interrupted his Hollywood career for theatrical roles, most notably, with his long-time collaborator and personal friend, the Irish playwright Enda Walsh.

Key to all three actors' success is the way in which masculinity has become a potent commodity in Western society. As we have seen, one of the most pervasive ideologies of recent decades has been the existence of a "crisis of masculinity," the contention that changes in working practices, most notably the decreased economic and social value of manual labour in favour of technological dexterity and bureaucratic acumen, has diminished the confidence of the white American man. Masculinity is no longer immune to commodification but part of, what Momin Rahman describes as, "a convergence between the historical moment in the public discourses of masculinity (the dislocation of masculinity from its traditional referents) and the emergence of masculinity as a commodifiable identity" (230). By tracing the careers of the three actors in question the next section will point to the origins of the discourses such as the celebration of an urban sensibility that simultaneously markets rural pre-modern Irishness, and the commodification of the post adolescent male body, which have shaped the star personae of Murphy, Farrell, and Meyers in their present Hollywood careers. As we have seen throughout this thesis, it is this specific type of Celtic Tiger Irish star personae that has

been watermarked onto their performances, becoming a subtle, but informative, subtext to their films.

Colin Farrell: “*Charma Chameleon*”



Figure 22. Colin Farrell in *Falling for a Dancer* (1998)



Figure 23. Colin Farrell in *Tigerland* (2000)

While Farrell’s early star persona traded on his rugged good looks and the sort of uncouth behaviour that is more redolent of a disadvantaged background, and the sort of

“hellraiser” behaviour typified by veteran Irish actors such as Peter O’Toole or Richard Harris, he grew up in Castleknock, Dublin, a suburban, middle class, housing estate close to the Phoenix Park. Farrell first began acting classes at the age of sixteen, and was later accepted onto a three year course in the Gaiety School of Acting (Fox 14). As the analysis of the earliest reception of him will demonstrate, Farrell’s progression into acting, the response to his performances on screen, and his off-screen behaviour, were informed by the specifics of Celtic Tiger Ireland. In a culture that celebrated urban development and commercial expansion, while simultaneously commodifying an image of “traditional” Irishness that is associated with ruralism, Farrell’s ability to mediate both aspects with a roguish charm and a selective presentation of his social background solidified his commercial appeal on Irish and Hollywood screens in a way not previously achieved by earlier generations of Irish actors.

Farrell’s career began at the Gaiety School of Acting about which very little is known. However, Farrell had previously auditioned for *Boyzone* in 1993 and, although unsuccessful, his invitation to try out for the ensemble in the first place offers several insights into the existing culture, and Farrell’s position within it. Louis Walsh’s inspiration to form the boy band was an attempt to capitalize on the success of the already popular all-male British singing group, *Take That*, and, within this context, as Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone have suggested, “it is tempting to draw parallels between the rise of the boy band form in Ireland and the emergence of the Celtic Tiger and the crass commercial imperatives and neoliberal economics that this represented” (62-3). Within popular culture in general, and popular music in particular, the identity of the boy band is predicated upon the marketing of a specific type of young masculinity through the very clear promotion of “boy” as opposed to “man” (Biddle and Jarman-Ivens 5). In its suggestion of adolescence or early development in sexual terms, the boy band surfaces as a product available for consumption by both men and women, and, in this sense, is “embroiled in slippages between discourses of effeminacy and

homosexuality” (6). Farrell was asked to audition when Louis Walsh spotted him dancing in a nightclub at the age of seventeen (Garvey et al.), and according to Walsh “[h]e always looked the part, and he was the boy around town” (qtd. in Kelleher). From the audition it emerged that “he couldn’t sing very well” (Kelleher) but Farrell’s star persona has depended upon the particular way he renders his sexuality as readable to both male and female viewers which, according to Barton, “forms part of a new discourse on masculinity that has moved closer to accepting that male-on-male look” (*Acting Irish in Hollywood* 210). Thus, although Farrell failed to make the shortlist for the group that appeared for the first time on popular Irish chat show *The Late Late Show* in 1993, the occasion is particularly revealing not only of the perceived marketability of metrosexual Irish masculinity at the time, but also of the fact that, even at seventeen, Farrell showed signs of commercial potential. In this sense then, it is notable that Farrell’s earliest acting opportunities, particularly in Ireland, were as much the result of his appearance as his skills as a performer. This was arguably also the case with regards to Farrell’s debut on Irish screens in *Falling for a Dancer* in 1998.

Falling for a Dancer (1998) originated as a novel written by Deirdre Purcell, and was adapted for television several years after its 1993 publication. Set in Ireland in the 1940s, the narrative follows the fate of Elizabeth Sullivan (Elizabeth Dermot Walsh), who, when she becomes pregnant after a brief affair with a handsome dancer belonging to a travelling performance group, is coerced by her middle class parents to marry a widower twice her age, and act as stepmother to his large young family. She is quickly moved to the beautiful but remote Beara peninsula to have her baby with minimum scandal to the family name. Due to its bleak but evocative period setting in 1940s rural Ireland, alongside its romantic focus and unplanned pregnancy, Purcell’s novel includes a range of generic formulae in need of contextualization. These elements not only impact the dynamic between the characters that

feature within the narrative when adapted for the screen, but also, have implications for the meaning attached to Farrell's character within the structure of the story.

On the one hand, with passages devoted to vivid descriptions of the Cork landscape the novel indulges in a heritage fantasy that presents rural Ireland as simultaneously picturesque in appearance, and experientially primordial. A nostalgic allusion to rural Ireland was also characteristic of both Irish television and cinema of the decade, and, as the discussion of *Ballykissangel* will confirm, Farrell's early career within Ireland was largely directed by the popularity of films "providing a distanced scenario—or one with significant historical reference to otherwise contemporary action" that surfaced at this time (Pettitt 115). On the other, the novel also contains elements of "chick-lit," and it is within this genre that Purcell's novels have tended to be placed critically alongside similar female Irish authors such as Cathy Kelly, Maeve Binchy, Marian Keyes, and Patricia Scanlon (Ging "The Celtic 'Chick-flick': How About You (2007) and PS I Love You (2007)"). With its unilaterally female perspective, but major emphasis on heterosexual marriage, responses to chick-lit have "tended towards extremes" as Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young have pointed out (1). As a consequence, it is possible to read Elizabeth's sexual independence as an instance of female empowerment while also keeping in mind the fact that this empowerment manifests only in terms of her prerogative to move from one (male) lover/guardian to the next. Both these elements are present in the corresponding film/mini-series that aired in 1998, and are particularly relevant in terms of Farrell's character in *Falling for a Dancer*.

Farrell plays Daniel Mc Carthey, the son of a local farmer, who arouses the jealousy of Elizabeth's husband when she dances with him at a parish social function in full view of her husband and most of the local village. However, despite the fact that the fleeting romance shared between Daniel and Elizabeth inadvertently brings about the manslaughter of her husband, Elizabeth has no meaningful feelings for him, and rejects his later advances, and professions

of love. As a model of virile and youthful manliness then, Farrell exemplifies the commodification of Irish masculinity, which, in this instance, is presented as spectacle for popular consumption, both within the mini-series, and within the socio-cultural context of the Celtic Tiger period. Thus, any reviews that mention Farrell's character do so only in relation to Daniel's function as a "smouldering sex-machine" (Boland 41), and a momentary diversion in Elizabeth's otherwise bleak marriage, within a film that equally underscores traditional stereotypes of rural Ireland as a site of both agricultural beauty, romance, and provincial ignorance (see fig. 22).

Farrell's next role was in *Ballykissangel*, a soap-opera set in a rural Irish village and commissioned by BBC Northern Ireland. The series was "rooted positively in Ireland through production processes, location and performers" (Llewellyn-Jones 126), and, as a consequence, the programme satisfies many of the criteria of what Ruth Barton describes as the "Irish heritage film," most notably the promotion of "Ireland as a 'feel good' location with an Arcadian landscape" ("From History to Heritage" 51). The heavy romanticization of the Irish countryside is a major element of *Ballykissangel*, and the series "seems to reflect its surface, re-presented as a commodity for those outside" (Llewellyn-Jones 132).

Farrell plays Danny Byrne, a Dublin teenager who arrives unannounced at the farm of his estranged uncle, Eamon (Birdy Sweeney). Danny's father and the Gardaí are attempting to confiscate Danny's pet horse, so the teenager offers to earn his keep, and that of the horse, by working on the farm for Eamon. Two specific aspects of this role are informative when attempting to situate Farrell within *Ballykissangel* as a series, and the cultural context of its initial transmission. Firstly, Danny's accent, dress, and behaviour are all conditioned by his urban backstory. He speaks with a heavy north Dublin accent, he is derided as a "townie" by his uncle, who is sceptical about Danny's ability to help him on the farm: "And what would you know about farming, all them council housing estates that you're from!" His multiple

layers of dark clothing are complemented by spotless white trainers, both of which are heavily branded with logos and similar signifiers of consumer culture. He is also shown to be lacking any awareness of the responsibilities entailed with owning a horse, and has been forced to leave Dublin with the animal after attempting to keep it in his back garden. Thus, Farrell's character, and that character's masculinity, are differentiated from the remaining male cast, most of whom are either farmers, villagers, or clergy, through the juxtaposition of the urban versus the rural. As such, Farrell represents "a new urban characterization that provided an antidote to the dominance of the series' investment in rural heritage nostalgia" (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 204), and supports the earlier contention that a defining aspect of Celtic Tiger Irishness is the way that urbanization and pastoralism sustain a predatory relationship with each other.

Secondly, and related to this, are the circumstances surrounding Farrell's addition to the cast. Farrell, alongside Don Wycherly, Victoria Smurfit, Lorcan Cranitch, and Deirdre Donnelly joined *Ballykissangel* in series four, following the departure of two of its most popular characters, Father Clifford (Stephen Tompkinson) and Assumpta (Dervla Kirwan). Three of the five additions to the cast were below the age of thirty, with Wycherly and Cranitch aged thirty-one and thirty-nine respectively. It is plausible to suggest then, that these characters were added to retain any potential decline in viewership that would arise from losing Tompkinson and Kirwan. An article on Farrell's rising profile that was published later described him as "eye candy" within the context of the show (Compton), and Farrell's time on *Ballykissangel* demonstrates the staging of a different kind of urban Irish male identity that is presented as a spectacle for popular consumption.

Farrell's next role was in Gary Mitchell's play *In a Little World of Our Own*. The part brought him into contact with Kevin Spacey, who, by chance, attended one of the performances in Covent Garden, and the introduction furthered Farrell's career from a

relatively unknown actor to potential stardom. Gary Mitchell became a sought-after playwright due to his “uncompromising portrayal” of the Ulster Loyalist milieu where he grew up in the Rathcoole housing estate in County Antrim (Coyle). A key trope of twentieth-century Irish theatre in general is the use of the family and the home as a microcosm of the nation (Singleton 293), and Mitchell’s work communicates the often overlooked Loyalist perspective, but not without exposing the tensions that exist within discrete communities rather than between warring factions of Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland (Fricker 55).

The play revolves around the lives of Ray, Richard, and their brother Gordon when Richard becomes a suspect in the brutal rape of a local girl he is attracted to. Mitchell won the *Irish Times* Best New Play award in 1998 for the production, and the play toured around several theatres in Ireland and England. Farrell was a new addition to the cast for the English tour. The reasons for this are uncertain, and he would appear to have only featured for the few nights that the play ran at the Donmar Warehouse in Covent Garden in London. As such, very few reviews exist on his performances as Richard, but he was described as “persuasively vulnerable” in the part by Charles Spencer of the *Telegraph*. While Farrell’s “bankability is based on his youth [and] looks,” he has made every effort to prove himself as “an actor rather than a cute collection of smirks, pouts and ties” (Compton), and the role offered the first opportunity for Farrell to fully demonstrate his acting skills above and beyond his physical attractiveness. But, it is worth noting that this performance is almost entirely realized through the experiences of men between men, and in this case, between brothers, and as a consequence, it is the fraternal bond between Ray and Richard, rather than romantic love shared by Gordon and his fiancée Deborah, which generates the greatest intensity in the play. Thus, *In a Little World of Our Own* is an early example of how Farrell’s more relaxed masculinity has succeeded in rendering his sexuality available to multiple interpretations

(Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 212) which are particularly acute in homosocial narratives.

Coming into contact with Spacey, and by extension Hollywood, brought about significant changes in Farrell's career, most notably in terms of his star persona. Farrell was cast by Spacey in his latest film at the time, *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (2000), and, in it, Farrell plays the youngest member of a criminal gang, headed by Michael Lynch (Kevin Spacey). The film was a critical failure both in Europe and America, where it went straight to video. There were several reasons for its poor reception within Ireland and England, the most consequential being the fact that, in taking its basis from the real life exploits of one of Ireland's most notorious criminals, Martin Cahill, "The General," Spacey's film very closely resembled a positively received movie on the same character directed by John Boorman, and starring Brendan Gleeson, that had been released earlier.

With a crew cut, a coarse urban accent, and the addition of a bomber jacket which adds the illusion of a broader upper torso, Farrell is very credible as the novice criminal Alec. Despite the limited screen time afforded to him as a minor character, Farrell's role proved fortuitous. It was following an introduction by Kevin Spacey that Farrell acquired an American agent, and was soon after signed up for two Hollywood movies: *American Outlaws* (2001) and *Tigerland* (2000). Moreover, while this shift in territory naturally coincided with a modified image, the transformation was such that it seemed to emphasize a lower class, and tougher and deprived experience of life that Farrell did not actually have personal experience of, specifically in terms of the actor's accent, appearance, and public behavior. In 2003, Paul Bracchi and Jon Clarke of *The Daily Mail* conducted an interview with *Social and Personal* editor Gavin Lambe-Murphy, who attended school with Farrell, and has remained in contact with him since. Lambe-Murphy met up with Farrell in 2000, and was greatly surprised by the changes he observed in the actor:

“I noticed Colin's accent had changed,” he says. “Rather than being some well-spoken Irish kid, I think he felt he would stand out more by being this typical Irish rogue. But he is a very gentle person. He's not a tough guy. My mother even commented on it. She said: ‘He never spoke like that before.’ She thought he was a lovely guy. She just couldn't understand why he was talking like a *gurrier* (hooligan). Ironically, a limousine came to collect him later that night.” (qtd. in Bracchi and Clarke)

The interview includes responses from several people connected with Farrell before his Hollywood career, such as Farrell's former mother-in-law, Annette Ekblom, who noticed a marked transformation from the “sweet,” “polite and well-behaved” “young man” who was briefly married to her daughter.

While it is not unusual for the material benefits and publicity of fame and fortune to substantially alter an actor's behaviour, the fact that Farrell's personality changed to suggest an upbringing from a lower social group to the one he experienced would suggest that this conduct was one constructed to emphasize a specific kind of Irish public persona: a “gurrier” toughened by urban living. This image was sustained through Farrell's first two Hollywood roles, *American Outlaws* and *Tigerland* (see fig. 23). Although Farrell was first cast in *American Outlaws*, this film was released almost a year following *Tigerland*, and it is *Tigerland* which is typically considered as Farrell's first Hollywood role. In both cases, Farrell plays a rebel hero who defies established mores to better the lives of those less fortunate, and more often than not succeeds because of a boyish charisma that endears him to supporting characters, and, by extension, the audience. The character closely resembles the identity the actor puts forward in interviews or “off-screen” to such an extent that suggests Farrell has assumed a popular persona pieced together from his earliest successful roles, in an attempt to market his performances as authentic. As the following comments from director Les Mayfield regarding his performance in *American Outlaws* suggests, this authenticity and blue-collar charm is often bound together with reference to Farrell's Irishness:

We decided to use this guy named Colin Farrell ... an Irish kid to play an American icon and a lot of people thought we were out of our heads but he turned out to be the absolute right choice 'cos he's charismatic ... he has more courage than anyone I've

ever met ... I mean you see it in any of the footage ... that's him doing the stuff ... he would do anything ... we had to pull him back and say, "No Colin you probably shouldn't ride into the horses with ..." but he would do anything with a smile ... because of his dedication ... because of his absolute ... he has no fear and he will do it and he understands the character and he understands walking that fine line of an action hero ... it's the idea of a little bit of a smile and this complete intensity ... this idea of a sense of humour about what you're doing and he brought a great, great spin to the character.

Mayfield's remarks are supported by the screen writer, John Rogers, in the director's commentary accompanying the DVD version of the film, but with the addition of Roger's own laboured imitation of an Irish accent that reinforces the impression that it is Farrell's ethnicity which accounts for his charisma and daredevil approach to roles. Much the same can be said in the case of *Tigerland* particularly given that, Schumacher's public endorsement of Farrell held much purchase in Hollywood, and effectively launched the actor's American career. In an interview with Schumacher shortly before the release of his next film with Farrell, *Phonebooth* (2002), and, as referred to above, the director voiced his public support of Farrell that seems to promote the actor's active engagement in the celebrity excesses offered by Hollywood: "I can't say enough about him—I'm so proud of him. And I'm so glad the movie came out at a time when everyone in the media is starting to talk about his bad boy image because it reminds everyone what a great actor he is" (qtd. in Morris).

Since his transition from local to international stardom, Farrell's popularity has presented a version of Irish masculinity that commodifies class and ethnicity to popular appeal. This public character derives from a Celtic Tiger culture that valorizes "traditional" Irishness for commercial consumption in an effort to participate in a neoliberal American, perceived as "global," context. By presenting a "gurrer" bravado associated with the working class, Farrell has modified his star persona within Hollywood in such a way that emphasizes urban and traditional stereotypes of Irishness while also offering a "hyped-up locker-room hetero-camp" (Compton) that is readily accessible to both male and female fans:

“Being Irish in Hollywood has done me no disservice,” he admits. “I can't say I consciously play it up but I probably do. But I am fairly Irish, you know what I mean. I wear it on my sleeve because it comes from the heart. And if I do play it up it's probably to remind me of where I'm from, just for myself. And to get a laugh for myself.”

It is this bifurcated masculinity that “differentiates less between the male and female gaze” (Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood* 210) which separates Farrell's star persona from earlier Irish actors. It speaks to the existence of a visceral version of Irishness watermarked onto his film performances, but one that is commodified by recourse to specific class and ethnic affiliations of particular purchase in Hollywood.

Although a contemporary of Farrell, and informed by the same cultural factors that shaped Farrell's reputation, the next actor under consideration, Cillian Murphy, has negotiated his Irishness, and androgynous appearance, in a way that is commensurate with his love of theatre, and distaste for self-promotion. Murphy has benefited from his recognition in both Ireland and the U.S. as a “serious” actor, and Murphy's attitude towards his career, most notably, his fastidious selection of the productions he commits to, has influenced his reception. This has much to do with Murphy's public declaration of his preference for theatre work, rather than film. Thus, while the following quotation is taken from the 2005 Neil Jordan film *Breakfast on Pluto* (discussed in the previous chapter) in which Murphy starred, “serious, serious, serious” is also an appropriate description of his public persona.

Cillian Murphy: “Serious, serious, serious!”



Figure 24. Cillian Murphy in *Disco Pigs* (2000)

Murphy was privileged with private schooling in his native city of Cork, and his first experience of acting occurred while still a secondary student in the Presentation College there, when director Pat Kiernan and playwright Enda Walsh conducted a drama workshop with Murphy’s Transition Year class (a supervised gap year that is integrated into the second-level school curriculum for students aged around 15-16 years old). In a similar way to Farrell, Murphy’s social background placed him within a society that experienced a commodification of the arts, a rise in consumer spending, and a greater investment in Irish culture. Unlike Farrell however, Murphy’s middle class up-bringing has become part of a discourse surrounding his career that associates the actor with stability, a rational approach towards acting, and a distaste for the superficialities of stardom. Murphy began a law degree in University College Cork on completing second-level education, but dropped out to pursue an acting career following his debut in the stage production of *Disco Pigs* by Enda Walsh. This would be the first of many similar collaborations between Walsh and Murphy, and the

former's predilection for "solitary, hermetic characters who live in terror of the outside world" (Billington) has influenced the progression of Murphy's career and reputation.

As the following analysis of Murphy's transition from amateur to star status will demonstrate, Murphy's metrosexual masculinity and his androgynous appearance, alongside his "serious" reputation, public acknowledgement of his love of theatre, and repeated commitment to indigenous drama and film endowed him with an enigmatic prominence that has greatly shaped his Hollywood career as a watermark that has pigmented the interpretation of his performances. In an effort to establish a correlation between Celtic Tiger culture and Murphy's later reception by Hollywood, what follows will consider a formative period of Murphy's career, and point to the importance of cultural context in dictating firstly, the manner of opportunities available to him as a young actor, and secondly, the development of Murphy's star persona in response to these experiences. This correlation speaks to the existence of a masculinity that is culturally specific, as well as suggesting an American climate that is receptive to such an identity.

Murphy's first acting experience began with Pat Kiernan's stage production of Enda Walsh's award winning play *Disco Pigs*, and it was his reprisal of the role in Kirsten Sheridan's film version of the same play four years later that marked a turning point in Murphy's career (see fig. 24). Within this time frame (between both versions of Walsh's *Disco Pigs*) Murphy's roles can be separated into three groups: theatre, short film, and small budget feature films, of which those specifically inspired by the Celtic Tiger can be considered as a subset. These groups involve processes particular to them as individual artistic forms which shall presently be identified. All contain elements which have consolidated within Murphy's star persona, most notably, by commodifying a metrosexual male identity alongside various interpretations of traditional Irishness. In this way, Murphy's

star persona corresponds with Colin Graham's more general conclusions regarding Irishness and authenticity:

Authenticity here relies on preservation, what is to be visited is not modern, new Ireland but authentic Ireland made modern and new. Thus Ireland is now "modern *but* authentic" in *style*; *storytelling* is state-of-the-art, but uses legends and history. It is the media (style and story) which are able to embody this apparent dichotomy of old and new and which in the process preserve the authentic. (20)

As the following analysis will demonstrate, Murphy's success in Hollywood, like Farrell's and Meyers,' has depended on the way in which he embodies a particular kind of metrosexual masculinity that both challenges, and commodifies, previous discourses of Irishness.

In order to fully appreciate the relevance of Murphy's stage role in *Disco Pigs* within the context of his subsequent career, it is necessary to briefly outline the extent to which the history of theatre in Ireland has been, and is, bound up with the idea of the "national." As previously demonstrated, one of the most profound consequences of colonialism for the Irish was the consolidation of negative stereotypes, as a pretext for colonial intervention.

According to Shaun Richards, for Irish nationalists at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was deemed imperative to create a theatre of, and for, the nation with the capacity to define itself, leading Richards to conclude that "Irish theatre is marked by the 'national' appellation and all its implications" (1-2). Thus, a corollary to this deep association, is the reverence afforded to the Irish theatrical tradition within nationalist consciousness, and the idea of the theatre as a site of authentic Irishness. It is possible for Corcadorca to be a case in point here. For example, as noted by Lisa Fitzpatrick, the Cork theatre company's production of the Shakespearean Classic, *The Merchant of Venice*, in 2005, was motivated by the intention to reflect the ethnic diversity of the Irish population as a result of the high levels of immigration in recent decades (169). Notwithstanding Corcadorca's admirable aspiration to confront the latent racism that is too often left unchallenged in accounts of contemporary Irishness, within discourses of Celtic Tiger Ireland the authentic stands as a marketable commodity where, as

noted by Patrick Lonergan, “the construction of identity and the branding of products for consumption are interrelated processes” (213). In this respect, it can be argued that, with *The Merchant of Venice*, Corcadorca used its association with the “national,” and “authentic Irishness,” to challenge the definition of both identifications. Secondly, given Murphy’s recognition as an actor of both stage and screen, it is necessary to consider the particular discourses pertaining to theatre and film individually. Simply put, there exists a cultural hierarchy between the two whereby “actors who work primarily on stage are often called ‘legitimate’ actors” according to William Downs et al. (27). As Downs et al. proceed to explain, the term “legitimate” extends from the history of stage performance in which it was necessary for theatres to acquire a license in order to lawfully stage plays (27). However, in contemporary discourses the term “legitimate” serves as a hallmark of quality with the impression that while “[b]eing a star of the legitimate stage requires years of training, ... it is possible to become a movie star with a bit of charisma, a bit of talent and a lot of luck” (27). Murphy’s career in general, and star persona in particular, is deeply invested in his recognition as an actor who favours theatre over the crass commercialism of Hollywood. Furthermore, Murphy’s decision to participate minimally in the marketing of his image has itself become a commodity, and this is especially true of his decision to commingle film work with Irish theatre projects, where, as noted by Lionel Pilkington, “[t]he ‘natural’ performativity exhibited by Irish theatre demonstrates Ireland’s renowned Celtic Tiger ability to adjust, adapt and remake itself according to the volatile demand of fast-track global capitalism” (9).

Despite his limited experience, Kiernan selected Murphy for the role of Darren in *Disco Pigs*, in 1996, after a brief audition. According to Kiernan, “[h]e had an understanding of the language, which was difficult, and real intelligence as an interpreter. You could trust him, let him off—he was very natural and comfortable on stage” (qtd. in O’Riordan 14).

Disco Pigs ran in multiple venues around Cork, Dublin, and Belfast, and received the Best Fringe Production Award at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1996. Walsh and Murphy reunited for *Misterman* in 2011 and *Ballyturk* in 2014 during which time Walsh has described Murphy as a “stage animal” (qtd. in Lukowski). Although Murphy has amassed a reputation for avoiding interviews, he has of late been very open about his reasons for being “happier on stage than chasing stardom” to quote the headline of an interview in the *Irish Examiner*. According to interviewer, Alan O’Riordan, Murphy, “wriggles visibly in his seat as he describes his craft, that inner performer that he says is part of his DNA stirring beneath his unassuming, understated presence. For all his reputation of being a guarded interviewee, Murphy is thoughtful and considered in his conversation, enthusiastic about his craft.” The interview is a particularly effective example of Murphy’s star persona in propagation, and several interviews between Murphy, and various Irish newspapers, reiterate the impression of him as artistically, rather than financially, motivated in the work he undertakes. For Murphy,

Fame is completely outside me; I’ve no control over it, and no interest. All I’ve ever tried to do is make worthwhile work, and improve as a performer. That other stuff is just noise. It’s inconsequential. At the same time, I recognise we have to do press, because we want to sell a product. I understand the relationship between art and commerce. But it’s still about the four of us in a rehearsal room.

And you know what, fame has never impinged on my life negatively—because I’ve chosen to live a certain way. People think it’s difficult to remain private, but it’s easy. Stay at home! Be with your friends. It’s that easy. (qtd. in McManus)

As the extract demonstrates, Murphy’s career has been marked by theatrical performances that have subsequently contributed to the development of his film career within Ireland and the U.K. Murphy’s first experience of film was in the short film, *Quando*, in 1997, and, following small parts in *Sweetie Barrett* (1998) and *The Trench* (1999), and a leading role in *Sunburn* (1999), Murphy performed in five other short films between 1999 and 2001: *Eviction* (1999), *At Death’s Door* (1999), *A Man of Few Words* (2000), *Filleann an Feall* (2000) and *Watchmen* (2001), which he co-wrote with Paloma Baeza. These were

followed by two feature films, *On the Edge* (2001) and *How Harry Became a Tree* (2001) before his leading role in Sheridan's *Disco Pigs*. Notwithstanding Martin McLoone's observation that "if short film is not merely a small feature, then it must be a qualitatively different genre entirely" (*Irish Film* 155), dividing these films thematically, rather than generically, offers a clearer perspective on the kinds of roles that, even at this early stage in his career, Murphy was considered appropriate for, with two dominant emphases emerging: films which portray Irishness as an enigma, and those which commodify Irish masculinity in ambiguous ways.

While the two short films, *Eviction* (1999) and *At Death's Door* (1999), and the two feature films, *The Trench* (1999) and *How Harry Became a Tree* (2001), present narratives spanning four different time periods and dealing with a variety of subject matter, they are united by the way in which they present an estranged version of Irishness, with Murphy cast in a defining role. *Eviction* (1999) is set in nineteenth century Ireland, and covers several bleak days in the lives of the McBride family, during which the elderly Patrick McBride (Denys Hawthorne) informs on a local criminal in order to avoid eviction from the small tenant cottage occupied by himself, his son Brendan (Murphy), and daughter Áine (Maria Lennon). Shot mostly at night or within the dark stone dwelling, the film is macabre in style and subject, particularly once an incestuous relationship between the siblings is revealed, and Patrick is subsequently murdered as a traitor by the Molly Maguires, a secret society who deployed violence against landowners and tenants who "violated the 'moral economy' of the rural poor" (Kenny 19). While equally morbid, *At Death's Door* (1999) approaches its subjects using the tradition of the absurd, which, according to Martin McLoone, is regularly used as a mode of commentary in short film (*Irish Film* 158). *At Death's Door* (1999) employs black humour in its brief insight into the life of the Grim Reaper's son (Murphy) who repeatedly fails to meet his father's exacting expectations, particularly, when he helps to

resuscitate his intended victim. Similarly, both *The Trench* (1999) and *How Harry became a Tree* (2001) present parodic versions of Irishness by exaggerating traditional stereotypes (*Film, Media and Popular Culture* 46). *The Trench* offers a stark portrayal of the days leading to The Battle of the Somme during the First World War by focalizing the friendships, hardships, and fears of the young, predominantly British, recruits. As a result, any non-English accents belonging to Scottish, or Irish youths, are immediately identifiable amongst the troops, particularly, as the mannerisms of these characters are exploited for some light comic relief from the somber circumstances. For example, Murphy plays “Rag” Rookwood, called so by a fellow Irish soldier Charlie Ambrose (Ciarán McMEnamin), because, he is a “raggedy arsed sort of a fellow.” The part is brief, and both Rag and Charlie are blown up half way through the film. Murphy had a far greater role in *How Harry Became a Tree* (2001), which also starred Colm Meaney as the title character. Murphy plays Harry’s shy and backward son, Gus, who is frequently criticized and ridiculed by his father, particularly, when he finds himself unable to muster enough courage to consummate his marriage with his new wife, Eileen (Kerry Condon). Like *At Death’s Door*, this film employs absurdity throughout to fully emphasize the narrow-mindedness of Harry, who vents all the anger, frustration, and grief in his life at the owner of the village pub, George (Adrian Dunbar) with Murphy’s Gus “taking on the pathological jealousy of his father,” as noted by Roddy Flynn and Pat Brereton (156). Based on a Chinese folk tale set in an Irish context using Irish characters, according to D og O’Connell, “there is no avoiding the pleasure of the absurd and the bizarre in the fable set in comic mode” (162). With their morbid subject matter, these films avail of Murphy’s pallid complexion and lean figure, both of which have enabled Murphy to credibly portray “a range from serious to brooding” (Lukowski) characters such as Jackson Rippner (*Red Eye* 2005) (see fig. 25), the Scarecrow (*Batman Begins* 2005), and Robert Capa (*Sunshine* 2007) in his later career.



Figure 25. Cillian Murphy in *Red Eye* (2005)

Within the context of Hollywood, Murphy has similarly accumulated a reputation as aloof and enigmatic which he has attempted to cultivate by keeping a low profile between his roles, where, according to the actor “the less people know about you the more convincing you are playing someone else” (qtd. in Nylind). According to an article entitled “Noticeably Damaged” published in *Yen* magazine in 2006, “Murphy's tactic is obvious. If he convinces the media that he's just a regular boring guy the interest in him will go away. Unfortunately with two stand out performances this year, and another three films due for release in 2007 no one is going to think for a minute, that Cillian Murphy is anything other than intriguing” (G. Flynn). Despite the fact that *Yen* is an Australian magazine, the article is a particularly illustrative example of the circulating discourses regarding Murphy’s reputation within the context of Hollywood, as another article, taken from the *Los Angeles Times* in 2007, confirms. For columnist Rachael Abramowitz,

There's something about seeing Irish film star Cillian Murphy standing on Santa Monica Beach that causes a momentary brain disconnect. The ethereal European vibe practically radiates from him as he clasps his arms protectively over each other, a small, thin figure in varying shades of blue—blue corduroys, blue striped shirt, a buttoned-up ratty blue cardigan. He's an island to himself amid the seagulls flocking about and the dizzyingly bright sun and the Pacific stretched out beside him. Giant

brown shades cover his surreal, light-blue eyes—the ones that practically leap out of his face with every performance he gives. Big-budget Hollywood directors have used Murphy's otherworldly-ness to create villains in such popcorn pics as *Batman Begins* and *Red Eye*—deceptively mild-manner sociopaths with inner reserves of malevolent creepiness.

The article's headline reads "When Irish Eyes Are Beguiling" (Abramowitz), and it is worth noting that there are websites specifically devoted to the particular hue of Murphy's "bluest blue of all the very blue" eyes (qtd. in Rose). The point here is not to misconstrue such pages and sites as critical analysis. Rather they are mentioned as examples to demonstrate the kind of discourses surrounding Murphy's star persona in Hollywood, namely, the perception of him as an enigmatic character, and, most importantly, to emphasize the way in which this quality is attributed to his Irishness. With themes ranging from the macabre to the absurd, *Eviction*, *At Death's Door*, *The Trench*, and *How Harry Became a Tree* demonstrate how this impression was also a significant trait of Murphy's early roles in Irish, and British film, and would suggest a deliberate attempt to peculiarize traditional Irishness within Celtic Tiger culture.

Taking the remaining short and feature films from this early period of Murphy's career then, the second theme that emerges in *Sunburn* (1999), *A Man of Few Words* (2000) *Filleann an Feall* (2000), *Watchmen* (2001), and *On the Edge* (2001) is the commodification of a particular kind of urban masculinity. As previously stressed, there was a definitive shift in terms of what constituted a masculine ideal within Celtic Tiger Ireland, specifically engendered by urbanization, and the more global perspective embraced within the late twentieth century. It is not surprising then that such changes surfaced in short, as well as feature, films of the period, with two significant types of masculinity emerging that are distinguished from each other in terms of class. Murphy played a very minor role in *A Man of Few Words* (2000), which combines humour and elements of melodrama in a narrative about a father-of-the-bride, who attempts to conceal his stutter by becoming intoxicated on the

morning of his daughter's wedding. In *Filleann an Feall* (2000), Murphy and Don Wycherly play two petty criminals attempting to procure some contraband poitín with farcical results, while similarly in *Watchmen* (2000), a pair of drug dealers are robbed of their supply by two hapless observers, Phil (Murphy) and Ray (Barry Ward), who are themselves caught on camera in the act. While these films also employ the absurd as a means of approaching their subject matter, their most striking aspect derives from the way in which they focalize an urban sensibility from a male perspective. Unlike films such as *About Adam* or *Goldfish Memory*, these narratives are firmly located within a working or underclass milieu, with leading men who are, much like Debbie Ging describes in another context, "both 'antisocial' and charismatic" (*Men and Masculinities* 162).

Murphy's next film saw him cast in a leading role as Daven McDerby in the coming-of-age comedy drama *Sunburn* (1999). After a one night stand that results in a pregnancy, the narrative follows Daven's decision to evade his responsibilities in Ireland by joining a group of students heading to Long Island to work in America for the summer. Murphy's last film before *Disco Pigs* was John Carney's *On the Edge* (2001) which, like *Sunburn*, focuses on a hedonistic version of Irish masculinity associated with the booming economy of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Murphy plays Jonathan Breech, a nineteen year old from the south side of Dublin who attempts to kill himself on the day of his father's burial by driving a stolen car off a cliff. After miraculously surviving the crash, Jonathan is given the option of a prison sentence on account of the theft or three weeks in a psychiatric institution. He selects the latter, and the narrative traces his gradual recovery as a result of therapy, and the unusual friendships he develops while institutionalized.

All the films from this four year period commodify male experience and suffering with all but *Sunburn* featuring the city as a proving ground of masculinity. Where the short films express male angst in nihilistic terms and engendered by social disadvantage, *On the*

Edge in particular focuses on the impact of middle class excess through Murphy's character Jonathan. While it is the latter type that has most typically been associated with Murphy in Hollywood, this has occurred in such a way that conflates his androgynous appearance with his sexuality. Like Farrell and Meyers, Murphy is heterosexual. However, his androgynous appearance has frequently been subject to multiple readings, with several articles on Murphy published in the U.S. version of LGBT magazine *The Advocate*. Some sites have framed Murphy as an icon of gay culture such as Tomandlorenzo.com or the Tumblr site fuckyeahcillianseyes.tumblr.com, mentioned in Steve Roses' article in the *Guardian* Newspaper, quoted above. The former is run by the eponymous male couple of the title who describe Tomandlorenzo.com as a "full purpose pop culture site with a special focus on fashion and style," while the latter, as the name suggests, is a site that invites fans of the actor to post comments, opinions, and pictures inspired by the colour of Murphy's eyes. In both cases, there is an obvious queering of Murphy's image that sexualizes any pose with captions commenting on aspects of his appearance and clothing. Such responses to the actor have arguably been encouraged by Murphy's role as the transvestite Kitten in Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto* (discussed in the previous chapter), but even his earliest films demonstrate not only the various interpretations of masculinity within an urban Celtic Tiger context, but more specifically, the multiple potential readings of Murphy's Irish masculinity.

As shall become apparent, such androgyny is pushed to a further degree in the case of the star persona of Murphy's contemporary, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, but in a very different way. To the extent that Meyers' star persona is grounded in cosmopolitan and traditional discourses of Irishness linked with a "softer" version of masculinity, this identity has been more forcibly directed by a logic of consumption than either Murphy or Farrell, and with slightly more sinister connotations, as the following consideration of him will suggest.

Jonathan Rhys Meyers: “Devil in a Blue Dress”



Figure 26. Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *Velvet Goldmine* (1998)

Born in Dublin but raised in Cork, Jonathan Rhys Meyers’ childhood was marked by a dysfunctional family life that would come to play a significant part in the star persona of his later Hollywood career, as one part of the framing identity watermarked onto his roles, and through which his performances have been interpreted. Meyers was reared predominantly by his mother, and various versions of the circumstances surrounding his parents’ separation have surfaced in the media throughout his career. It has also been claimed that Meyers grew up in abject poverty with his mother suffering from alcoholism (Moore). This is not to draw psychological inferences between childhood events, and Meyers’ own later struggles with addiction. Rather, it is to suggest that both Meyers, and the media surrounding his on- and off-screen behaviour, have moulded his familial and social background into a defining narrative of Meyers’ star persona that caters to a “certain nostalgia for the classic rags-to-riches narrative” that Ging claims is central to the American Dream (*Men and Masculinities* 196), by equating personal circumstances to national characteristics through traditional stereotypes of Irishness.

Meyers was expelled from secondary school in his mid-teens for truancy, and was spotted in a pool hall by casting scouts who were at the time looking for boys to appear in an upcoming Irish film by David Puttnam, *The War of the Buttons* (1994) (Bartlett). Despite several auditions Meyers did not make the selection for the film, but the experience, and later success, persuaded Meyers to consider acting professionally. Although he was christened Johnathan Michael Francis O' Keeffe, Meyers adopted his mother's maiden name on beginning his acting career. The actor has not publically given reasons for this, and Meyers' brothers, all of whom are professional musicians, have retained their father's surname. However, the decision is an example of Meyers' active engagement in self-construction, and, as the following consideration of his earliest acting roles will attempt to show, part of Meyers' star persona has extended from discourses invested in promoting a commodified version of masculinity, in which manliness, narcissism, and beauty are not mutually exclusive. In this way, Meyers' star persona has been informed by discourses attached to urbanization through the linking of masculinity with marketing practices in the construction of the metrosexual as a figuration of male identity. This has been achieved through roles that distort the divisions between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour by way of dress, personal grooming, product consumption, or effeminate appearance.

As with Cillian Murphy, and to a lesser degree with Colin Farrell, Meyers' first film appearances were limited to minor characters who were incidental to the plot, or had negligible screen time, as in the case of the Irish films *A Man of No Importance* (1994) and *Michael Collins* (1996), the Spanish sci-fi horror film *La Lengua Asesina* (1996), the TV movie for the American cable network TNT *Samson and Delilah* (1996), and *Telling Lies in America* (1997), an American film starring the Hollywood actor Kevin Bacon. These parts overlapped with leading roles in the Irish film *The Disappearance of Finbar* (1996) and the American crime drama *The Maker* (1997), before a defining performance in the British glam-

rocker film *Velvet Goldmine* (1998). The movies extend across multiple genres, and are marked by the national discourses particular to their origin. However, they are united to the extent that they each contain examples of Meyers' earliest performances in films that produce, what Debbie Ging refers to elsewhere as "increasingly narcissistic and objectified constructions of masculinity" (*Men and Masculinities* 184).

After his debut in a walk-on part in *A Man of No Importance* (1994), Meyers' next film was also a minor role in Neil Jordan's historical drama, *Michael Collins* (1996). Considered in detail in the previous chapter, Meyers played the young sniper who delivers the fatal shot that kills Collins at Béal na Bláth. As part of the film's promotional merchandize, Jordan's film diary and the movie's screen-play from the production, *Michael Collins: Film Diary and Screenplay* were published in paperback and, despite the minimal screen-time, Jordan's notes contain remarks about Meyers' role: "I have found someone to play Collins's killer. Jonathan Rees-Myers (sic), from County Cork apparently, who looks like a young Tom Cruise. Comes into the casting session with alarming certainty. Obviously gifted" (38).

Their brevity notwithstanding, these comments offer some scope for interrogation. The comparison to an icon of 1990's masculinity, Tom Cruise, suggests the existence of qualities such as physical attractiveness, youth, virility, and male charisma. This is also suggested by the reference to Meyers' confidence, and, as shall become apparent, it is Meyers' narcissism in conjunction with his modelling work and androgynous appearance which have become notable trademarks of his off-screen star persona. This would appear to be the case in Meyers' segue into the Spanish horror genre in *La Lengua Asesina* (or, to use its English translation, "The Killer Tongue.")

La Lengua Asesina focuses on a Bonnie-and-Clyde type couple, Candy (Melinda Clarke) and Johnnie (Jason Durr), who are separated when Johnnie is imprisoned following a

robbery. Candy takes refuge at a petrol station run by nuns, but leaves the “convent” with her four poodles on receiving a letter from Johnnie. While stopping at a diner, an asteroid falls from the sky, a piece of which contaminates some soup eaten by Candy, and her pets. As a consequence, Candy becomes possessed by the “killer tongue” of the film’s title, over which she has no control, despite desperate attempts to sever it. Her poodles take human form as crossdressers, and indulge in childish, erotic, and camp behaviour in a subordinate capacity. Meyers plays the human manifestation of Candy’s favourite poodle, Rudolf.

It is not possible within the present discussion to offer a comprehensive history of Spanish cinema, however, some details are beneficial in order to situate *La Lengua Asesina* within a generic context. According to Juan F. Egea, from the 1960s it was deemed a political urgency to project a positive “modern” image of Spanishness as a marker of Spanish national identity, in which film played a significant role (19-20). Whether or not this strategy was a deliberate attempt to mask the conservative policies of the governing dictatorship, as Egea suggests (20), what he describes as “dark humor” as a form of national reimagining does appear to feature prominently in *La Lengua Asesina* (137). While it appears to add little to Meyers’ repertoire in terms of acting experience, the film tests reason, religious orthodoxy, and most notably performances of gender, with a plot “as gloriously camp as its costumes” (Mitchell). In this way, his role in *La Lengua Asesina* would seem to be a further example that avails of Meyers’ androgynous, and even effeminate, appearance, in this case in order to achieve what Barry Jordan and Ricki Morgan-Tamosunas describe as, “the consistent exploitation of filmic excess and bad tastes” (108).

Meyers’ next film offered the opportunity of a starring role in Sue Clayton’s *The Disappearance of Finbar* which frames elements of Irish mythology within the context of Irish culture in the mid-1990s, and, in so doing, addresses the conflicting discourses of Celtic Tiger Ireland in general, and Meyers’ star persona in particular. The film is set in a depressed

Roscommon town, and relates the events that transpire for his best friend Danny when Finbar vanishes from a fly-over near where they both live. When the film begins, Finbar is shown leaving for Zurich to join a reputed Swedish football team, *Grasshoppers FC*, to the resounding cheers of his neighbours. However, Finbar's life begins to fall apart several months later when he returns home to Ireland in the middle of the night, having left the team. On his return, Finbar becomes increasingly argumentative, and, when taunted as a failure by his neighbours, he climbs on top of a fly-over and disappears over the edge. It is not until three years later that Danny discovers Finbar's whereabouts in Sweden, and travels to Stockholm to find his former friend.

Due to the multiple sources funding the project, and the multiple locations of its setting, *The Disappearance of Finbar* has been described as a "Euro-pudding" (Pramaggiore, *Irish and African American Cinema* 185) as well as an "ill-conceived attempt to emulate the cross-cultural frameworks" of previously successful European directors such as Jim Jarmusch and Aki Kaurismaki (J. Downs 62). Clayton has responded to such criticisms by stating that the multiple film settings were intended to effect a pan-European perspective, at a time of economic expansion in which Europe is "at once a more open place with less physical boundaries and a place fraught with increasingly harsh divisions around race and class" (Clayton 168-9). The stark lighting and muted colours of the cinematography give a melancholy overtone to the "sprawling mass of concrete" (J. Downs 62) of the Roscommon housing estate with the result that, according to Maria Pramaggiore "[t]his small town's residents, including Danny, vicariously invest their hopes of transcendence—or, at the very least, their fantasies of leaving for a better life elsewhere—in favoured son Finbar" (*Irish and African American Cinema* 185). Thus, the rather dystopian perspective of urban Ireland that the film delivers is interlaced with a counter narrative based on elements of Irish mythology, and, as such, Pramaggiore's observations are supported by Clayton's stated inspiration for the

film as a modern adaptation of the adventures of itinerant figures from traditional folklore: “Finbar bears resonance of past Irish heroes like Oisín and Finn Mac Cumhaill, also condemned to be wanderers, yet he is trapped on a mundane housing estate (the ‘ordinary world’ referred to by Volger) overshadowed by a trans-European highway to a world bigger than he can imagine” (Clayton 166). In this way, Clayton’s narrative is as much concerned with the ideological repositioning of Ireland within a global framework, as it is an exploration of the role of traditional Irishness. Through the characters of Finbar and Danny, masculinity becomes subject to negotiation, as, within this context, personal identity is opened up to broader shifts in national development and globalization.

After a minor role in the made-for-TV movie *Samson and Delilah* (1996), Meyers’ next leading role was in the American crime drama *The Maker*, in which he played Josh Minnell, a bright, but delinquent, teenager living with his adoptive parents in a non-specific Californian suburbia whose life descends into chaos on the return of his older brother Walter, with whom he has been estranged. The film received few reviews with the most notable from *Variety*, which speculated that the film’s main success would emerge from “video exposure” rather than creating a big impression at the box office (Harvey). *The Maker* explores social concerns such as juvenile delinquency, in the form of minor theft, the influence of drink and drug culture, and experimentation with sexual orientation. Adolescent experience and behaviour has been a lucrative market for film companies since the 1950s with the major success of iconic young actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, primarily due to the fact that adolescence is a “crucial phase in identity formation” (*Men and Masculinities* 58). Similarly, Timothy Shary has observed that narratives concerning adolescence offer scope to explore the margins of “social and personal concerns” (148). While the dearth of substantial critical response to the film precludes a more detailed analysis of the reception to Meyers’ character, some conclusions can be drawn from a cursory reading. Josh is highly emotional,

sensitive, and romantic in comparison to the other male characters of the film. Similarly, Meyers' hair is worn long, which exaggerates his already effeminate appearance, and, unlike his brother Walter, Josh elects to use his intellect, rather than resort to physical strength, when caught in a compromising position. He thus displays rudimentary characteristics of New Mannism, to the extent that he proves to be a "refuge from the hardline masculinity epitomized by the paranoid, macho men with stifled emotions" (Beynon 100), and, in this way, the character is typical of the kind that earned Meyers an "A for Androgyny" by film critics (Wolf).

However, after another minor role in Guy Ferland's *Telling Lies in America* (1997), Meyers' part in *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) proved to be a defining one in Meyers' career in general and star persona in particular, notwithstanding later film successes. Meyers played Brian Slade, a glam-rocker in 1970s London whose music, appearance, and flaunting of his bisexuality are a source of inspiration to his multiple young fans, and one of scandal to more conservative members of the British public. When Arthur (Christian Bale), a British journalist working in New York, is assigned to write an article on the rocker for the ten year anniversary of his shooting, Brian's rise to global stardom, and subsequent fall from grace is revealed through a series of interviews with people who knew him; his ex-wife, Mandy (Toni Collette); his former manager, Cecil (Michael Feast); and his lover, Curt Wild (Ewan McGregor). These recollections are interwoven with Arthur's own memories from the time which marked a significant period in his personal life to the extent that Brian's career publicly framed Arthur's acceptance of his own homosexuality. Thus, the defining aspects of the film concern sexuality, or at least male sexuality, and its practices of performance, which, in *Velvet Goldmine* (see fig. 26), are predominantly exhibited through elaborate costume and make-up. According to Nick Davis,

Haynes films Rhys Meyers as Brian in an endless array of guises, costumes, postures and alter egos, sometimes to the point of unrecognizability; the soundtrack plays peek-a-boo in a similar way oscillating between Rhys Meyers' own singing and pre-recorded tracks by "original" glam-rockers as well as their contemporary heirs. Posters, video footage, newspaper photographs and album covers emblazoned with Brian's image crop up in *mise-en-scene* with the same regularity as "direct" images of Brian, until the character becomes all but synonymous with his hyper-mediated and commodified persona. (90)

Thus, the spectacle surrounding Slade is as much due to his unorthodox behaviours, and elaborate costumes, as it is to the response of the media to these performances. The opening of the film occurs in the form of several television news broadcasts, during which an anonymous reporter describes how "the streets of London are ablaze in sparkle and make-up and glittering frocks, as the boys and girls of the current glam rock craze pay tribute to their patron saint pop star Brian Slade, and his space-age rock persona, Maxwell Demon." This is intercut with several interviews between teenage fans, disapproving adults, and other rockers of the period, such as Curt Wild and Jack Fairy, and also scenes of Brian Slade in costume before a live show, where, heavily made up with blue hair, a white glitter body suit, platform boots, and a lavish feather collar, he prepares to take to the stage. A quote is taken from one of the interviews in which a voice tells the reporter how "at the minute having a gay image is the in thing." This is confirmed by Curt Wild commenting somewhat regretfully that "it was trendy to wear a long grey coat and carry a Led Zeppelin record under your arm." This passing remark establishes the way in which the film links sexuality to an urban fashion consciousness signified by camp dressing habits and costumes consisting of flares, multi-coloured wigs, velvet trench coats, embroidered waistcoats, cravats, sparkling eye shadow, and lipstick, or simply painted on apparel using green, blue, and gold glittering body paint. Key to this construction is the way in which Meyers' effeminate facial features and slender figure enhance the performance by blurring the boundaries between male and female, gay and straight, masculinity and femininity.

Critical response to the film varied considerably, mostly due to conflicting opinion about whether or not Haynes' interpretation did justice to the real-life glam rocker David Bowie, whom Slade was taken to represent (Ebert "Velvet Goldmine"). For the most part, however, the majority of reactions were united by consistent descriptions of Meyers' androgynous appearance ranging from an "insolent, snake-hipped presence," "poutingly pretty," to the thorough description given by Owen Gleiberman in *Entertainment Weekly*:

Pouty, flamboyant Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), the film's David Bowie figure, starts out as a failed hippie but repackages himself as a polymorphous (or is it just polyester?) intergalactic mannequin; with his playfully head-spinning glitter-trash aesthetic, he becomes the poster queen for a new, subversive celebration of sexual ambiguity.

However, while reviews of *Velvet Goldmine* constitute the largest number of descriptions regarding his androgynous appearance, Meyers' star persona has been structured around similar comments associating him with a highly nuanced type of effeminate male identity. For Sue Clayton, the director of *The Disappearance of Finbar*, Meyers was selected in an effort to add an autobiographical element to her film. Unable to alter the gender of her protagonist, Clayton "cast an actor who read as having an androgynous, or feminine look and sensibility (Jonathan Rhys Meyers, who has played a variety of androgynous roles most notably in *Velvet Goldmine* [dir Todd Haynes, 1998, UK])" (167-8). Similarly, Susan Bordo has noted how much of the debate surrounding Meyers as Henry VIII derived from the fact that Meyers refused to compromise his appearance by gaining weight or donning a "big body suit" when portraying Henry's final years as King (202). According to Hirst, "we simply couldn't have gotten Jonny [sic] to do it. He would not have been able to tolerate looking grotesque" (qtd. in Bordo 202). This was also confirmed by Meyers in Bordo's account, as well as on other occasions, in which he has readily admitted to his narcissism when questioned on the issue:

Oh good God, of course. I'm not going to say [**exaggerated California surfer dude accent**], "Hey, I'm just a normal guy, man. I got no ego, I'm not vain." [**Reverting to Irish accent**] F-k off! I'm all of those things! Not necessarily with good reason; it's just part of my makeup. If you're a jock, you're competitive. If you're an actor, you're narcissistic. (qtd. in P. O'Connor)

Since the beginning of his career, Meyers has typically been cast in roles that call for narcissistic male characters, in some cases, of ambiguous sexual orientation. With the elevation of Meyers' profile in Ireland, Britain, and America, this image has become gradually absorbed into Meyers' star persona, and supported, by not only Meyers' own androgynous appearance, his self-confessed vanity, and strong opinions on the superficiality of star culture, but also, his brief career as a model for luxury fashion houses such as Versace and Hugo Boss. However, this persona has also been undercut by a counter-narrative fuelled by Meyers' self-destructive behaviour, alcoholism, and violent temper, all of which have traditionally been considered stereotypes of Irishness.

In this way, Meyers' star persona has been shaped by two specific discourses: one, informed by the urbanization of Ireland, the commodification of Irish masculinity, the absorption of "New Mannism" and metrosexuality into Irish culture, and the rise in consumerism during the Celtic Tiger period, and the other, dependent on traditional stereotypes of Irishness and Irish masculinity such as alcoholism and violence.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to emphasize the social, cultural, industrial, and commercial changes that altered previously established discourses of Ireland as a pre-modern and agricultural nation. These developments culminated in just over a decade of unprecedented economic growth known as the Celtic Tiger period, founded on a bifurcated understanding of Irishness that emphasized urban Ireland, and the city, as a centre of commerce, and a means of situating the country within a global economy, while also commodifying rural Ireland for tourist purposes. By considering three of Ireland's most

successful actors of the Celtic Tiger period, and situating their early careers within this context, the second part of the chapter has attempted to demonstrate how this period equally impacted discourses of Irish masculinity through the reception of the metrosexual as an idealized male identity. Colin Farrell's star persona has emphasized a rebellious interpretation of Irishness that is also accessible to sexually diverse interpretation, while, for Jonathan Rhys Meyers, it has involved promoting his androgynous appearance, the commodification of his body through modelling, dress, and exercise, and his acknowledgment that "[a] lot of my success is because of what I look like. I know that" (Greenfeld 2). While Murphy's star persona has also been based on his androgynous appearance, it has been shaped and informed by his aloofness, his personal investment in Irish theatre, and public disdain for the commercial promotion of his career, of which Danny Boyle's recollection of Murphy's audition for *28 Days Later* is particularly revealing:

And then this gentle, shy guy arrived. With a face from space. Cillian Murphy. He wasn't right, too modest and quiet in person and in reading for the part but, but ... Maybe it's the Celtic thing, maybe it's my vulnerability to anything without an English accent, maybe it is that face from space; you just couldn't not cast him. And then on set, like the casting process itself, a sense of the unexpected grows around him in his choices and range each day. (qtd. in O'Riordan)

As we have seen throughout this thesis when reflecting upon the discourses surrounding their films, the particular kind of Irishness embodied by these actors is never *not* a subtext to their reception. Rather than a case of ethnic exceptionalism, the kind of masculinity in question has been fashioned at a time when the signs that form the basis of Ireland's national imaginary were in flux. Shaped by the seminal periods in their careers discussed above, Celtic Tiger Irishness is, through various strategies of creative bricolage, attached to the star texts of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy in Hollywood to become a watermark—a veil—through which viewers make sense of their performances on screen. In this way, the star personae of these three actors, and their reputation within Hollywood has been grounded in the discourses of

Celtic Tiger Irishness with “the increased visibility and acceptance of non-normative gender and sexual identities at discursive and legislative levels, all occurring against the backdrop of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger” (Woods 27).

CONCLUSION

The careers and star personae of three Irish actors, Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, and Jonathan Rhys Meyers, have been considered in detail through four chapters, each with a specific thematic focus related to representations of Irishness in Hollywood film: whiteness, violence, oedipal conflict, and sexuality and the city. These chapters have discussed how the years between 1994 and 2008, during which time Ireland experienced what was described as a “Celtic Tiger” economy, resulted in a fundamental renegotiation of Irishness itself, that is, Ireland’s position within the global, economic, and political landscape, and the relationship between the buoyant contemporary moment and a history marked by colonial trauma, civil war, and recurrent recession. If, in reality, the contrast between past and present was not quite as stark as this description would lead one to believe, it was certainly how the situation was presented by popular media across the world. To take an instance of a (possibly Irish) American point of view, *IPO Reporter*, Colleen O’Connor, described how the nation had gone from “a struggling country” to a “roaring economy.” Similarly, from across the border in Canada, Eric Beauchesne of the *National Post* referred to “an economic backwater” that had been transformed by “wildly successful” initiatives on the part of the Irish government, while, perhaps most striking of all three examples, the comments of Kim Mi-hui, the Irish correspondent for the *Korea Herald* based in Dublin, illustrate how the impression that Ireland had experienced radical changes over the previous two decades was not limited to a Western perspective: “If ever a nation can be described as a fairy tale character, Ireland is it. The Cinderella-like state, once just a poverty-stricken country of potato farmers, attended a ‘midnight ball’ in the 1980s and transformed in a blink of an eye into European royalty.”

In a similar way, the film examples, interviews, commentaries, and articles on Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy considered throughout this thesis have pointed to a phenomenon whereby traditional stereotypes of Celtic sentimentality and ethnic volatility are amalgamated

with a configuration of the post 1980s construction of the urban male in mainstream cinema. To this extent, the research conducted throughout this thesis has shown these Irish actors to be both “new” and “old” men: au fait with consumer culture and the behaviours of sensitive heterosexual masculinity, but, with an emphatically Irish element that has frequently been framed to suggest a culturally specific proclivity for alcoholism and violence.

This thesis contributes to the existing research on Irish stars in Hollywood through a process that has involved taking account of current issues within the study of whiteness and ethnicity, star studies, and masculinity studies, as well as intersecting with Irish studies, and paying heed to discourses of Irishness within Ireland and America during the Celtic Tiger period. Beginning with race, and in light of claims by Negra et al that Irishness in the U.S. “seems to move between a quasi-blackness and a politically insulated whiteness” (“The Irish in Us” 3), political blackness appears to be a dormant property within constructions of Celtic Tiger Irish masculinity to the degree that, as a result of the discourses within and surrounding their films, stars such as Farrell, Murphy, and Meyers, and the characters that they have played, have been connected to social disenfranchisement and historical experiences of national trauma even as they benefit from the whiteness that affords social currency to their Irishness in the first place.

In this respect, the capacity of contemporary Irishness to register often contradictory political positions has served as a powerful discursive force within U.S. popular culture in general, and cinema in particular. In a context where Irishness has often been recruited by Hollywood to allow for sanctioned expressions that might otherwise seem gratuitous, the particular way that violence, as a traditional stereotype of Irish masculinity, was incorporated into the film roles of the Irish actors of this study recalled Hill’s analysis of U.S. troubles films, but, in an explicitly post-troubles context, to the extent that violence “helps forward drives and ambitions, establishes character and identity, resolves problems and conflicts and

ultimately affirms an ideology of advancement and development” (“Images of Violence” 151). While *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* revealed how, even within the limited time constraints of a two hour movie, it has been possible to produce a nuanced account of Irish history that does justice to the complexities involved where ethnic conflict is concerned, for the most part, Irishness in the films discussed has served as a vehicle for the articulation of violence, and functions as both a destructive and a restorative force that organizes the development of the drama.

However, if U.S. society has privileged traditional stereotypes of Irishness, it has also engaged with contemporary discourses of masculinity in which the “New Man” embodies certain qualities typically ascribed to the feminine, such as sensitivity and nurturing, and a capacity to receive and show affection. We saw this in particular when tracking the distinguishing features of Celtic Tiger masculinity by looking at generational conflict through the father-son relationship, a longstanding trope within Irish culture, literature, and cinema. Considering films that juxtaposed two generations of Irish actors through a paternal and filial relationship revealed scenarios in which the literal and symbolic journey to manhood corresponded with each young protagonist assuming the mantle of fatherhood in such a way that also called attention to less suitable father figures within the narrative.

In conjunction with these findings, reflecting upon the origins and defining factors of the economic boom offered further clarity as to the defining aspects of Celtic Tiger Irishness, and the extent to which the careers and star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy were influenced by discourses of the period such as its celebration of urban development and cosmopolitanism, and, in such a way that bore positively on the actors’ later reception within Hollywood as icons of contemporary Irish masculinity. Key to this undertaking was an acknowledgement of how traditional stereotypes of Irish culture relating to a pre-lapsarian landscape peopled by a simple, congenial, country-folk were ideologically and discursively

consigned to the Western periphery, and marketed by urban political centres such as Dublin to meet the needs of a thriving tourist industry. It was discussed in detail how Celtic Tiger Irishness, while straightforward as an example of economic development propelled by massive foreign direct investment, an inflated property market, and neoliberal government policies that prioritised commerce over social obligations, was also profoundly complex, defined as it was by an impulse to both transcend, and consume, elements of Ireland's rural and colonial past.

What has become increasingly clear from considering the performances of these actors in film as well as discourses of both promotion and reception that have surrounded them, is a diminishing reliance upon accent as a marker of Irishness. Speaking of ethnicity in terms of a watermark has been a useful framework to approach the way that these actors' Irishness has repeatedly been cited by film reviewers, writers, and spokespersons from popular press, irrespective of whether they were playing Irish characters. In this regard, the film characters played by Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy using a generic "American" or "British" accent as appropriate to the film in question, have been the most revealing to the extent that they have made visible alternative ways in which Irishness has been registered beyond a vocal performance. *Hart's War*, *Red Eye*, *Batman Begins*, or *The Tudors* are just some of the examples discussed that have pointed to a system of signification—a watermark, a trace that resides below the surface, and is activated by the viewer who comes to the film text with an accumulated body of knowledge that has been created paratextually.

To this extent, the concept of a watermark has not involved an essentialist appreciation of ethnicity: it has alluded to the existence of a sign that is visible to the audience because it is made real by the discourses surrounding the star. We saw how in *The Tudors* and *Red Eye*, the director and producers respectively involved relied upon their audience's awareness of Meyers and Murphy's ethnicity, whether to bolster the

unconventional casting of a notorious British monarch, or to prevent an unpatriotic reading of the film that responded to the politically sensitive post-9/11 context of its release. *Hart's War* and *S.W.A.T.* were illustrative cases in which Farrell's Irishness was flagged in the discourses that surrounded these films despite their American setting, and the non-Irish characters that they focused upon, while some of the most interesting examples to effectively convey the advantages of considering ethnic stardom in terms of a watermark have shown an attempt to locate traces of the actor's star persona within the fictional character, such as, in the case of Murphy's performance of Scarecrow in *Batman Begins*.

But, if it can be argued that accent serves as an instantly recognizable marker of ethnicity within the context of a narrative, examples of films in which Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy play Irish characters, and speak with an Irish accent, such as *August Rush*, *Match Point*, *Daredevil*, *Ondine*, *In Bruges*, or *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, alluded to something more than just an ethnic placement. To this extent, accent must be considered as only one amongst other signs, such as the image, that point to an identity which is constructed, and performed, beyond the fictional or imaginary space of the film. As we have seen in *Alexander*, Oliver Stone's decision to use the history of Ireland's relationship with Britain as an allegory to convey Celtic ambitions within a world organized between Greek and Roman power, relied not on Irishness alone, but on the meanings attached to an Irish actor recognised for his refreshing exhibition of hedonistic and politically incorrect behaviour within the Hollywood film industry. Accent may suggest a specific ethnic origin or homeland, but it is only when it is articulated in conjunction with the image, or body, of the actor that the particulars of star persona contribute to the potential meanings generated by the film. The findings of this thesis suggest that the off-screen ethnicity and identity of the star is registered by the viewers' visual recognition of his image, and, as such, can occur with, or without, the addition of an ethnic accent. Reflecting on the early careers of Farrell, Meyers,

and Murphy, and their progression from indigenous acting to stardom, has also made clear the relevance of at least two distinct conceptual spaces, namely, Celtic Tiger Ireland on the one hand, and Hollywood on the other, in constructing the star personae of these actors. Taking account of the first roles of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis has shown a certain element of continuity between their experiences as minor actors, working within the context of the Irish and British film markets, and their later Hollywood careers. Meyers' first roles in films that strain against a heteronormative division of gender (*A Man of No Importance*, *La Lengua Asesina*, *Velvet Goldmine*), Farrell's debut parts as both a rural heart-throb and an urban hardened hooligan (*Falling for a Dancer*, *Ballykissangel*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*), or Murphy's spate of performances in low-budget but artistically orientated films that put forward an estranged version of Irishness (*Eviction*, *How Harry Became a Tree*, *Disco Pigs*) are in many ways consistent with the particular type of male character they have been called to portray by Hollywood. In this respect, it can be concluded that the star personae of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy represent composite, rather than singular, identities, and, are as much rooted in the specific geographic, economic, sociocultural, and ethnic space of Celtic Tiger Ireland, as they participate in the global, omnipresent context of Hollywood cinema.

This thesis has shown how the Irish masculinity of three actors working in Hollywood was received during an unprecedented period in Ireland's social, cultural, and economic history in such a way as to emphasize both traditional stereotypes of Irishness, and a movement towards global trends pertaining to hegemonic masculinity. Chapter One has illustrated how, despite the progression of time, contemporary discourses of Irishness within the U.S. continue to draw on a history of racial oppression by linking Irish and black experiences of ethnic or racial hatred. An incident such as Samuel L. Jackson's defence of Farrell in an interview for the film *S.W.A.T* is illustrative of how reflecting on the historical

trauma of the past can create, what Gibbons describes elsewhere as “a powerful basis for cross-cultural sympathy” (“We Knew Their Plight Well” 559). But, the ethnically inflected comments of Willis when challenged by Farrell on the set of *Hart’s War*, *the media’s—and indeed Farrell’s own—decision to exploit the incident*, or the use of ethnic prejudice as a back story in both *Bend It like Beckham* and *Match Point*, show a less positive tendency by producing tropes of a variegated hierarchy of whiteness that suggest an image of the Irish as black and ultimately valorizes a state of victimhood based on past, rather than present, experience. There are several reasons why this might be so, but, the way that, as we saw in Chapter Two, the stereotype of violence has also lingered in cinematic representations despite the cease-fire of the late 1990s points to a reluctance to relinquish a notion of Irishness that is divorced from stereotypes, such as Irish violence, for example, the negative attention placed early on in Farrell’s career upon his hedonistic social life, the tabloid scrutiny of Meyers’ continuing battles with alcoholism, or the connections implied by interviewers between Murphy’s enigmatic personality and his spate of roles in violent films.

What can be concluded from looking at the way that Irishness and violence formed an integral component of these particular five films, the promotional media connected to their release, and the Irish actors that starred in them, is a reluctance, or perhaps an inability, to conceive of an Irish national character that is completely vacant of violent inclinations even in a post-troubles time period. Joep Leerssen argues that stereotyping is more than just affixing character traits to a specific nation: it also involves ascribing “actorial roles to a certain nationality with a narrative configuration” (282). This suggests that national stereotypes are as much about the way that an in-group (superpowers such as Britain, until the early twentieth century, or America) defines an out-group, as about the way that in-group understands itself. Leerssen’s remarks here are in keeping with the argument of Declan Kiberd (referred to in Chapter Two), that in order to justify colonization in the first place,

Britain, a nation that prided itself on the rationality and civility of its national character, needed to posit inverse characteristics, such as irrationality and barbarity, onto the rebel Irish. This could perhaps be understood up until the cease-fire and Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998 and effective since 1999. But it does not explain the Celtic Tiger representations encountered in Chapter Two where irrational violence was *read into* Irishness despite the political sensitivity of films such as Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, starring Cillian Murphy, or, the fact that movies, such as *Alexander*, starring Colin Farrell, did not concern either fictional or historical Irish characters.

One possible interpretation of the research this thesis has put forward then, is that stereotypes such as black Irishness, or Irish violence, regardless of a postcolonial and post-troubles present marked by unprecedented economic success, continues to be relevant to Ireland's position within an international community. Further research then, might question why this is so, and consider what end it serves Hollywood, or Irish America, to sustain an interpretation of the Irish male as a locus of irrational and compulsive violence. On the other hand, Chapters Three and Four have shown how a resilient construct in Irish literature and cinema, such as the trope of failed fatherhood, was also reworked to juxtapose the figure of the ineffective father with a version of contemporary Irish masculinity that provides the ideal combination of strength and sensitivity needed to nurture the next generation. We saw how discourses pertaining to the Celtic Tiger period that draw on Ireland's eager engagement, both culturally and commercially, with Europe and America, were also incorporated into representations of Irishness on screen in films such as *August Rush* and *28 Days Later*, as well as into the discourses surrounding Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy as Irish actors working in Hollywood. This was particularly apparent in the case of Farrell, where, following his role in *Ondine*, and the subsequent birth of his second child, the actor's rejection of his former playboy lifestyle to perform a version of fatherhood that represented both tongue-in-cheek

“Oirishness,” and paternal responsibility, was readily picked up by various media across popular culture. In this respect, if the discussion of the Celtic Tiger in Chapter Four showed that promoting a sense of ethnically inflected urban cosmopolitanism was integral to the way that Ireland marketed itself across the turn of the millennium, this research has strongly put forward the argument that Hollywood readily embraced its efforts, but on its own terms.

One possible conclusion to be reached then, not only from Chapter Four but from the thesis as a whole, is that these actors satisfied a certain need within American popular culture for personifications of Irishness that took into account the changing reality of contemporary Irish society due to accelerated economic growth, industrialization, and urbanization of the Celtic Tiger, while preserving traditional stereotypes that have become valued symbols of identification for millions of white Americans with varying investments in Irishness as an identity category. As Dyer reminds us, “[w]ork, sexuality, ethnicity and sexual identity themselves depend on more general ideas about what a person is, and stars are major definers of these ideas” (*Heavenly Bodies* 7).

Halter’s a-la-carte ethnicity, referred to in Chapter One, made explicit the phenomenon among later generations of Americans of ethnic descent for a self-crafted identity that both retains membership with collective society while expressing an aspect of individualism through consuming ethnic symbols, suggesting that what contemporary Americans really seek when shopping for an ethnic identity is “the original recipe that is somehow ‘new and improved’”(7). Halter states that, “[o]ne of the latest innovations to galvanize consumers and hold out the promise of that magical potion that mixes the security of the old with the excitement of the new is a broad based appeal to our romantic search for an ethnic identity” (7). Whether this practice persists out of an effort to escape an anodyne white existence by peppering one’s identity with an ethnic seasoning, or it is just a further development in the commercialization of society is uncertain. Whatever the reason, the

research of this thesis proposes that the star personae of the Irish actors studied here represent a way of being Irish that allows for a version of Irishness that is both old and new, Celtic and contemporary.

It has been the very paradox of Celtic Tiger Irishness, the merging of the local and the global in a pseudo-celebratory way that has been the defining feature of the metrosexual masculinity of Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy as Hollywood stars. Irishness during the Celtic Tiger period was linked to a particular sense of urban space and place in which traditional and nostalgic stereotypes that are imaginatively located within a primitive, pastoral and rural context, become a marketable brand rather than a sociocultural reality. Farrell, Meyers, and Murphy must be appreciated as ethnic actors working within Hollywood who were representative of this particular brand of cosmopolitan Irishness. Presented variously as enigmatic, androgynous luminaries, driven by artistic fervour with a distaste for the superficial excesses of contemporary stardom, volatile narcissists with a prevalence for substance abuse and alcoholic excess, or hedonistic socialisers converted to later-day health gurus and icons of responsible, if unconventional, fatherhood, Cillian Murphy, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Colin Farrell made assimilable a globalized formation of Irishness by embodying a mode of metrosexual masculinity that dips into countercultural lifestyles but draws on pre-existing “traditional” versions of Irishness.

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