

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE

**The Road to Calvary: Tracing the Diachronic Instability in
Representations of the Cleric in Modern Irish Film**

PhD

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Declaration

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Contents

Summary.....	6
Acknowledgements.....	8
Introduction.....	10
Overview.....	10
Methods.....	13
Richard Kearney and the Excarate/Incarnate Characterization of the Cinematic Priest.....	22
Themes and Discourses.....	28
Chapter Outline.....	32
Chapter One: The Hollywood Heritage of the Irish Priest: Cinematic Representations of Irish Clergy Before the 1970s.....	37
Introduction.....	37
Section I: The ‘Social Worker’ Priest.....	41
Hollywood and the Irish Catholic: An Historical Overview.....	41
Censorship and the Catholic-themed Film.....	44
The Influence of Catholic Social Teaching.....	45
<i>Regeneration</i> and the Social Problem Film.....	47
Boys Town.....	53
Father Flanagan and the ‘Social Worker’ Priest.....	56
The ‘Social Worker’ Priest and the Instability of Hegemonic Masculinity.....	60
Spencer Tracy.....	65
The Incarnate Characterization of the ‘Social Worker’ Priest.....	68
Section II: The ‘Mayor’ Priest as the Model of Immigrant Assimilation.....	73
The ‘Mayor Priest’.....	73
<i>Going My Way</i>	74
<i>Going My Way</i> : Nationalist Mythologies and the ‘Mayor’ Priest Archetype.....	77
<i>Going My Way</i> : The Incarnate Characterization of the ‘Mayor’ Priest and the ‘Ana-Carnate’ Event.....	80
<i>Going My Way</i> : Sex, Women, and the ‘Normalising’ of the Cinematic Celibate Priest.....	88
John Ford, <i>The Quiet Man</i> , and the Emigrant Returns.....	93
Father Lonergan: ‘Mayor Priest,’ director proxy, and keeper of the mythic.....	98
Conclusion.....	103
Chapter Two: The Priest, a Church in Decline, and the Ascent of an Indigenous Irish Cinema ...	108
Introduction.....	108
Section I: The Modernization of Ireland and Vatican II.....	112
A Historical Overview.....	112

Father Michael Cleary and <i>The Rocky Road to Dublin</i> (Peter Lennon, 1968)	118
Section II: The Question of Mandatory Clerical Celibacy and the ‘Problem’ of the Female for the Irish Catholic Church of the 1970s and 1980s	126
Post-Vatican II Ireland and the Ascent of ‘Procreation Politics’	126
The ‘Casey Affair,’ the ‘Rebel Priest’ and the Problem of Clerical Celibacy.....	130
Budawanny and The Bishop’s Story.....	136
The Clerical Figures of <i>Budawanny</i> and <i>The Bishop’s Story</i> and Space: Deconstructing the Romantic Legacy of the Western Island.	140
The ‘Excarnate/Incarnate’ division of the Bishop and Priest in <i>Budawanny</i> and <i>The Bishop’s Story</i>	151
Conclusion.....	163
Chapter Three: The Abuse Crisis, the Celtic Tiger and the ‘Ex-carnate’ Irish Cinematic Priest	168
Introduction	168
Section I: Cinematic Representations of Clerical Abuse before the Celtic Tiger	175
The Christian Brother: Cultural Signifier of Clerical Abuse	175
Our Boys.....	181
<i>Our Boys</i> : Time and Space and the Christian Brothers School as <i>Lieu de Memoire</i>	184
<i>Our Boys</i> : Survivor Discourse and Societal Indictment.....	189
<i>Our Boys</i> : Cultural Nationalism and the God of ‘Ontotheology’	193
Our Boys and the ‘Abusive’ Cleric.....	198
Section II <i>Song for a Raggy Boy</i> : The ‘Excarnate’ Cinematic Cleric and the Abuse Melodrama in the Celtic Tiger	205
The Celtic Tiger: Revelations of Sexual Abuse and the Rapidly Changing Discourse Surrounding the Catholic Church.....	205
Celtic Tiger Cinematic Depictions of the ‘Abusive’ Cleric: <i>The Magdalene Sisters</i>	208
The Emergence of Sexual Abuse in Public Discourse and the Case of Father Brendan Smyth	212
<i>Song for a Raggy Boy</i>	216
Clerical Representation in <i>Song for a Raggy Boy</i>	224
Conclusion.....	234
Chapter Four: Cinematic Representations of the Priest After the Celtic Tiger	237
Introduction	237
Section One: Post-Celtic Tiger Embodied Characterizations of the Priest in the Historical Film: Ken Loach’s <i>Jimmy’s Hall</i>	241
<i>Jimmy’s Hall</i> (Ken Loach, 2014).....	241
James Galton and Ken Loach: <i>Jimmy’s Hall</i> ’s Historical and Cinematic Context.....	243
Narrative Heterogeneity in <i>Jimmy’s Hall</i>	248
Father Sheridan’s Transformation from Excarnate to Incarnate Priest.....	255

Space and Authority in <i>Jimmy's Hall</i>	259
Space: The Presbytery	264
Father Seamus: The 'Other' Priest	266
The Displacement of the 'Mayor' Priest.....	268
Section Two: The Contemporary Irish Cinematic Priest as 'Wounded Healer' in John Michael	
McDonagh's <i>Calvary</i>	273
<i>Calvary</i> an Overview.....	273
<i>Calvary</i> : Cultural and Historical Context	274
Father James as 'Wounded Healer'	276
Father James and the Problem of Masculinity.....	284
<i>Calvary's</i> 'Excarnate' Clergy.....	301
Carnal Hospitality and the Return of the Priest to the Sacraments	304
Conclusion	308
Conclusion	312

Summary

This thesis argues for the diachronic contingency of the clerical figure in the modern Irish film. Drawing on the theory of Irish philosopher, Richard Kearney, this thesis suggests that the cinematic Irish priest's instability can be traced diachronically, according to the fluctuation in characterization from the 'incarnate' cleric of the 1970s and 1980s, to the 'excarnate' priest of the Celtic Tiger era, before returning to an embodied subjectivity once more in the post-Celtic Tiger era.¹

This inquiry analyses cinematic texts primarily from the Irish national cinematic canon and as such, in consonance with its traditional critical approach, will provide a close reading of key cinematic texts against the socio-historical horizon of post-Independence Ireland. With that said, this thesis also engages with modern ecclesial history, analysing international and domestic ecclesial events and their subsequent doctrine's impact on the Irish Church.

This thesis presents accounts of the historical events surrounding real-life Irish clerical figures and demonstrates their influence on public discourse surrounding the Catholic Church and its clergy, and by extension cinematic depictions of the Irish priest. This thesis also engages with other key discourses surrounding Irish cinema, including, cultural nationalism, spatiality, masculinity, and their evolving relationship with the priest and Catholicism.

The first chapter of this thesis analyses the archetypes of the Irish priest which emerged during Hollywood's Golden Era, just preceding and during the Second World War. These archetypes provided a reservoir of images, themes, and motifs from which modern Irish filmmakers have liberally taken.

¹ Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2021).

Chapter Two contains close readings of two of the cinematic texts of Irish filmmaker Bob Quinn: *Budawanny* (1987) and *The Bishop's Story* (1994), both of which explore mandatory clerical celibacy. The two films' depiction of the clerical figure, illustrate the double-bind for the cinematic priest, in that, his embodiment leads to the silencing of the female, while his attainment of authority is contingent on his subjective dis-embodiment.

Chapter Three provides a descriptor of the cinematic cleric at the nadir of his excarnate descent which emerged during the Celtic Tiger era. The 'abusive' priest—an inversion of the 'social worker' priest archetype—emerges as a manifestation of a Manichean dualism inherent in Irish Catholic theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, wherein the soul/mind is privileged and the physical body is despised. The characterization of the 'abusive' priest serves, not as an embodied subject, but rather as a disembodied signifier for the institutional Church in Ireland.

The fourth chapter of this thesis traces the 'anacarnate' return of the Irish cinematic priest in the post-Celtic Tiger era. An analysis of the clerical figure of Father James (Brendan Gleeson) in John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary*, illustrates the embodied figure of the 'wounded healer.' Father James is representative of a collection of depictions in film and television, wherein the cleric is characterized as a benevolent authority figure—though limited in his influence—but ultimately a 'good' priest. The re-emergence of the incarnate characterization of the priest in the contemporary Irish situation presents a fractured figure, one with a history of both trauma and sexual activity, and who is frequently at odds with the community to whom he ministers.

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For Mary Adele Hickey (1919-2001)

Introduction

Overview

When Pope Francis visited Ireland in August of 2018, he encountered a country and a Church very different from the one met by the previous visiting pontiff some forty years prior. Far from the glory and triumphalism of the seemingly monolithic Catholic Irish state that greeted Pope John Paul II in 1979, Francis came upon an Irish Catholic Church which as Fintan O’Toole reported on the eve of the visit was ‘not just falling to ruin, but in some respects beyond repair.’² O’Toole’s statement is borne out in the numbers: in 1979 when John Paul II had made his visit—the first of its kind by the Bishop of Rome—weekly Mass attendance for Irish Catholics was at 80 percent, when Francis set foot on Irish soil on 25 August 2018, that number had declined to 35 percent.³ An even more compelling argument for O’Toole’s journalistic requiem for the Church in Ireland, are two key pieces of government legislation supported by the majority of the population. The legalisation of gay marriage in 2015, and the repeal of the eighth amendment from the Constitution of Ireland in 2018, which authorized abortion, both of which the Catholic hierarchy was opposed.⁴

That Church attendance has decreased, and belief has diminished is not something unique to the Irish situation and can be found across Western Europe. What is intriguing, is the rapidity in which that decline has occurred, particularly in light of the inordinate

² Fintan O’Toole, ‘It’s Too Late. Not Even Pope Francis Can Resurrect Catholic Ireland,’ *Guardian*, 23 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/23/pope-francis-ireland-irish-catholicism-catholic-church-abusive-institution>

³ O’Toole, ‘It’s Too Late.’

⁴ Geraldine Kennedy, ‘Pope Francis Is Coming to a Different Ireland than 1979. It Is Not the Same Country and We Are Not the Same People,’ *Irish Times*, 18 August 2018.

amount of power the Church held in Ireland, both politically and culturally, from the time it gained independence from British rule in the early 1920s.

The publication of the Ryan and Murphy reports in 2009, was the culmination of nearly two decades worth of disclosures about systemic clerical abuse in Ireland, both sexual and physical. Harrowing and tragic as these revelations were, the abuse crisis in and of itself, was not the sole catalyst for the Church's decline in Ireland, but rather, served to expedite a deterioration that had begun a half-century before. Economic development, modernisation, and secularisation have, along with the more recent increase in immigration, all played a significant role in bringing about what Gladys Ganiel calls a 'Post-Catholic' Ireland.⁵

Representation in cultural forms such as cinema speaks to societal perceptions of a particular group and their place and rights within that society. I would argue that the relationship between cinematic representation and society is a reciprocal one, wherein each assist in the informing of the other. Cinematic representations are not to be understood as 'mirroring' society, but instead, as Ruth Barton says, being 'based on fantasies and projections of the social order.'⁶ This representational construction in turn, serves to shape societal perceptions. Richard Dyer notes, 'How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.'⁷

There has been a seismic shift in the perception of the Catholic Church in Ireland over the past half-century; the continual revelations of abuse over the past two decades

⁵ Gladys Ganiel, *Transforming Post Catholic Ireland: Religious Practice in Late Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.

⁶ Ruth Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (Manchester, Manchester University Press), 6.

⁷ Richard Dyer, 'Introduction,' in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, ed. R. Dyer, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

coalescing with a modernising movement have transformed a once hegemonic institution into a relic of the past. This inquiry's focus is in evaluating representations of the Catholic Church's most visible symbol: the cleric, against the horizon of that cultural metamorphosis. I would like to suggest that cinematic representations of clergy in Irish films since the 1970s, both reflect the changing socio-cultural situation of the Catholic Church in Ireland, as well as providing a cultural space for the continual renegotiation and re-examination of organized religion's place within society, both in Ireland and the West.

I will argue in this thesis for the diachronic contingency of the clerical figure in the modern Irish film. Drawing on the theory of Irish philosopher, Richard Kearney, I would like to suggest that the cinematic Irish priest's instability can be traced diachronically, according to the fluctuation in characterization from the 'incarnate' to the 'excarbate' to the 'incarnate,' once more. I will utilize Kearney's theories of 'incarnate' and 'excarbate' as figurative signifiers for the variation of characterizations of the priest against the ever-changing backdrop of the Irish cultural landscape. I would like to suggest that the cinematic Irish priest has gone through a figurative process of *katabasis/anabasis*, wherein characterizations of the cleric can be seen to diachronically descend (*katabasis*) from incarnate subject to excarnate, that is, from 'word becoming flesh,' to 'flesh becoming word,' before ascending (*anabasis*) to what Kearney refers to as 'ana-carnation', or 'the repeat act of incarnation.'⁸

⁸ Kearney uses the terms 'word' and 'image' when defining the process of both 'incarnation' and 'ex-carnation.' I interpret Kearney's use of both terms as a means of expansion on the biblical Christological definition, 'Word became flesh' (Jn 1:14, NRSV) from the Greek *λόγος* to address a screen-centric contemporary audience with the use of 'image,' while also providing some distance from the theological. Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2021).

Methods

This inquiry will analyse cinematic texts primarily from the Irish national cinematic canon, which Ruth Barton defines, in her eponymous text as, ‘a body of films made inside and outside of Ireland that addresses both the local and the diasporic cultures.’⁹ In light of Ireland’s considerable history of emigration, Barton’s definition allows for a broad assemblage of films. With that said, brevity in terms of academic inquiry, necessitates that this study claims a geographic concentration. Thus, the films examined in this thesis—with the exception of the first chapter—will be set in the geographic region, known presently, as the Republic of Ireland. As such, Irish films set in Northern Ireland and the diaspora, will be excluded from this study.

The films used as case studies in this inquiry will be analysed through, what Barton notes is the prevailing critical approach to Irish cinema: the socio-historical perspective.¹⁰ With that said, as Gerardine Meaney states: ‘Irish cinema is not a national cinema in any conventional sense. Contemporary Irish filmmaking has developed in a context in which strong expectations of the appropriate content and style of films set in Ireland have been set by their British and American predecessors.’¹¹ Clerical representations in modern Irish film are very much indebted to the Irish priest of the American film industry from the first half of the twentieth century. That both the Irish and the United States Catholic Churches’ have had the highest visibility in terms of clerical abuse revelations over the course of the past thirty years, gestures to the importance of analysing the Irish cinematic cleric’s

⁹ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

¹⁰ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 6.

¹¹ Gerardine Meaney, ‘Landscapes of Desire: Women and Ireland on Film,’ *Women: A Cultural Review* 9, no.3 (1998): 251.

Hollywood ancestry. Thus, the first chapter of this thesis will analyse the archetypes of the Irish priest which emerged during Hollywood's Golden Era, just preceding and during the Second World War. These archetypes, which I refer to as the 'social worker' and the 'mayor' priest, were subsequently appropriated by Irish indigenous filmmakers, as a means of deconstructing received notions of Ireland and the Irish promulgated by the American and British film industries. Particularly significant for this study is modern Irish cinema's transfiguration of these clerical archetypes into new 'abusive' clerical characterizations that disclose the 'shadow' side of the priestly figure during what Hollywood promulgated to be an idyllic time for Irish Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Thus, in the first chapter I will engage with the scholarship on 1930s and 1940s Hollywood cinema, particularly as it relates to, what Anthony Burke Smith refers to as, the 'remarkable run of films about Catholics' during this era.¹² Burke Smith's *The Look of Catholics*, published in 2010, provides a comprehensive analysis of cinematic depictions of American Catholicism between the Great Depression and the Cold War. Burke Smith's evaluation of Bing Crosby's Father Charles 'Chuck' O'Malley in *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944) and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (McCarey, 1945) which he does in both, *The Look of Catholics*, as well as his earlier essay, 'America's Favorite Priest,' are particularly helpful to this study. Burke Smith contends that the cinematic priest that emerged during the years preceding and into the Second World War, as exemplified by Father O'Malley, served as a means of evangelizing the American public,

¹² Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 45.

not so much with regards to doctrine emerging from Rome, but rather, the principles of ‘American Civil Religion,’ i.e., ‘the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’¹³

‘America’s Favorite Priest,’ appears as a part of a collection of essays on Hollywood’s representation of Catholicism from the silent era to the first decade of the twenty-first century, in Colleen McDannell’s *Catholics in the Movies*, published in 2008. In addition to Burke Smith’s essay on Father O’Malley, McDannell’s collection also includes Thomas Ferraro’s chapter, ‘Boys to Men,’ which provides an analysis of the post-Depression era discourses surrounding the Irish-American male and masculinity, as illustrated in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938). In the first chapter of this thesis, I juxtapose the clerical figure of Father Jerry (Pat O’Brien), in Curtiz’s film, with that of Father Flanagan, from *Boys Town* (Norman Taurog, 1938) in relation to the gendering of the priest. This study also appropriates Ferraro’s use of the term ‘social worker’ priest and consolidates it into its own typology.¹⁴

Also found in McDannell’s book is Judith Weisenfeld’s chapter on the Anglo-Protestant female as social reformer, as depicted in *Regeneration* (Raoul Walsh, 1915). Weisenfeld analyzes the cinematic evolution of ethnic, urban, Catholic representations, beginning as they did with the violent, urban poor in need of regeneration, before transforming into promulgators of social reform during the Depression era. Weisenfeld’s articulation of the genesis of the ‘social reform’ film, and the feminine Protestant woman, who serves as the redemptive figure to the urban Catholic community, discloses the

¹³ Anthony Burke Smith, ‘America’s Favorite Priest,’ in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

¹⁴ Thomas Ferraro, ‘Boys to Men,’ in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61.

impotence of the Catholic clerical figure both spatially and ministerially during the nascent period of American cinema.¹⁵

Ruth Barton's collection of essays on representations of the Irish in Hollywood, *Screening Irish America*, published in 2012, also provides insight into the cinematic cleric. Barton's introductory chapter identifies Hollywood's role in assigning the Irish cleric—and by extension the Catholic Church—the responsibility of social reform within their communities.¹⁶ Also in Barton's collection is historian Lawrence J. McCaffrey's article, 'Going My Way and Irish-American Catholicism: Myth and Reality,' which examines the authenticity of McCarey's film's depiction of American Catholicism during World War II. McCaffrey contends that *Going My Way* affirms much of the lived reality of the American Catholic Church, as he says, 'In reality, the urban wing of the American church was Irish in structure and leadership, and pastoral, rather than theological, in focus.'¹⁷ McCaffrey also affirms the notion that Hollywood films from the late 1930s and throughout the War years were essential cultural elements in the mainstream American acceptance of Catholicism.¹⁸

All of the aforementioned scholarship builds on earlier work from the latter half of the twentieth century. Joseph Curran's, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen*, is a key text, in its exploration of film's role in the integration of the Irish immigrant into American

¹⁵ Judith Weisenfeld, 'The Silent Social Problem Film,' in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33-58.

¹⁶ Ruth Barton, 'Introduction' in *Screening Irish-America: Representing Irish-America in Film and Television*, ed. R. Barton (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁷ Lawrence McCaffrey, 'Going My Way and Irish Catholicism: Myth and Reality,' in *Screening Irish-America*, ed. Ruth Barton (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 185.

¹⁸ McCaffrey, 'Going My Way,' 186.

culture. Curran's study examines both on-screen Irish representations, as well as the influence of Irish-American actors, directors, and screenwriters in Hollywood.¹⁹

Lee Lourdeaux's scholarship on Irish and Italian-American directors and the Catholic themes and motifs that inform their work proves to be a foundational text for an analysis of the Hollywood roots of the modern Irish cinematic priest. Lourdeaux's study of the intrinsic Catholicity in the output of Irish-American director, John Ford, in his book, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, provides a cultural link between Hollywood's image of the Irish-American priest in the 1930s and 1940s and that of the indigenous Irish priest that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though Lourdeaux is dismissive of the singular Ford text examined in this thesis, *The Quiet Man* (1952), referring to it as, 'little more than sentimental Irish faces and stereotypical fisticuffs,' his analysis of the Catholic element inherent in the auteur's output, as well as his filmmaking process, is helpful in transitioning the focus of this thesis from Hollywood to modern Ireland.²⁰

Les and Barbara Keyser's book, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church*, is one of the earliest texts to explore Catholicism and Hollywood. The text provides an analysis of a broad collection of films containing Catholic subject matters and themes, with one chapter giving special attention to Bing Crosby's portrayal of Father O'Malley in both *Going My Way* and its sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's*. The text's concern with incorporating such an exorbitant number of films, prohibits it from an extensive analysis of McCarey's films and Crosby's depiction of the Irish priest.²¹

¹⁹ Joseph M. Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen: The Irish and American Movies* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1989).

²⁰ Lee Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990).

²¹ Les and Barbara Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984).

The last three chapters of this thesis will be focused on modern films set primarily within Ireland. Thus, Ruth Barton's two key texts on Irish film, *Irish National Cinema* and *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, along with Martin McLoone's *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, will serve as my primary points of departure in terms of film scholarship. Both Barton and McLoone's work owes a debt to the scholarship of Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill, whose *Cinema and Ireland*, published in 1988, is perhaps the seminal text in Irish film scholarship. In the book, Rockett gives an extensive account of Kalem film studio's European-based production team, under the guidance of director, Sidney Olcott, and the prolific output of films made and set in Ireland during the second decade of the twentieth century. Rockett's account of the local clergy's attempts at interfering with production and Olcott's subsequent ambiguous characterizations of the Irish priest in his silent films serve as a precedent for this thesis.²² In this thesis, I also engage with Gibbons' claim from the same text, for the self-reflexive romanticism that can be read into the cinematic text of Ford's *The Quiet Man*.

This thesis has a diachronic trajectory, thus the case studies used in each chapter will be from those films which provided a depiction of Irish clergy which resonate with the primary discourses surrounding Catholicism at that particular historical moment. With that said, there are few substantive representations of Catholic clergy in Western cinema, thus some of my choices were contingent, less on societal impact and more on other factors such as the creative team, with a bias being given to indigenous Irish filmmakers. With that said, this study is by no means a comprehensive evaluation of all cinematic depictions of Irish clerics, but instead a look at those representations which were most

²² Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 9-11.

visibly in dialogue with prevailing discourses found in both Irish film scholarship and relating to Roman Catholicism and the Republic of Ireland.

As stated earlier, the primary approach to Irish film scholarship is societal, thus this thesis will analyse cinematic depictions of the priest, up and against the socio-historic context of the Catholic Church in Ireland throughout the twentieth century to the present day. I will appeal in particular to Irish sociologist, Tom Inglis' scholarship from his seminal work, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. *Moral Monopoly's* overarching thesis, that from the first half of the nineteenth century, through the era of the nascent independent Irish state, until the end of the twentieth century, the institutional Catholic Church cultivated a hegemonic influence over government and society, provides much of the socio-historical grounding for this thesis.²³ Thus, throughout this thesis, I will continually reference the term, 'modernity,' which can be utilized in multiple contexts, but which I will apply primarily in relation to the economic and cultural transformation that occurred in the Republic of Ireland from the late 1950s onward. Inglis articulates this delineation of modernity as:

the advent of an industrial type of society in which religion becomes rationally differentiated from the rest of social life, the state becomes separated from the Church, religious belief and practice become a private rather than public affair, the rational choice of the individuals in the marketplace takes over from the pressures of tradition and community to conform; and production and consumption take primary importance over being spiritual.²⁴

As mentioned previously, this study will be in dialogue with ecclesial history of the past two centuries and its impact on the Catholic Church in Ireland. Thus, there will be engagement with multiple ecclesial documents from both Rome and the various Church institutions in Ireland.

²³ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998,).

²⁴ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 250.

Though Irish film scholarship has frequently included analysis of cinematic representations of the Catholic Church, there has yet to be a prominent interrogation of the clerical figure. In attempting to assemble anything resembling a typology of cinematic priests, it must be conceded that the character is an archetype unto itself. In the vast constellation of cinematic representations, the priest character occupies very little space, and as such, does not have an extensive variation of types. As the role of the priest has been a minor character in most cinematic narratives, serving a utilitarian purpose, his characterisation is usually flat, and is frequently credited as simply, ‘priest.’ Indeed, were one to look through the credits of any working Irish male actor from the past half century, he is bound to be billed at least once, as simply, ‘priest.’

In the relatively few films that foreground priests, either in a leading role or a prominent supporting part, however, there are what can be called sub-types of the clerical role that have emerged. As has been stated, representations are constructed and do not come about organically, thus, they simultaneously mirror and shape the social and cultural situation in which they are entwined. In this thesis, I will delineate two priestly archetypes, both of which manifested in Hollywood films in the Depression and into the Cold War era. I refer to these two types as the ‘social worker’ priest and the ‘mayor’ priest. While both types find their genesis in Hollywood’s Golden Age, they have continually re-emerged in myriad contexts and for myriad purposes. In the modern Irish context both archetypes have been deconstructed, as well as re-constructed since the emergence of an indigenous cinema in the 1970s.

For clarity’s sake I will distinguish between the two predominant types of priests in the Roman Catholic tradition. The diocesan, or secular priest, usually works within the geographical parameters of the diocese or the archdiocese which they have entered. They are under the authority of the local bishop and make a promise of obedience and celibacy

to him upon their ordination to the priesthood. However, secular priests do not make a public profession of the evangelical counsels, more widely known as the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The other common type is the religious priest, who is a member of a particular religious order or congregation sanctioned by the institutional Church, either at the local or universal level. Religious priests are, typically, not bound to the local bishop, but rather to their local superior, as well as the head of their congregation. Many religious congregations are international, and as such, their members are more inclined to move from diocese to diocese, both domestically and internationally. Religious congregations usually fall under one of three categories: monastic, mendicant, and apostolic. The monastic congregations were born out of the Christian desert ascetical movement of the fourth century. The legalisation of Christianity through the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, made martyrdom obsolete, thus Christians, looking for new ways to radically follow Christ, took his instructions to the rich young man found in Matthew's Gospel, literally and sold all they had and followed him, living a life of extreme ascetism as hermits in the desert.²⁵²⁶

By 320 CE, the first Christian monastery was established by Pachomius in Egypt and by the end of the century, the monastic movement had expanded throughout the Middle East and into Europe.²⁷ The mendicant congregations, such as the Franciscan and Dominican friars, which arose during the Middle Ages, took many of the ascetic practices of their monastic predecessors, however they chose not to live in an enclosed community,

²⁵ Matthew 19: 16-22 (NRSV).

²⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'A Theology of the Evangelical Counsels,' trans. Br. Alberic, *Cross Currents* 16, no. 2 (1966): 213-215.

²⁷ Glenn Holland, 'Celibacy in the Early Christian Church' in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 75-76.

shut off from ‘the world’, but rather lived as itinerant preachers, wandering the roads, proclaiming the gospels and ‘begging without shame.’²⁸

Apostolic congregations, such as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) were born out of the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century and were primarily focused on public ministries, such as education and parish work. Thus, these congregations, though living in the community and professing the evangelical counsels, viewed poverty, chastity, and obedience less in terms of their own sanctity and more with how they could best serve ‘the mission.’²⁹

This study will focus primarily on secular priests, as they are most frequently depicted in the cinematic realm. Secular priests usually live on or adjacent to the church they minister at, usually living in the presbytery, which also frequently serves as an administrative space. Diocesan parishes are run by what is referred to as a parish priest, in the United States, this role is also referred to as pastor. They often live in the presbytery with a (usually) less experienced priest, usually referred to as the curate, though, again in the United States often referred to as associate pastor. As stated earlier, the secular priests do not take the ‘vows’ of the theological counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but rather make ‘promises’ of the secular ideals of obedience and celibacy.

Richard Kearney and the Excarinate/Incarnate Characterization of the Cinematic Priest

The thrust of this thesis centres around the instability of the clerical figure in modern Irish cinema. I will utilize Richard Kearney’s notions of ‘excarinate’ and ‘incarnate,’ as analogous descriptors of the cinematic characterizations of the Irish priest in order to

²⁸ Thomas Nairn, ‘Medieval Mendicant Orders Relied on Contributions,’ in *Health Progress* 98, no. 2 (2017): 9.

²⁹ Josef Fuchs, ‘Chastity as Vow in the Jesuit Life-Project,’ *The Way* 19 (Summer 1973): 97-98.

illustrate the clerical figure's instability. I would like to suggest that the contingency of the cinematic Irish priest can be traced through a diachronic *katabasis/anabasis*, wherein the characterization 'descends' into the sphere of, what Kearney terms, the 'excarbate,' that is, 'the flesh becomes image;' before the characterization 're-ascends' back to the 'incarnate,' that is, 'the image becoming flesh.'³⁰

Kearney's 'excarbate' project derives from his background in Continental philosophy, rooted in the phenomenological tradition. Following the lead of many Continental scholars at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Kearney's work took a 'theological' turn. This movement toward an exploration of conceptions of God and the Stranger, is in part, informed by his upbringing in the Republic of Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, where he says he:

experienced the damaging influence of two kinds of theocracy in both parts of the island. North of the border one had the ideology of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, while south of the border, in the Republic of Ireland, we had for many decades after independence from Britain a more or less Catholic parliament for a Catholic people.³¹

Thus, Kearney claims that his upbringing made him particularly averse to authoritarian ideology, 'be it political or religious.'³² Kearney's philosophical approach to religious concepts and themes then, like that of his doctoral supervisor Paul Ricoeur, is an integration of both phenomenological and hermeneutical methods.

With that said, this thesis' primary focus is cinematic not philosophical, as such, its engagement with Kearney's project is concerned with extracting key concepts to create a model for articulating the position of the priest within modern Irish film. Thus, this thesis'

³⁰ Richard Kearney, *Touch: Rediscovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 2.

³¹ Richard Kearney, Daniel Veldsman, & Yolande Steenkamp, 'Across Oceans: A Conversation on Otherness, Hospitality and Welcoming a Strange God,' in *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*, eds. D.P. Veldsman & Y. Steenkamp (Cape Town: AOSIS, Ltd, 2018), 309, <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2018.BK94.15>.

³² Kearney, Veldsman, and Steenkamp, 'Across Oceans,' 309.

dialogue with Kearney's inquiry should be understood as an analogous one, rather than a direct intervention with his theory. I use Kearney's notions of incarnate/excarnate as an analogous means of analysing the position of the cleric in Irish cinema.

This project will construct its model for analysis of the cinematic priest, primarily engaging with two of Kearney's theoretical projects: his anatheistic paradigm, which he gives a comprehensive account of in his book, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, published in 2010, and his account of what he terms a 'commons of the flesh,' found in his book, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*, published in 2021.

Kearney's anatheistic paradigm's central focus is on a philosophical engagement with the sacred, after what Kearney terms, 'the disappearance of God.'³³ Kearney contends that 'after the terrors of Verdun, after the traumas of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and the gulags, to speak of God is an insult unless we speak in a new way.'³⁴ It is Kearney's contention that the God, i.e. the conception of God, who allowed for the horrors of the twentieth century, must be eviscerated in order to allow for God, i.e. a new conception of God, to be reborn.³⁵

Kearney contends that the core of the anatheistic wager, that is, the 'God after God,' is one of many possible ways to bring about a new understanding of the divine. Kearney says, the anatheistic paradigm, 'opens a space for the questioning of God where theists and atheists may converse. It invites us to revise old interpretations and reimagine new ones.'³⁶ Kearney's concern with eradicating traditional conceptions of the divine and allowing for new understandings to emerge, aligns with the aspirations and hopes of some within the contemporary Irish situation. This thesis will utilize Kearney's notions of

³³ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xvi.

³⁴ Kearney, *Anatheism*, xvi.

³⁵ Kearney, *Anatheism*, xvi.

³⁶ Kearney, *Anatheism*, xvii.

anatheism, sovereign theism, and radical atheism as a means of articulating the intertwining relationship between religion and authority in the Irish situation and how that was informed by a conception of God as sovereign.

Kearney disassembles the widely held notion of what he terms ‘sovereign theism,’ wherein ‘God as Sovereign *causa sui*, as immutable Emperor of the world, exercises arbitrary and unlimited powers over his creatures. Everything—even the worst horrors—could thus be justified as part of some divine Will.’³⁷ Kearney’s anatheistic response to sovereign theism is the moment of Incarnation, which he claims, serves as the *kenotic* occasion, wherein the omnipotent God empties himself and in doing so, the sovereign becomes servant.³⁸ Kearney says that the Incarnation is ‘the surpassing of metaphysical categories of divinity as First Cause or Highest Being, the realization that God is a promise, a call, a desire to love and be loved that can not *be* at all unless we allow God to be God.’³⁹ Kearney’s notion of God as sovereign, corresponds with the Catholic theological stance on the divine, until the time of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the mid-1960s. The perversion of sovereign theism as a discursive weapon to enforce the authority of the Catholic Church in post-Independence Ireland is a recurring theme in multiple cinematic texts since the earliest days of a native cinema in the 1970s.

Kearney’s notions of incarnation, hospitality and healing found in his anatheism paradigm, as well as in other texts, which I will be engaging with throughout this thesis, imbricate with his recent scholarship on ‘touch.’ Indeed, Kearney’s notion of ‘excarnation,’ that is ‘flesh made image,’ is foundational to this inquiry.⁴⁰ Kearney contends that contemporary society is experiencing a ‘crisis of touch,’ brought about by increases in visual technology and virtual experience. Kearney questions whether cyber

³⁷ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 53.

³⁸ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 52.

³⁹ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 52.

⁴⁰ Kearney, *Touch*, 2.

technology has degenerated our sense experience in favour of more mediated modes of encounter.⁴¹ Kearney argues for the necessity of the ‘recovery’ of touch in relation to all the senses, as fundamental to human well-being at the physical, mental, and spiritual level.

Kearney gives a phenomenological account of ‘touch,’ as it manifests in the five senses, using the notion of ‘tact,’ which he defines as the ‘wisdom of tactility,’ in guiding the subject to discern when ‘touch’—as manifested in any of the five senses—is mutually beneficial and appropriate.⁴² Kearney then goes on to present an account of the philosophies of touch in the Western tradition. Kearney holds that throughout most of its history, philosophy in the West has been dominated by an optocentric—sight centred—bias, instituted by Platonic thought in the Classical era, encouraging a mind/body dualism.⁴³ Kearney notes that this Platonic dualism continually infiltrated Christian theology throughout its two centuries of existence, despite its ‘heralding of Incarnation (Word made flesh).’⁴⁴

Kearney contends that Western philosophy only ‘returned to the body’ in the twentieth century with Edmund Husserl’s call for a philosophical return to ‘things themselves.’ The phenomenological turn brought with it an opportunity to what Kearney says, ‘revisit our prereflective experience of the body.’⁴⁵ The work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty is of particular importance to Kearney’s account, as his scholarship focused on touch and its relation to healing. As Kearney says of the reciprocal nature of touch and its corresponding ability to heal, ‘ultimate healing involves an existential conversion of one body-subject in tactful communion with another.’⁴⁶

⁴¹ Kearney, *Touch*, 2.

⁴² Kearney, *Touch*, 9-10.

⁴³ Kearney, *Touch*, 33-36.

⁴⁴ Kearney, *Touch*, 36.

⁴⁵ Kearney, *Touch*, 45.

⁴⁶ Kearney, *Touch*, 49.

Kearney's linkage of touch and healing are instrumental to this thesis' account of the 'incarnate' cinematic priest. Kearney underlines the significance of this link and the importance of embodiment in his account of the 'wounded healer.' Kearney presents multiple accounts of 'wounded healers' from the Western canon, both scriptural and secular, including such figures as Odysseus, Oedipus, Chiron, Jacob, and Jesus.⁴⁷

Kearney gives particular attention to Christ, both from scriptural accounts of his suffering and healing, as well as from the visual arts, such as, Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*. Kearney's account of the 'wounded healer,' and his linkage of embodiment, touch, and healing, undergird this thesis' account of an 'incarnate' clerical depiction.

In this thesis, I will repurpose Kearney's notions of excarnate and incarnate, as an analogous model for illustrating the distinctions in clerical representations in modern Irish film. I've chosen to use Kearney's language of 'excarnate' and 'incarnate,' as grounding principles for a model of analysis of the Irish priest, projecting images, both factual and illusory, of the relationship between Ireland and the Catholic Church. The demarcation of the cinematic priest as excarnate/incarnate, buttresses my argument for the cleric's onscreen diachronic contingency. I will utilize from Kearney's incarnate/excarnate project, his understanding of the term, 'touch,' and its operation through all of the senses, as a means of delineating the excarnate from the incarnate cinematic cleric.

The Irish cinematic priest's placement within Irish film is an unstable one, as he shifts from 'incarnate' to 'excarnate' and back again. The cleric's instability is illustrated through the fissuring that occurs diachronically between the embodied characterization of the priest and his access to authority. As the socio-historical horizon shifted from the late twentieth century into the new millennium, so too did clerical depictions alter, with depictions decidedly of priests in positions of authority, becoming decidedly less

⁴⁷ Kearney, *Touch*, 62-75

‘embodied.’ The ‘excarate’ characterization of the cleric is correlative to his placement within the cinematic text as institutional signifier. The disembodied cleric is not so much supposed to represent an embodied subject, so much as a disembodied hegemonic institution.

The intertwined relationship between civil authority and ecclesial authority in modern Irish history informs my analysis of the priest in Irish film. Representations of clergy in Irish cinema, as opposed to other Western national cinemas, differ in that they are concerned with authority rather than faith. Thus, in the Irish film, the priest frequently serves as an emblem of authority and not as a vehicle for theological and spiritual exploration.

Themes and Discourses

Though, the primary contention of this project is for the diachronic instability of the clerical representation in modern Irish films, there are certain themes within Irish film scholarship which remain constant and provide support for that claim. As such, each of the chapters in this study will engage with key discursive themes that continually re-emerge in Irish film scholarship and serve to reinforce the cinematic priest’s contingency.

Space and place have grown in prominence over the past two decades in Irish film scholarship. The recent work of both Ruth Barton and Conn Holohan note the increasing contingency of place, particularly within the urban context, in modern Irish cinema.⁴⁸ This position is informed by Yi-Fu Tuan’s influential delineation of space and place, wherein he holds that an indeterminate space ‘becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.’ Tuan contends that the construction of place provides an

⁴⁸ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*; Conn Holohan, *Cinema on the Periphery: Contemporary Irish and Spanish Film* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2010).

environment of ‘security and stability’ in opposition to the ‘openness, freedom, and threat of space.’⁴⁹

This thesis analyses the emplacement of the clerical figure and its relationship to authority, as Barton says, ‘power and space are inextricably linked,’ this is especially true of the priest in modern Irish film.⁵⁰ In the diachronic tracing of the cinematic cleric, his contingency is affixed to his emplacement within the context of the cinematic text and the authority inscribed within that space. Though certain spaces in which the cleric is located, such as the ecclesial space, rectory, and presbytery, remain constant within the diachronic trajectory of this study, their relation to power is unstable. This unstable relation between space and authority is invariably dependent upon the temporal setting of the diegesis, with the narratives of the Irish past linking ecclesial areas with power.

With that said, the emplacement of the clerical figure, historical or modern, within the West of Ireland proves to be more complex. The image of the Roman Catholic cleric is traditionally attached to the West because, as Martin McLoone points out, they are both key principles of the cultural nationalist movement that emerged in late nineteenth century Ireland.⁵¹ Morash and Richards refer to the West as a ‘chronotope,’ in its conceptual representation, that is, that the West invariably alludes to the past and exists out of time.⁵² However, the cinematic priest and the Western landscape have a difficult relationship, and the exterior terrain of the West is frequently utilized by Irish filmmakers as a discursive means to illustrate the cleric’s inherent alterity.

⁴⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

⁵⁰ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 13

⁵¹ Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London, British Film Institute, 2000), 12.

⁵² Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41-42.

The problem of cultural nationalism and the discourses surrounding Irish identity which it has engendered, were a recurring theme in the first two decades of indigenous Irish filmmaking. Indeed, Martin McLoone utilizes cultural nationalism as the thematic linchpin to bind the scholarship of his book: *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, published in 2000, a moment which seemingly marked the waning of Irish cinematic concerns over notions of ‘Irishness,’ or at least a shift away from the traditional avenues of interrogation.

‘Cultural nationalism’ arose alongside the nationalist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and gained traction as the hegemonic arbiter of Irish identity as the newly independent Irish state emerged. McLoone holds that cultural nationalism is rooted in an essentialist account of Irish identity, holding that the Irish descended from a historic nation, and were a rural, culturally Gaelic, and Catholic people.⁵³ This narrow conception of Irish identity which prevailed through the first decades of the new Irish state, was fundamentally problematic in light of the lived-reality of an ethnically and religiously pluralist society within the Republic, to say nothing of the sectarian discord occurring in the North. Catholicism’s inscription within cultural nationalism, brought with it attendant affiliations with the rural, Gaelic and Irish-speaking principles of the ideology. The links between Catholicism and these other principles of cultural nationalism were not necessarily warranted and would provide modern Irish filmmakers ample material for interrogation.

With the emergence of the Celtic Tiger in the mid-1990s came a decline in films about traditional notions of Irish identity and the Irish past, and with it concern with discourses surrounding cultural nationalism. However, the clerical figure has not been cinematically

⁵³ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 11-12.

liberated from his affiliation with the movement, as evidenced by recent depictions of the cinematic priest, such as those found in John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* (2014) which will be analysed in Chapter Four of this study. The foregrounding of the priest in the contemporary Irish context, as is the case in McDonagh's film, necessitates a continued interrogation of questions regarding Irish identity and the recessive accounts engendered by cultural nationalism and their impact on an increasingly diverse Irish population, both ethnically and religiously. As I point out in Chapter One of this thesis, the coalescing of religion with nativist sensibilities, as culturally manifested in cinematic depictions, is not exclusive to Ireland, as seen in the transition of the 'social worker' priest archetype of the late 1930s to the 'mayor' priest of the World War II era in Hollywood. However, the Catholic Church's affixation to 'cultural nationalism,' and the essentialist notion of Irishness which it begat in the post-Independence era are continually foregrounded by Irish filmmakers, specifically in their depictions of Catholic clergy.

In the modern Irish context, questions of nationalism and national identity invariably imbricate with discourses surrounding masculinity and manliness. The celibate cleric of post-Independence Ireland was, arguably the archetype of masculinity until the middle of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ The emergence and evacuation of the celibate cleric as masculine exemplar in Irish society speaks to the inherent instability of what Raewynn Connell and Ian Davis refer to as hegemonic masculinity, that being the particular manifestation of 'manliness' most 'honoured' within a particular culture.⁵⁵ Thus, this thesis will analyse the cinematic cleric in relation to the fluctuating conceptions dominant conceptions of manliness within the Irish context and its impact on clerical representations.

⁵⁴ Andrew Auge, *A Chastened Communion: Modern Irish Poetry and Catholicism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 169-170.

⁵⁵ Raewyn Connell and Ian Davis, 'The Study of Masculinities', *Qualitative Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (2014): 8.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will give an account of the cultural antecedent to the modern Irish priest of film and television: the Irish-American priest of Classic Hollywood. I will provide a close reading of two key cinematic texts from the post-Depression, pre-Cold War era of American film, part of what is commonly referred to as ‘Hollywood’s Golden Age.’ In the textual reading of *Boys Town* (Norman Taurog, 1938), I will present an account of the cinematic archetype of the ‘social worker’ priest. I argue that Spencer Tracy’s depiction of Father Edward Flanagan in *Boys Town* is the quintessential representation of the ‘social worker’ priest while articulating its typology and the characterization’s grounding in American politics, Irish immigration, and modern Catholic history.

I will also provide a close reading of *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944), from which, I contend, emerged a new cinematic clerical archetype: the ‘mayor’ priest. Bing Crosby’s portrayal of Father Charles ‘Chuck’ O’Malley provides a key image of this type of cinematic priest, the consequence of Irish-American assimilation and a wartime desire for traditional images of masculine authority.

Chapter One concludes with an evaluation of yet another ‘mayor’ priest figure, Father Lonergan (Ward Bond) in John Ford’s seminal *The Quiet Man* (1952). I would argue that Father Lonergan’s priestly characterization serves as a trans-Atlantic link between the Irish priest of Hollywood from the 1930s and 1940s with the Irish priest of the modern Irish film. The cinematic priest is now relocated back to Ireland, where he still serves as primary authority figure—as his counterpart did in urban America—within the fictive, rural community.

I would like to suggest that both the ‘social worker’ priest and the ‘mayor’ priest, along with their accompanying discourses, which include, working with boys, nationalism, masculinity, celibacy and the diminishment of the woman, provided a reservoir of images, themes, and motifs from which modern Irish filmmakers have liberally taken. Indeed, it is my contention that the priest of modern Irish film is very much a deconstruction or a ‘re-construction’ of the priest of Hollywood’s Golden Age.

The second chapter of this thesis will provide the beginning of my account of the diachronic contingency of the Irish priest in modern Irish cinema. I will provide a close textual reading of the seminal Irish documentary film, *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (Peter Lennon, 1968), particularly its focus on real-life priest, Father Michael Cleary and his—and by extension the Irish Catholic Church’s—attempts to ‘modernize’ in the wake of the ecclesial changes of Vatican II, as well as the continuing shifting of Irish society away from the Church.

Chapter Two will also explore the ecclesial and cultural horizon of Ireland during the course of the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter also contains close readings of two of the cinematic texts of Irish filmmaker Bob Quinn: *Budawanny* (1987) and *The Bishop’s Story* (1994). Quinn, part of what is often termed to as the ‘first wave,’ of Irish cinema in the 1970s, put forth these two independent films at a moment when revelations of sexual indiscretions by celibate clergy were first beginning to make headlines in Ireland⁵⁶. Both of Quinn’s films call into question clerical celibacy as well as the mythology of the West of Ireland. Irish actor, Donal McCann’s portrayal of both films’ primary clerical figure illustrates the problem of embodiment for the cinematic priest in relation to sexuality and the female. As I will demonstrate, the paradox for the cinematic priest is his embodiment

⁵⁶ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 131.

leads to the silencing of the female, while his authority and influence are contingent on his dis-embodiment.

In the tracing of the diachronic *katabasis/anabasis* of the priest in modern Irish film, Chapter Three provides a descriptor of the cinematic cleric at the nadir of his excarnate descent. The ‘abusive’ priest, who I contend is an inversion of the ‘social worker’ priest archetype, which I addressed in Chapter One, emerged during the period of economic prosperity in Ireland, referred to as the Celtic Tiger. The Celtic Tiger era, which ran from approximately the mid-1990s to 2008, coalesced with a continuing stream of abuse revelations involving Catholic clergy in Ireland.

I provide an example of the ‘proto-abusive’ priest in a close reading of the cinematic text of Cathal Black’s *Our Boys* (1981). *Our Boys*, a docudrama, depicts the physical abuse occurring at a Christian Brothers school in Dublin in the years preceding Vatican II. The film intertwines actuality footage with talking head interviews and a fictive narrative to provide one of the earliest instances of the image of the Christian Brother as ‘abusive’ cleric. I will argue that the Christian Brother would, by the end of the twentieth century, become the primary cultural signifier of clerical abuse.

Utilizing the template of the ‘abusive’ priest archetype found in *Our Boys*, *Song for a Raggy Boy* (Aisling Walsh, 2003), which is also analysed in Chapter Three, presents in the characters of Brother John (Iain Glen) and Brother Mac (Marc Warren), two distinctive depictions of the excarnate priest. In tracing the *katabasis* of the cinematic priest, what emerges is the representation of the excarnate cleric as a manifestation of a Manichean dualism, wherein the flesh is despised and eviscerated. Brother John’s characterization consists of continual depictions of him performing extreme acts of corporal punishment on the boys of the institution where he ministers. The film’s

repetitive depictions of Brother John's violent assaults on the flesh of the boys provide a jarring spectacle for viewers, which proves more impactful than the narrative's melodramatic framework. Brother John's characterization serves as signifier for the Irish Catholic Church and the sovereign theism which undergirded it throughout the twentieth century. Brother Mac's characterization as sexual predator provides one of the few cinematic representations of clerical sexual abuse while also providing an alternative illustration of the dualistic theology supporting the evisceration of the 'flesh.'

Chapter Four traces the diachronic *anabasis* of the cinematic priest in the post-Celtic Tiger era. This chapter presents close readings of two films released in 2014: Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall* and John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary*. The films present two distinctive representations of the 'incarnate' priest. Loach's film is a historical drama, loosely based on the life story of socialist agitator, James 'Jimmy' Gralton (Barry Ward) and his attempts to open a dancehall against the wishes of parish priest, Father Sheridan (Jim Norton).

Father Sheridan is very much in the tradition of the 'mayor' priest archetype; however, it is the Gralton character who takes on the role of charismatic community hero in the Bing Crosby tradition. Father Sheridan is shown throughout the narrative as transforming from excarnate to incarnate, assisted by his young curate, Father Seamus (Andrew Scott).

Calvary, in contrast to *Jimmy's Hall*, is set in contemporary rural Ireland. The film is an anomaly in contemporary Irish film in having a Catholic priest, Father James (Brendan Gleeson) as its primary protagonist. Father James manifests his incarnate characterization in the role of 'wounded healer.' Father James is representative of a collection of depictions in film and television in the post-Celtic Tiger era, wherein the cleric has become the image of benevolent authority. Father James is represented as an unstable

figure, limited in his influence and authority, but ultimately a 'good' priest. The re-emergence of the incarnate characterization of the priest in the contemporary Irish situation presents a fractured figure, one with a history of both trauma and sexual activity.

Affixed to the incarnate priest in the modern Irish film, are discourses surrounding authority, women, celibacy, and masculinity. The embodied cinematic priest of the twentieth century has an ambiguous relationship with celibacy and must be 'normalized' with either a sexual past or present. In the analysis of the characterization of Father James is the incompatibility of embodiment and authority for the priest. He is seemingly prohibited from being fully human, while also carrying influence and being in a position of power. Finally, the problem of the female follows the Irish priest, throughout this thesis, in part informed by celibacy, however as Father James in *Calvary* demonstrates, the incarnate cleric within the cinematic text seems to disallow for the presence of feminine agency in any significant manner.

Chapter One: The Hollywood Heritage of the Irish Priest: Cinematic Representations of Irish Clergy Before the 1970s

Introduction

To understand the representation of clergy in modern Irish cinema, it is essential to look to the cinematic past. However, within the canon of Irish national cinema, the paucity of indigenous Irish films before the last part of the twentieth century necessitates a focus on those Irish clerical images constructed in foreign film industries. The mainstream American or Hollywood film industry in particular, provided myriad representations of Ireland and the Irish, as Kevin Rockett says, ‘more fiction films were produced about the Irish by American filmmakers before 1915, when the first indigenous Irish fiction film was made, than in the whole hundred-year history of fiction film-making in Ireland’.⁵⁷

The trend of cinematic representations of Ireland and the Irish, constructed primarily through foreign film industries would continue throughout most of the twentieth century. Thus, as Ruth Barton points out, these depictions of the Irish and Irishness that emerged from Hollywood, as well as the British film industry, form an ‘archive of images’ that are a ‘constituent element of Irish national cinema.’ Barton goes on to say, ‘Part of the process of creating a national cinema has been predicated on wresting the powerful practice of image-making from the control of other filmmaking traditions whether hostile or otherwise.’⁵⁸ Thus, modern representations of the Irish priest are always in a dialogical relationship with those foreign-born representations from the past.

⁵⁷ Kevin Rockett, *The Irish Filmography* (Dublin: Red Mountain Media, 1996), i.

⁵⁸ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 6-7.

This study commences with depictions of clergy, in what is informally referred to as Hollywood's Golden Age, a period of both critical and economic flourishing for the film industry in the United States. Hollywood's 'Golden Age,' lasted from approximately the end of the silent era to the early 1950s, an epoch that also happened to produce an inordinate amount of Catholic and Catholic-themed films. Indeed, in 1952, at the tail end of the era, Twentieth Century-Fox president, Spyros P. Skouras wrote, in an article titled, 'Religion and the Movies,' for the Protestant publication, *Christian Herald*, 'We of the motion picture industry have received many complaints from various Protestant denominations that our pictures do not sufficiently cover Protestant subjects. It is true that the majority of purely religious pictures have been Catholic subjects, but circumstances are responsible for this rather than intention [...] there are [...] Catholic writers and producers in our industry who like to undertake subjects of this kind.'⁵⁹

Though Hollywood put forth a multiplicity of 'Irish priests,' during this time, this chapter will examine priestly representation in five films which are emblematic, not only of key typologies, but also which foreground themes, tropes and discourses that continually resurface in contemporary representations of clergy in film. This chapter is divided into two sections in relation to, what I argue, are the two primary clerical archetypes of the era: the 'social worker' priest and the 'mayor' priest. One of the primary arguments of this thesis is that the clerical figure in modern Irish cinema deconstructs and the 're-constructs' these cinematic archetypes. Thus, the first section will consist of a close reading of the cinematic text of *Boys Town* (1938), and the exemplification of the 'social worker' priest in the characterization of Father Flanagan, as portrayed by Spencer Tracy. Father Flanagan, based on a real-life figure, provides the template for the 'social worker' priest, as an 'incarnate' figure, whose cinematic 'embodiment,' manifests in his

⁵⁹ Spyros P. Skouras, 'Religion and the Movies,' *Christian Herald*, June 1952, 71.

benevolent, masculine authority. The characterization of the ‘social worker’ priest is inherently incarnate, and I will demonstrate how that embodiment emerges through Richard Kearney’s notions of hospitality and ‘touch.’ This section will also provide an analysis of the instability of hegemonic masculinity and its cultural representation will be analysed in relation to the depiction of Father Flanagan’s benevolent authority. The spatial locus of the priest is a recurring theme in this thesis and the liberty given to the ‘social worker’ priest within the spatiality of the cinematic realm will be analysed.

As Irish film scholarship is grounded in socio-historical scholarship, so too, is the depiction of the Irish priest in the Hollywood film of the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, this section will examine the relationship between the emergence of the cinematic ‘social worker’ priest, and the Roman Catholic situation in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. I will then juxtapose the cinematic characterization of Father Flanagan with that of another ‘social worker’ priest of the same era, Father Jerry (Pat O’Brien) in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938), as a means of evaluating discourses surrounding masculinity and the priesthood.

The second section of the chapter will analyse the other notable priestly type that came out of Hollywood during its Golden Era, the ‘mayor priest.’ I will interrogate the representation of perhaps the most famous of all cinematic priests, Bing Crosby’s Father Charles ‘Chuck’ O’Malley from *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944). I will examine these films in relation to its depiction of the ‘immigrant’ within the urban context, along with the ‘mayor’ priest’s position as community unifier and model of assimilation. Father O’Malley and his relationship with key women characters in *Going My Way* will be examined from the perspective of mandatory clerical celibacy as well as diminishment of the female narrative voice at the service of cinematic clerical authority.

The chapter will conclude with a close reading of John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), which I contend serves as a trans-Atlantic link between this thesis' analysis of both Hollywood's 'Golden Age,' and modern Irish-set cinema. *The Quiet Man*'s cleric, Father Lonergan (Ward Bond), is a secondary character, however his placement within the cinematic text as benevolent, community unifier holding unquestioned authority stands firmly in the tradition of the 'mayor' priest found in Hollywood films of the 1940s. The clerical character's alignment with essentialist notions of Irish-ness, including entrenchment within the rural West, speaking the Irish language, and of course, the Catholic religion, point to prominent discourses surrounding cultural nationalism interrogated in the modern Irish-set film.

It is necessary to note that these cinematic clerical representations did not come about *ex nihilo*, rather, like all media representations they were constructed in relation to a socio-historical and political situation. As film scholar, Richard Dyer points out, how particular groups 'are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life.' Dyer goes on to say that representations 'have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and rights.'⁶⁰ With that said, I contend that these clerical representations are not entirely socially determined—wherein these cinematic 'Irish priests' exclusively mirrored the social and cultural situation back unto itself—but rather, that they engaged in a dialogical relationship with society which shaped both its understanding of the Roman Catholic priest and formed many of the predominant discourses around Catholic clergy and the Church.

⁶⁰ Richard Dyer, 'Introduction,' *The Matter of Images*, ed. Dyer, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

What I would like to argue in this chapter is that representations of clergy in modern Irish cinema are inextricably linked to representations of the ‘Irish’ priest in cinema from Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age.’ Hollywood, as it has done repeatedly throughout the short history of filmmaking, has provided a template for typology, narrative tropes, and discourses surrounding the priest and Catholicism that modern Irish filmmakers have repurposed and revised for their own cinematic ends. Thus, in order to analyse contemporary representations of the priest in Irish cinema we must first examine their Hollywood predecessors and examine the ways that they both reflected and shaped images of the Irish Catholic priest, as well as corresponding discourses on Catholicism.

Section I: The ‘Social Worker’ Priest

Hollywood and the Irish Catholic: An Historical Overview

Clerical representations in Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age,’ are fundamentally intertwined with the Irish situation, as many of the prominent figures behind the scenes were of Irish heritage, notably, directors such as, Raoul Walsh, Rex Ingram, Leo McCarey, and John Ford. More importantly, regardless of who was behind the film, the Catholic situation within the narrative, was almost without exception, an Irish-American phenomenon. The Irish diaspora in urban America, was—for all intents and purposes—Catholic America, at least cinematically. This is borne out in the wave of Catholic-centric films that emerged from Hollywood from the Depression into the Cold War era. As Colleen McDannell

writes, ‘Like the Democratic political ward, the (Catholic) parish was represented in movies as an Irish American institution.’⁶¹

The films analysed in this chapter were constitutive of the cultural legitimisation of Catholicism—and by extension Irish-Americans—in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1820 and 1920, five million Irish immigrants came to the United States, the majority of whom were Roman Catholic.⁶² This mass migration coincided with an exodus of similar magnitude coming from Germany leading to an exponential growth of the American Catholic Church by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶³ Priests were imported from Ireland to address the clergy shortage in the United States in the wake of such a rapid increase of Catholics over such a brief period of time. The College of All Hallows in Dublin alone sent 1,500 priests to the United States between 1842 and the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ Thus, the Irish came to dominate the Catholic hierarchy in the United States, with the Church, along with trade unions and the Democratic party becoming the defining institutions of Irish America in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

Kevin Kenny argues that the institutional Church leadership in both the United States and Ireland led by Archbishop John Hughes in New York and Cardinal Paul Cullen in Dublin set forth with a programme emphasising the importance of weekly Mass attendance, regular confession, and an array of devotional practices which were used to enforce orthodoxy on the traditionally heterodox rural Irish and urban Irish-American in

⁶¹ Colleen McDannell, ‘Why the Movies, Why Religion?’ in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. C. McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

⁶² Kevin Kenny, ‘Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study,’ *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (2003): 135-6.

⁶³ Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (Essex: Pearson, 2000), 113.

⁶⁴ Kenny, *The American Irish*, 113.

⁶⁵ Kenny, *The American Irish*, 114.

what was to become known as the ‘devotional revolution’.⁶⁶ This movement toward consistent orthodox practice, and away from laxity and magical practices, had the resultant effect of empowering the Church hierarchy on both sides of the Atlantic. The institutional Church’s growing authority in the United States and Ireland corresponded with the movement toward a more centralised and autocratic Church in Rome during that same era, as evidenced by the outcome of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) and the promulgation of the document *Pastor Aeternus*, which put forth the doctrine of papal infallibility. The rise of Ultramontanism, that is, the movement toward a papal-centred Church, in the 19th century was a consequence of a series of events which threatened the existence of the papacy beginning with the French Revolution and culminating in the Italian *Risorgimento* which would ultimately unify Italy and bring an end to the Papal States and with it, the Pope’s secular authority.⁶⁷ Ecclesial historian, John O’Malley refers to the time between the French Revolution and the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), as the ‘long nineteenth century,’ wherein the pontiff’s loss of civil authority corresponded with the growth of his teaching authority which manifest in the increased publication of encyclicals, which were used to ‘propose, expound and elaborate theological and doctrinal positions in a manner unprecedented.’⁶⁸ As a literary form, the papal encyclical came into being in the 18th century but flourished during the papacies of Pius IX and Leo XIII in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which, as I will articulate later in this chapter, would indirectly influence Hollywood cinema in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Kenny, *The American Irish*, 113-114.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey von Arx, ‘A Post-Traumatic Church,’ *America*, 22 June 2015, 22-23.

⁶⁸ John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 55.

⁶⁹ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 56.

Censorship and the Catholic-themed Film

Throughout the middle years of the twentieth century a notable selection of films that foregrounded Catholic subjects and themes came out of mainstream Hollywood. Anthony Burke Smith refers to the numerous films with Catholic subject matters and themes released by Hollywood during the late 1930s and early 1940s as marking the ‘Catholic moment in American cinema and popular imagination’.⁷⁰ The impetus toward an increase in explicitly Catholic films in Hollywood beginning in the 1930s was not entirely accidental; it was the result of a few factors: one of which was the very visible and vocal presence of the Irish-American Catholic community in the debate over film censorship. Ruth Barton points out that the public crusade against the Irish-Catholic stereotypes utilised in the film, *The Callahans and The Murphys* (George W. Hill, 1927) by Catholic and Irish-American interest groups signalled to Hollywood the weight of both Irish and Catholic influence, while simultaneously serving to synonymize the two.⁷¹

Due in part to the influence of the predominantly Irish, Roman Catholic hierarchy in the United States, the film industry introduced the Motion Picture Production Code at the beginning of the 1930s. However, it was not until 1934 and the installation of the Catholic run Legion of Decency—which put forth a list of films they deemed objectionable, while demanding their members sign a pledge and boycott them—that Hollywood began to take censorship seriously. The Legion of Decency’s influence proved to be substantial, as Kevin Rockett points out, ‘within ten weeks of the pledge being launched it was claimed that as many as eleven million people had signed it’.⁷²

⁷⁰ Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 45.

⁷¹ Ruth Barton, ‘Introduction,’ *Screening Irish-America: Representing Irish-America in Film and Television*, ed. R. Barton (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 4-5.

⁷² Kevin Rockett, ‘The Irish Migrant and Film’ in *Screening Irish-America: Representing Irish-America in Film and Television*, ed. R. Barton (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 30.

Thus, the Legion of Decency forced the hand of the film industry, who in turn established the Production Code Administration (PCA), with Joseph Breen—approved by the Catholic hierarchy—selected as its leader.⁷³ Breen was to have complete autonomy over the censorship of all films distributed in Hollywood.⁷⁴ An Irish-American Catholic, Breen was particularly fond of films that foregrounded explicitly Catholic themes and was personally partial to films that featured ‘two-fisted’ priests, clerics of Irish heritage who were characterized as unafraid of resorting to violence for the sake of justice and the common good.⁷⁵

Paula M. Kane says of the Production Code, that it ‘was widely hailed by its supporters as protecting national morality and blasted by its critics, many of whom were filmmakers, as an attempt to straitjacket aesthetic freedom’⁷⁶. The Production Code, itself, was authored by two Catholics: Martin Quigley, a lay person, and Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest. As such, Catholic notions of morality and decency inevitably became fundamental to how Hollywood went about creating cinematic narratives during the three plus decades that the Code was enforced.⁷⁷ Indeed, the Production Code articulated that religion and its representatives, should not be satirized, or denigrated, stating: ‘Ministers of religion [...] should not be used in comedy, as villains, or as unpleasant persons’⁷⁸

The Influence of Catholic Social Teaching

⁷³ Rockett, ‘The Irish Migrant and Film,’ 31.

⁷⁴ Rockett, ‘The Irish Migrant and Film,’ 31.

⁷⁵ James T. Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie and the Soul of the Port of New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), ix-x.

⁷⁶ Paula M. Kane, ‘Jews and Catholics Converge’ in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91.

⁷⁷ Kane, ‘Jews and Catholics Converge,’ 91-92.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 308.

Other sociological phenomenon were also at play in the increase of Catholic-themed films emerging from Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. As Anthony Burke Smith points out, the influx of Catholic films at this time, particularly those focusing on priests, cannot be solely attributed to the tastes of Breen and those few others who made up the censoring institutions.⁷⁹ In spite of, or perhaps because of Ultramontanism, changes were occurring within the Catholic Church in the West, the effects of which were felt most especially in the cinematic content emerging from Hollywood. Though many identify Vatican II as the impetus for the transition from a less insular more socially oriented Catholic Church, it was, in fact, the culmination of a series of events that had been occurring both in Rome and locally for nearly a century. Indeed, as the Pope and the Vatican lost all but a semblance of secular authority, there in turn came a focus on social and economic inequality in a rapidly modernising Western world.

The stream of Catholic-themed films of this time were an indirect consequence of the shift taking place within the Church in response to the economic and political turmoil of the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. A movement emerged from a desire for social reform from within the Catholic community by both the clergy and the laity that was grounded in the recent development of Catholic Social Teaching. What was at the heart of this movement was the recognition that the Christian tenet of ‘love thy neighbour’ had to broaden its geographical conception of neighbour, and with that move beyond traditional notions of ‘Christian Charity’ and into the realm of social justice.

Catholic Social Theory’s genesis on the global level can be traced to the end of the 19th century and Pope Leo XIII’s papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* or ‘Rights and Duties

⁷⁹ Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics*, 11-12.

of Capital Labour' (1891). This seminal document addressed, amongst other issues: the inequities and abuses of the worker in the industrial age; endorsed the notion of a just wage; the right to unionise; and introduced a Catholic understanding of the 'common good' within the state. Around the same time, Catholic leaders throughout Europe and North America were likewise putting forth a similar message of social concern. James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore from 1877 to 1921, cautioned that the Church was headed for real danger if it did not become a 'Church of the people.'⁸⁰ Similarly, the Archbishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, John Ireland said of the poor and working class of his diocese: 'Until their material condition is improved, it is futile to speak to them of supernatural life and duties.'⁸¹ Thus, *Rerum Novarum* and the subsequent documents of the early twentieth century Catholic Church which arose in its wake, put forth the first germ of what would become one of the primary operating principles of the modern Catholic Church: the 'preferential option for the poor.'⁸²

The prioritization of social justice by the institutional Church at the dawn of the twentieth century would allow for new modes of understanding and living out the Catholic faith, taking it outside of the dusty, dark, gothic churches, moral legalism, superstitious piety, clericalism and out into the city streets. This new mode way of understanding what it meant to be Catholic, first and foremost, allowed for the first hints of a more egalitarian conception of church in the Catholic tradition.

Regeneration and the Social Problem Film

⁸⁰ Arthur S. Meyers, 'Social Justice Warrior: The Legacy of John A. Ryan,' *Commonweal*, 6 July 2018, 17.

⁸¹ Meyers, 'Social Justice Warrior,' 18.

⁸² The actual term is not explicitly articulated in ecclesial documents until Father Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus used it in a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America in 1968. The term was then utilised by the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CLEAM) in Medellin, Colombia that same year. The term was first used by a pontiff in the 1991 document, *Centesimus Annus* by John Paul II, in a document to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

Preceding the Catholic cleric as preeminent signifier of cinematic social reform was the upper-class Anglo-Protestant woman, who held sway as the model of Christian charity and social concern in the early decades of American film. The Protestant woman as social reformer trope mirrored the urban situation of the early twentieth century—wherein young, unmarried woman of means worked and lived in settlement houses in impoverished urban areas. As Thomas J. Ferrero says, ‘In 1915 the energy of redemption in the American city was still associated almost exclusively with the activism of chaste white womanhood.’⁸³ Though there was no official production code to police cinematic content during most of the silent era, there were informal censorial campaigns directly linked to the reform movements of the settlement house communities.⁸⁴ In order to appease social reformers, as well as legitimize the still embryonic motion picture industry, studios began producing films with explicit religious and social reform content. Though, well-meaning in their aim, these religious and reform films frequently utilised ethnic and religious stereotypes that ran counter to the very reform they aspired toward.⁸⁵

The most prominent of these cinematic female reformers was the character of Marie, as portrayed by Anna Q. Nilsson, in *Regeneration* (Raoul Walsh, 1915). The film, based upon the memoir *My Mamie Rose: The Story of My Regeneration* by Owen Kildare, tells the story of young Owen’s (James Marcus) life in one of New York’s many tenements. Orphaned at age ten, Owen is forced to live on the streets, where he becomes involved in organized crime and becomes head of the local gang. The adult Owen’s (Rockcliffe Fellowes) world changes upon meeting Marie, a schoolteacher who works at the local settlement house. Under Marie’s tutelage the illiterate Owen learns to read, write, and

⁸³ Thomas J. Ferrero, ‘Boys to Men,’ *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 64.

⁸⁴ Judith Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. by Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40-41.

⁸⁵ Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ 43.

develops a moral compass. Forced to choose between his life on the streets and respectability, Owen chooses for the good, but pays the price when Marie winds up being shot and killed by Owen's former underworld associate, Skinny (William Sheer).

Regeneration is one of the earliest examples of the 'social problem' film, and as a proto-gangster film, it is also one of the first to codify notions of Irishness with a type of masculinity rooted in urban violence and crime. Henceforth, Irish Americans would come to be understood as the 'lords of criminality' throughout the silent and into the sound era of filmmaking in Hollywood.⁸⁶ The New York tenements presented in *Regeneration* are a hyper-masculine, violent, world. The prevailing discourses of the day with regards to the urban poor necessitate that Owen's salvation come from outside the realm of the masculine, violent, ethnic, Catholic world of the tenement space and must come from the sphere of the feminine, Anglo-Protestant.

Judith Weisenfeld argues that although Owen's moral redemption occurred as a result of his adaptation to the behavioural standards of the Anglo-Protestant elite, the film went against the prevailing discourses on the rehabilitation of the poor, with a more tolerant position regarding ethnic Catholicism.⁸⁷ Indeed, there would have been concern in the opening decades of the twentieth century with questions concerning the fundamental 'un-Americanness' of Roman Catholicism, in relation to both its adherents' perceived allegiance to the pontiff as well as their non-Anglo ethnicity.⁸⁸

The film's director, Raoul Walsh, born of an Irish immigrant father in New York, had a privileged perspective on the ethnic Catholic poor in the urban United States, that manifests in, what Weidenfeld terms, his 'distinctly Catholic understanding of the origins

⁸⁶ McDannell, 'Why the Movies, Why Religion,' 15.

⁸⁷ Weisenfeld, 'The Silent Social Problem Film,' 34-35

⁸⁸ Weisenfeld, 'The Silent Social Problem Film,' 39.

of poverty.’⁸⁹ This ‘Catholic’ notion of poverty’s causality was different from that of the Anglo-Protestant understanding, and mirrors the overarching theological differences between the religious traditions. The Catholic position identifies poverty as the consequence of failures by society and the state, while generally speaking, the Protestant stance held that poverty’s origins emerged out of the moral failings of the individual.⁹⁰ These two positions are directly in alignment with both traditions’ soteriology, that is, their teachings on salvation, with the Catholic understanding being rooted in communality, while the Protestant position holding it as a negotiation between God and the individual.

There is little explicit religious content in *Regeneration* outside of one sequence toward the end of the film. Weisenfeld argues that, though the film was implicitly Catholic in terms of its perspective on the urban poor, it still championed the hegemonic American Protestant position of the time. In the one explicit sequence of religious imagery in the film, which takes place at the neighbourhood Catholic church, Owen writes a letter against the front door of the church telling Skinny he will no longer help him in his criminal endeavours. Owen then enters the church and seeks counsel from the parish priest. Weisenfeld argues that this sequence serves as a critique of the ineffectuality of the institutional Church in ministering to the urban poor of the time. She reads Owen’s writing the letter against the church door as a direct allusion to the popular legend of Luther’s nailing of his 95 Theses.⁹¹ She goes on to say that the destitute mother and child on the steps of the church gestures toward the Catholic iconography of

⁸⁹ Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ 43.

⁹⁰ Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ 43.

⁹¹ Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ 49-50.

Madonna and child and describes the priest as ‘friendly, but useless’ and of little help to Owen in his time of crisis.⁹²

I agree with Weisenfeld’s take on the film’s critique of the ineffectuality of the American Catholic Church in dealing with social problems and would build on it to argue that it demonstrates the fundamental containment of the religion by its locating of the priest within the interior of the physical space of the church. To be sure, the film does not ‘demonize’ the Church by foregrounding its ‘unnaturalness’ and ‘mystery’ as was common in Anglo-Protestant cultural representations in the United States and Europe going back to the time of the Reformation. But instead represents the physical space of the church as a place of safety and moral goodness, while still demonstrating its inability to address the problems at stake outside of the physical space of the church.

With that said, I would contend that another reading of the shot of the mother and child on the exterior steps of the church building could be made. Weisenfeld says of the scene, ‘Walsh lingers on the urban Madonna and child briefly in a medium-close shot. Even the holy family itself has been exiled from the church, this image seems to say.’ However, the image is a duplicate of Roberto Feruzzi’s *Madonna Della Strada* (1897), or ‘Madonna of the Streets,’ which was a popular devotional picture in the first half of the twentieth century. That the film presents such a recognizable image within popular Catholic discourse of the time, would suggest that the image could be interpreted as the Church’s concern for the urban poor, rather than an indication of callous neglect. Further, the image of the Madonna Della Strada, which is also translated as ‘Our Lady of the Way,’ could be read as a directive to Owen, showing him ‘the way,’ that is, toward the interior of the church, and away from his previous life of criminality.

⁹² Weisenfeld, ‘The Silent Social Problem Film,’ 51.

Spatiality is fundamental to the film's moral signification. Thus, the space of the tenements; the gang's underground hangout; and the exterior shots of the urban milieu, are signified as immoral, violent, and unsafe. Conversely, the settlement house is designated as an ethically righteous and safe space, wherein the indigent subject can 'regenerate' and flourish. I would suggest that through a sequence of shots, the film formally links the morally upstanding space of the settlement house with that of the neighbourhood Catholic church. This 'conjoining' of space occurs with a long shot of Owen going down the outside steps of the settlement house. followed by an immediate cut to another long shot of Owen going up the outside steps of the church.

Owen is then shown walking in the exterior of the church with the priest, who has his hand on Owen's back, comforting him (Fig. 1.1). The scene between Owen and the priest is intercut with scenes of Marie being attacked by Skinny in the gang's hideout. The intercutting of the two scenes allows for a cinematic juxtaposition of space, as we move from the violent world of the gang's hideout to the supportive and safe realm of the church interior. The priest tells Owen 'Go back my boy and keep up the good work. We are proud of you.' At that moment, one of Owen's criminal colleagues runs into the church and tells Owen about Marie's attack. Owen and his friend flee the church to go after Skinny, while the priest stands and looks on seemingly helpless and unable to leave the church space. Weisenfeld argues that the scene's representation of the priest, contained within the church space and encouraging Owen to return to the settlement house, signifies the Catholic church's impotence, while simultaneously affirming of the Anglo-Protestant stance.⁹³ This sequence is of particular interest to this thesis because of spatial confinement of the cleric; he is seemingly disallowed from leaving the church

⁹³ Weisenfeld. 'The Silent Social Problem Film,' 51.

space, an area his immediate cinematic successors, the ‘social worker’ and the ‘mayor’ priests are almost never situated within.



Fig. 1.1 Regeneration. The Catholic Priest (uncredited) comforts Owen (Rockcliffe Fellowes) within the church space.

Boys Town

Norman Taurog’s *Boys Town*, released in September of 1938 by M-G-M, was a critical and commercial success, with five Academy Award nominations and two wins, including Best Actor for Spencer Tracy. John Meehan and Dore Schary wrote the film’s screenplay, from a story by Schary and Eleanore Griffin, for which the film won its other Academy Award. The film ranked third at the United State box office for the year 1938.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ It ranked third at the box office for the year 1938 according to *Box Office Digest*, 1939 March, 18.

The film received acclaim from critics for a ‘depth and reality seldom found in films.’⁹⁵ While *Film Daily* called it ‘compelling in its human qualities.’⁹⁶ Tracy was praised for what was termed a ‘deeply sincere piece of acting.’⁹⁷ In her review of the film in the *Observer*, C.A. LeJeune said that *Boys Town* ‘is one of the most valuable films the industry has produced.’ She goes on to say of Tracy’s performance, ‘it takes a great actor to play a clergyman and wear clerical dress throughout, but Mr. Tracy never fumbles. His acting is a patient miracle of understatement; first a man, then a priest, only when you come to remember it, an actor.’⁹⁸

The film’s reception in the real-life Father Flanagan’s native Ireland, at the time of its release in early 1939, was overwhelmingly positive. *Boys Town*’s lack of explicit Catholicity in terms of visual representation allowed the film an appeal that transcended religious lines, as evidenced in the historically Protestant, *Irish Times*’ review, which stated that it ‘is well ahead of anything M-G-M has offered the cinema for many a day.’⁹⁹

Boys Town is the story of Father Edward Flanagan and the eponymous institution he founded just outside of Omaha, Nebraska in 1917. The film opens on a scene of Flanagan located within the prison cell of convict, Dan Farrow (Leslie Fenton), ministering to him, as he awaits execution. Farrow is shown lashing out at a group of reporters and prison authorities who have gathered in the cell, anticipating the execution. Farrow tells them how state institutions failed him as an orphaned boy and claims that if someone had intervened when he was young, his life might have turned out differently. The prisoner’s

⁹⁵ ‘Tracy and Rooney at Metro: “Boys Town:” High Standard of Acting,’ *Times of India*, 5 November 1938.

⁹⁶ ‘Boys Town,’ *Film Daily* 6 September 1938, 11.

⁹⁷ ‘Tracy and Rooney at Metro: “Boys Town:” High Standard of Acting,’ *Times of India*, 5 November 1938.

⁹⁸ C.A. LeJeune, ‘Father Flanagan’s Miracle,’ *Observer* 25 September 1938, 12.

⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, March 13, 1939.

tirade inspires Flanagan to open a home for underprivileged boys so as to provide the support that Farrow lacked in his childhood.

Flanagan, who has been operating a resource centre for homeless men in Omaha, asks his bishop (Minor Watson) for permission to open a home for homeless boys. After receiving the cleric's blessing, he then appeals to small business owner, Dave Morris (Henry Hull), for financial assistance to rent out a residential home. When Flanagan's experiment proves successful, he meets with newspaper magnate, John Hargraves (Jonathan Hale) to seek publicity to enable the development of a larger institution, which he describes as a 'town for boys, governed by boys.' Hargraves is initially opposed to the idea, arguing that it is 'a tacit criticism of things as they are,' but Flanagan persuades him to publicly support the development of Boys Town. Flanagan receives financial backing for the building of the institution thanks to Hargraves' positive media campaign, and opens Boys Town, a residential and educational institution, which is distinguished from similar institutions, in that the boys primarily govern themselves.

As Boys Town begins to thrive, Flanagan agrees to take in 'juvenile delinquent,' Whitey Marsh (Mickey Rooney), at the behest of his older brother, Joe (Edward Norris), who is serving a life sentence in the state penitentiary. Joe, an underworld criminal, wants to save his brother from the same fate. Whitey reluctantly enters the all-boy community, though he continually refuses to conform to its standards. After multiple infractions of the rules, Whitey runs away.

Meanwhile, Joe has escaped from prison and sets about robbing a bank in Omaha, killing a guard in the process. While attempting a getaway, Joe's gang accidentally shoots Whitey, wounding the boy. Hargraves and the local press get word of the story of the robbery and think Whitey is an accomplice. Hargraves telephones Father Flanagan to

inform him that his newspapers are set to run a headline denouncing Boys Town, while the priest asks for him to wait as he believes that Whitey is innocent. Father Flanagan leads an ad hoc militia of boys from the community in an attempt to track down Whitey. Father Flanagan and the boys find Whitey with Joe and his gang, and a brawl ensues. The skirmish culminates with Father Flanagan punching out Joe. Whitey agrees to turn Joe and his gang in and is ultimately elected mayor of Boys Town.

Father Flanagan and the 'Social Worker' Priest

The cinematic characterization of Father Flanagan was representative of a trend that had begun in the mid-1930s, wherein the Catholic cleric became the primary figure of moral authority within the ethnic, urban, cinematic space. Burke Smith argues that the placement of the priest within the cinematic text was done in part to continue making urban gangster films in post-Production Code Hollywood, while still staying 'within the censorship framework established by the PCA, which insisted that crime be defeated by the forces of proper social authority.'¹⁰⁰ Films such as *Angels with Dirty Faces* and *San Francisco* (Van Dyke, 1936) bear out Burke Smith's claim, in that in both films, the clerical figure serves as ethical foil to the film's criminal male lead. Both films' priestly figures, Father Jerry Connolly (Pat O'Brien) and Father Tim Mullin (Spencer Tracy, anticipating his performance two years later as Father Flanagan) do not, as Burke Smith says, so much 'obviate' their criminal counterparts, portrayed by James Cagney and Clark Gable respectively, as 'culturally echo [them] in a more constructive communitarian direction.'¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics*, 46.

However, the cinematic priest of the 1930s was more than just a means of pacifying the censorship organization in order to sustain the production of the gangster film, especially in light of the fact that, by the time these films were released, the genre was in decline. The clerical figures featured in films, such as *San Francisco* and *Angels with Dirty Faces*, were also born out of the social reform movement of the Depression era, mirroring real-life clerical figures such as Father Charles Coughlin, the ‘Radio priest’ in Detroit, who publicly critiqued the inequalities inherent to a capitalist economy from his wireless pulpit. As well as Bishop Bernard Sheil in Chicago, and Father Charles Owen Rice in Pittsburgh, both of whom were deeply invested in the labour movements of their respective urban milieus. Thus, the clerical characterizations of this time would be better understood as ‘social worker’ than as sacerdotal, in that these cinematic priests did not overtly engage in the cultic activities typically regarded as ‘priestly,’ i.e., the sacramental and liturgical practices. Instead, they were men who moved outside the confines of the physical space of the church and out into the world working to incite change.¹⁰²

The ‘social worker’ priest is a cinematic type which, in part, served to exemplify the dialogical relationship between culture and society. The cinematic clerical figure manifests the shifting ecclesiology of the Catholic Church in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as the cultural assimilation and acceptance of ethnic Catholicism by mainstream Anglo-Protestant culture in the United States. The stability of the characterization of the cinematic priest in Hollywood can be seen in the similitude between the ‘social worker’ priest as champion of ‘at risk’ youth in the form of Spencer Tracy’s Father Flanagan in *Boys Town*, and Karl Malden’s Father Barry in Elia Kazan’s, *On the Waterfront* (1954), who squares off against union corruption and organised crime.

¹⁰² Anthony Burke Smith, ‘America’s Favorite Priest’ in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 118-119.

Though there are fifteen plus years separating the two clerical representations, the ‘social worker’ priest is, of himself as a character, unchanging. A benevolent, solitary figure defending the exploitation of the urban disenfranchised male.

The ‘social worker’ priest anticipated the changes within the Catholic Church in the West, which would reach their fulfilment during Vatican II. The Irish ‘social worker’ priest represented a new ‘de-ethnicised’ American Catholicism. This building of a ‘National Catholicism’ in the United States, foregrounded the ‘ordinariness’ of the clergy and presented an understanding of the priest as the ‘common man,’ moving away from the long-held notions of clerics as being elevated ‘above’ and ‘outside’ of the *civitas*. This push toward an understanding of a populist, democratic Church created a cultural climate that was conducive to the making of films about, and for, what Burke Smith terms a new type of ‘American Catholicism,’ which he describes as ‘a symbol of modern American cultural vitality.’¹⁰³

With that said, part of the ‘social worker’ priest’s appeal to audiences was in his assuaging of middle- and upper-class America’s guilt regarding the devastation wreaked by the Depression, in his care and work with the urban poor. Joseph Curran says of the Irish cleric, ‘by defending the downtrodden and the outcast, while at the same time upholding the law and basic social values, the Irish priest both reflected and confirmed the public perceptions of the Irish as mediators between old-stock Americans and ethnic minorities.’¹⁰⁴

As stated previously, the ‘social worker’ priest characters in the gangster films of the mid-to-late 1930s were supporting characters to the criminal male lead. Other films featuring a ‘social worker’ priest included: *Over the Wall* (Frank McDonald, 1938) with

¹⁰³ Burke Smith, ‘America’s Favorite Priest,’ 122.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 52.

John Litel portraying prison chaplain, Father Connor who helps to regenerate convict, Jerry Davis (Dick Foran). Litel would play a similar ‘social worker’ priest in *Castle on the Hudson* (Anatole Litvak, 1940); as would Howard Hickman and William Gargan in *We Who are About to Die* (Christy Cabanne, 1937) and *You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1937) respectively; Paul Kelly portrayed Father Jerry Donovan, a former juvenile offender who serves as moral guide to his adult friends in *The Devil’s Party* (Ray McCarey, 1938).

Boys Town was the first film to centre its narrative entirely around the ‘social worker’ priest character. The life of ‘social worker’ priest, Edward J. Flanagan then, proved to be an ideal vehicle for such an endeavour. Flanagan was born in Ballymoe, County Galway in 1886, one of eleven children. He grew up in Roscommon and studied at Summerhill College in Sligo¹⁰⁵ He emigrated to the United States with his family in 1904 and was ordained a priest in the diocese of Omaha in 1912.¹⁰⁶ His initial ministry was working with Irish immigrant communities in O’Neill, Nebraska—the self-proclaimed, ‘Irish Capital of Nebraska’—before moving on to Omaha, where he set up a shelter for homeless men.

Flanagan’s encounters with the numerous homeless children on Omaha’s streets instilled in him the belief of the correlation between juvenile indigency and adult criminality. Thus, he went about the process of opening a residential educational complex for homeless boys.¹⁰⁷ As Boys Town alumni and Roman Catholic priest, Clifford J. Stevens says, ‘Father Flanagan’s vision of his work found full expression in Boys Town,

¹⁰⁵ ‘Sligo Book on Boys Town Founder,’ *Sligo Champion*, 5 July 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Dáire Keogh, ‘There’s No Such Thing as a Bad Boy, Father Flanagan’s Visit to Ireland, 1946,’ *History Ireland* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 29.

¹⁰⁷ Keogh, ‘There’s No Such Thing as a Bad Boy,’ 29.

in the concept of the boy not as a ward of an institution or the inmate of a home, but as a citizen, still in a state of formation, but already possessing dignity and rights.’¹⁰⁸

The ‘Social Worker’ Priest and the Instability of Hegemonic Masculinity

The ‘social worker’ priest was also representative of a shift in prevailing notions of masculine heroism, moving away from the emphasis on anti-social violence and erotic romance that had marked much of the early years of the Depression. Raewyn Connell and Ian Davis define hegemonic masculinity as

the pattern of masculinity which is most honoured, which occupies the position of centrality in a structure of gender relations, and whose privileged position helps to stabilize the gender order as a whole [...] hegemonic masculinity is contrasted not only with femininity, but also with subordinated or marginalized masculinities that exist in the same society ¹⁰⁹

As the United States and the West moved out of economic crisis and closer to global warfare, it could be argued that Hollywood shaped the cultural need for a new prevailing image of masculinity in the figure of the beneficent, democratic authority grounded in Christian morality. Hollywood moved away from the gangster film and its depiction of the violent, urban, ethnic, antihero, as well as the sensitive, romantic male lead of the female melodrama. Both figures were prevalent in films during the first part of the 1930s but as the decade concluded they were cast aside in favour of benevolent, solitary authority figures. overseeing primarily homosocial communities, be they military squadrons, outpost towns in the American West, or urban Catholic ethnic communities.

Cinematically, the Depression brought forth social criticism through the anti-establishment figure, most notably, the gangster, as portrayed by James Cagney and

¹⁰⁸ Clifford J. Stevens, ‘Father Edward Flanagan and the Founding of Boys Town: Omaha, Nebraska (1917-1925),’ *American Catholic Studies* 121, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 96.

¹⁰⁹ Raewyn Connell and Ian Davis, ‘The Study of Masculinities,’ *Qualitative Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (2014): 8.

Edward G. Robinson. Burke Smith contends that the cinematic priest that emerged in the mid-1930s, originally served a complementary role to the gangster, and did not so much supplant the underworld character, as offer a more constructive critique of social injustice. Burke Smith says of the 'social worker' priest, 'If the gangster represented social destruction, the Catholic priest signified social affirmation. But in the 1930s, that affirmative vision was tied explicitly to social reform of the existing order'.¹¹⁰

Similarly, the romantic fantasies which allowed the American audience to escape their troubles via romantic period pieces, wherein the young, quasi-feminine male lead, was seduced by the worldly female, best exemplified by Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor in *Camille* (George Cukor, 1936), was now eclipsed by the unattached, masculine authority figure, be it a military hero, the sheriff, or the priest, all of whom were, seemingly without need for feminine companionship.

Due to the preponderance of films during the late 1930s and into the War years that had their locus in homosocial landscapes and the erasure of the female, there came with it an allowance for the unquestioning depiction of the celibate priest. The iconography that surrounds the premiere leaders during the Second World War is perhaps unparalleled to any other time in history, that the names of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Mussolini and of course, Hitler are still entrenched in the cultural psyche well over a half century later, speaks to the significance given to leadership and the cult of personality surrounding it. Connell says that hegemonic masculinity is 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'.¹¹¹ Singular male authority figures representative of their nation's identity and

¹¹⁰ Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics*, 46.

¹¹¹ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1995), 77.

values, moved to the forefront of political discourse in a world mired in social instability. The ‘social worker’ priest and other similar masculine authority figures matched and met that societal need, as they put to the fore the interest of the common good, while suppressing their personal needs.

The instability of hegemonic masculinity can be seen in juxtaposing *Boys Town* and *Angels with Dirty Faces*, both released in 1938 and both featuring ‘social worker’ priests. *Angels with Dirty Faces* tells the story of the complex relationship between Father Jerry Connolly and his childhood friend and gangster, Rocky Sullivan (James Cagney) as they fight to win the favour of a group of neighbourhood boys (portrayed by the ‘Dead End’ Kids). The film, like *Boys Town* has a pivotal execution scene, though this one occurs at its conclusion, where Father Jerry convinces Rocky to pretend to ‘turn yellow’ so as to deromanticize the criminal life for the neighbourhood boys who idolize him. The film is ostensibly a gangster film, which for the majority of the decade, had been the most overt and explicit cinematic depiction of ‘maleness,’ and that comes to the fore in this film as Cagney’s Rocky is clearly understood to be the dominant masculine image.

Angels with Dirty Faces and *Boys Town* were both released at the tail end of the gangster era, with the former seeming to fondly look back at the gangster films of yore. *Boys Town*, by contrast—with its first-act execution of the gangster—very much anticipates a new ideal in cinematic masculinity. Indeed, Frederik Byrne Kohlert argues that *Angels with Dirty Faces* was a transitional film for its studio, Warner Brothers—a name synonymous with the gangster film—as it moved away from the underworld genre and toward the social problem film.¹¹²

¹¹² Frederik Byrne Kohlert, ‘In the Ghetto: Sociology, the Cagney Gangster, and the “Dead End” Kids in *Angels with Dirty Faces*,’ *Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 4 (2014): 869.

Both films' clerical figures: Father Flanagan and Father Connolly can be categorized as 'social worker' priests in that they both minister to ethnic, urban American communities. Their ministry is focused on adolescent boys in the hopes of diverting them from the path of criminality. Neither cleric is depicted performing 'traditional' priestly duties—i.e., cultic practices. However, what distinguishes the two clerics is in their 'maleness,' with Father Flanagan clearly representative of the hegemonic masculinity, where Father Jerry's is a subsidiary one. Father Flanagan as the image of the prevailing masculine ideal, manifests not only in his benevolent authority but also by his judicious recourse to violence, as in his first encounter with Whitey where he physically manhandles him in order to get him to Boys Town. Similarly at the end of the film he once more prudently resorts to violence once again as he punches Joe as he tries to escape. It speaks to the shifting of hegemony in masculine archetypes that the film concludes with Father Flanagan punching out Joe in his hideout, thus conquering the gangster in his own space and on his own violent terms. Indeed, the depiction of Father Flanagan's circumspect approach to violence is also far removed from the hot-headed criminals that Hollywood had been putting forth as the Irish masculine archetype since the time of *Regeneration*. Indeed, Father Flanagan's placid demeanour is consistent with the WASP ideal of virtuous self-restraint.

By contrast there is an ambiguity to the masculinity of Father Jerry, as portrayed by Pat O'Brien, whom Barton notes was the 'personification' of the cinematic Irish priest in Hollywood, with his clerical characterizations being 'neither threateningly educated nor given to referencing extra-territorial authority, namely Rome'.¹¹³ O'Brien, was at one time known as 'America's Favourite Irishman'.¹¹⁴ At the time of *Angels* release, he was,

¹¹³ Barton, 'Introduction,' 5.

¹¹⁴ Les and Barbara Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 62.

along with Cagney and Tracy, the face of Irish-America onscreen. O'Brien's portrayal of Father Jerry was in a sense, a microcosm of his entire career, in that he frequently played opposite Cagney and was often cast as a priest.¹¹⁵

Thomas J. Ferrero describes Father Jerry as, a 'particular kind of softie, with a warm and sentimental domestic heart'.¹¹⁶ Ferrero argues that though he is tall—noticeably taller than Rocky—Father Jerry's masculinity is, in fact, undermined by his physical presence: as he is seemingly shapeless in his clerical soutane.¹¹⁷ What cements the feminization for Ferrero, is in Father Jerry's disclosure that it was his mother's wish that he become a priest. As Ferrero says:

In the popular culture of the day, it is mothers who are reputed to ask their sons to serve God as directly as possible, sacrificing their sexuality, their social influence, and their reputations as "real men" to the increasingly marginal enterprise of the holy priesthood.¹¹⁸

Ferrero goes on to say that Father Jerry's narrative alignment with the sporting world—he was a college football star and is the coach of the boys' basketball team—as well as his last act stand to expose the organised crime network of which Rocky is a part, disclose that the priest cannot be entirely reduced to the feminine, as he says, 'underneath his priestly frock, Jerry is tougher than the citified boy scout (nay, den mother) he appears to be.'¹¹⁹ Still, the ambiguity of Father Jerry's maleness cannot help but be diffused in the robust, violent kinetic energy of Cagney's Rocky. The juxtaposition of the two men's energy and physicality work well cinematically, while simultaneously always allowing

¹¹⁵ Rockett, 'The Irish Migrant and Film,' 30.

¹¹⁶ Thomas J. Ferrero, 'Boys to Men,' *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. C. McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 70.

¹¹⁷ Ferrero, 'Boys to Men,' 70.

¹¹⁸ Ferrero, 'Boys to Men,' 70-71.

¹¹⁹ Ferrero, 'Boys to Men,' 74.

Cagney to dominate the scene. O'Brien's large, 'fleshy' frame and gentle, phlegmatic demeanour complement Cagney's small build and fiery disposition.

That *Angels with Dirty Faces*, produced by Warner Brothers, the major studio synonymous with the underworld genre, and starring James Cagney, the 'quintessential' gangster, attempts to conserve the violent antihero as the prevailing image of masculinity is hardly surprising. With that said, only two years later Warner Brothers would reteam Cagney and O'Brien (they would co-star nine times in total) in *The Fighting 69th* (William Keighley, 1940) with O'Brien, once again portraying a priest, this time, real-life soldier and military chaplain, Father Francis Duffy. Cagney, on the other hand, now portrays soldier Jerry Plunkett, who is 'reformed' by the priest. Warner Brothers and Cagney's shift once again speaks to the changing cultural tide and a movement away from the hegemonic masculinity of the violent antihero and toward the benevolent institutional authority figure.

Spencer Tracy

Fundamental to the incarnate characterization of Father Flanagan is his portrayal by Spencer Tracy. The Milwaukee born Tracy languished for the first part of the 1930s in relative anonymity at Fox Studios before moving to M-G-M in 1935 at the invitation of production chief Irving Thalberg.¹²⁰ By the time of *Boys Town*'s release he was already an Academy Award winner, thanks to his turn as a Portuguese fisherman in M-G-M's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's novel, *Captains Courageous* (Victor Fleming, 1937), and became firmly established as one of M-G-M's top male stars. Eddie Mannix—himself of Irish heritage—M-G-M's vice-president and general manager, is credited with helping guide Tracy's career. It was Mannix who was responsible for casting Tracy as the

¹²⁰ James Curtis, *Spencer Tracy, a Biography* (London: Arrow, 2011), 258.

priest, Father Tim Mullin in *San Francisco* opposite Clark Gable and Jeanette MacDonald in a role that would set the tone for the rest of his career. Tracy's turn as Father Tim, an 'earthy' priest, who tosses off phrases like 'mugg' and 'sucker,' which according to reviews of the time. was language usually associated with 'men of lesser spiritual quality,' received much critical acclaim.¹²¹ Tracy wound up with an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor for his seventeen minutes of screen time in the Van Dyke film and it cemented his status at M-G-M.¹²²

By the time of *Boys Town*'s release, his star persona as an 'unpretentious "regular guy," who, while in no way humourless, took a fundamentally serious view of life had been established. Thus, his portrayal of yet another urban Irish-American priest in *Boys Town*, and this time in the leading role, would only serve to cement it.¹²³ Indeed, Tracy would spend the rest of his career portraying benevolent, no-nonsense, 'average' authority figures.

While he was living, Tracy's offscreen life was presented to the public as one of quiet stability, with little known about his private life outside of his affiliation with a group who dubbed themselves the 'Boys Club.' This coterie of actors, which included Cagney, O'Brien, and Frank McHugh was referred to by gossip columnist Sidney Skolsky as 'The Irish Mafia' due to its members shared heritage.¹²⁴ That the group was given their moniker by one of the industry's most prominent voices speaks to the visibility of the actors' ethnic heritage in terms of their identities as celebrities.

Irishness aside, Tracy's persona was very much intertwined with his gifts as a film actor. Besides his consecutive Academy Award victories, multiplicity of critic's awards,

¹²¹ Joe Bigelow, 'San Francisco Review,' *Variety*, 1 July 1936, 12.

¹²² Curtis, *Spencer Tracy*, 310.

¹²³ Terry Teachout, 'The Eclipse of Spencer Tracy,' *Commentary*, December 2011, 72.

¹²⁴ Curtis, *Spencer Tracy*, 387.

he also had the reverence of his peers in Hollywood, John Ford said, ‘When I say Spencer Tracy is the best actor we ever had, I’m giving you something of my philosophy on acting. The best is most natural.’¹²⁵ Indeed, it was his naturalistic style in front of the camera that set him apart in the early days of sound films when major studios appropriated myriad stage actors from New York, who usually brought with them the larger-than-life performance mode required for that medium. Tracy had been onstage himself for several years before moving out to Hollywood, yet his nuanced, naturalistic performance style became his signature.

John C. Tibbets says of Tracy’s star persona, ‘[he] embodied the lonely man required to courageously stand up for truth, decency, and compassion when self-interest or compromise might instead make his own path a smoother one.’¹²⁶ Father Flanagan epitomized Tibbets’ sentiment, already in his second high-profile clerical role and having an Academy Award from the previous year to his name, audiences would expect Tracy to play a priest familiar and comfortable in the world, yet not corrupted by it. Implicit in any Tracy performance is stability and common sense; instability of any kind would be anathema and surprise would be utilised solely for very gentle comedic effect. Because of his star persona, *Boys Town* can immediately jump into sequences that demand the audience’s implicit trust and unwavering acknowledgment of his moral authority. Spencer Tracy as Father Flanagan does not have to win an audience’s trust, it is there from the first frame because his star persona always precedes him, and so Father Flanagan can continually enter scenes with various modes of civil authority as the presumptive moral paragon.

¹²⁵ Curtis, *Spencer Tracy*, 741.

¹²⁶ John C. Tibbets, ‘Pre-MGM Spencer Tracy,’ *Films in Review*, Nov/Dec 1995, 2.

The Incarnate Characterization of the ‘Social Worker’ Priest

The primary argument of this thesis centres around the instability of the clerical figure in modern Irish cinema. I utilize Richard Kearney’s notions of ‘incarnate’ and ‘excarinate,’ as signifiers for distinguishing characterization of the cinematic Irish priest to illustrate his instability. I would like to suggest that the contingency of the cinematic Irish cleric can be traced through his diachronic *katabasis/anabasis*, as his characterization ‘descends’ into the sphere of the excarnate, ‘the flesh becomes image’ before ‘re-ascending’ back to the incarnate, ‘the image becoming flesh.’¹²⁷

Spencer Tracy’s performance makes up a part of Father Flanagan’s ‘incarnate’ characterization. Tracy’s characterization of Father Flanagan is informed by his embodied modes of exchange as a means of connection with those he encounters. Father Flanagan ‘touches’ and is ‘touched’ by those around him. To clarify, Kearney’s articulation of ‘touch’ is an inclusive one and moves past the parameters of the five senses—though necessarily contains them. He says that ‘touch’ is, ‘an existential approach to things, that is open and vulnerable, as when skin touches and is touched.’¹²⁸

Father Flanagan’s ‘incarnate’ characterization manifests in his very first appearance on-screen, when he enters Dan Farrow’s cell. He immediately sits beside the prisoner on his cot, as the camera cuts to a two-shot of both men facing forward, the priest then places his arms around the shoulders of Farrow to comfort him. (See Fig. 1.2) Father Flanagan illustrates what Kearney refers to as ‘tact,’ that is ‘the carnal wisdom of tactility,’ whereby the subject ‘senses the subtle differences between variations of touch—gentle or

¹²⁷ Richard Kearney, *Touch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 2.

¹²⁸ Kearney, *Touch*, 16.

firm, light or charged, sensitive or insensitive.’¹²⁹



Fig. 1.2 Boys Town. Father Flanagan (Spencer Tracy) comforts convict, Dan Farrow (Leslie Fenton) as he waits execution

However, ‘tact’ involves more than just embodied contact, it is also sensitivity to the other and their feelings within the moment of encounter.¹³⁰ The scene in the prison cell demonstrates Flanagan’s ‘tact,’ not only in his physical comforting of Farrow, but also in his compassionate interactions with the man as he awaits his execution. Flanagan’s ‘tact’ is juxtaposed with that of the reporters and prison authorities, who stand collectively on the opposing side of the cell. Throughout the scene, Farrow is situated within the frame, in direct opposition to the press and authorities, mirroring his disposition toward them, while Flanagan is always visually in alignment with the convict. When Farrow confronts

¹²⁹ Kearney, *Touch*, 9-10.

¹³⁰ Kearney, *Touch*, 13.

the prison official face to face and says, 'Where was the state when a lonely starving kid cried himself to sleep at night in a flophouse?' Farrow continues his tirade, before concluding by saying, 'One friend...one friend when I was twelve years old, and I don't stand here like this.' Throughout Farrow's diatribe, the camera frequently cuts to a close-up of Father Flanagan's reactions which make clear that he is strongly affected by what he hears.

The scene concludes with Farrow yelling at the journalists and prison officials to 'get out' of the cell. Once more Father Flanagan goes over to the sobbing prisoner and places his hands on his elbows, as the prisoner holds his hands in a pray-like grasp and says to the priest, 'I am sorry.' Farrow's head then falls on the priest's chest as he sobs, and Flanagan hugs him.

That Flanagan is clearly 'touched' by the prisoner's tirade is further evidenced in the scene that directly follows, as the priest is shown seated on a train going back to Omaha. The camera holds an extended close-up on Flanagan's face as he looks directly into the camera. Over the diegetic sound of the train can be heard Flanagan's voice-over articulating his thoughts as the phrases, 'twelve years old;' 'one friend;' 'starving kid;' and 'never had a chance,' are repeated over and over.

Father Flanagan's 'tact' is displayed throughout the film, both in his physical exchanges with those around him, as well as in his sensitivity as he listens. Indeed, the significance of physical touch in Father Flanagan's engagements with all those he encounters has a jarringly ironic effect when viewing the cinematic text from a post-abuse crisis perspective. Father Flanagan is frequently depicted physically touching the boys, albeit always in a tactful manner. Still, scenes such as the ones between the cleric and Pee Wee (Bobs Watson)—the smallest of Boys Towns residents—wherein the priest makes

the boy search for candy in his desk, while he sits in close proximity and physically handles the child, cannot help but take the contemporary viewer out of the narrative.

Kearney links ‘touch’ to hospitality, as he argues that ‘the first act of civilization was touch; the handshake between two people laying down their arms to place one bare palm on another.’¹³¹ Fundamentally, *Boys Town*—and by extension, Father Flanagan’s story is one of hospitality. Kearney notes the shared roots of the words hostility and hospitality and appeals to Beneviste’s etymological analysis of the Latin words, *hostis*, meaning enemy, and *hospes* meaning guest, both of which find a common root in the term ‘stranger.’¹³² Building on this, Kearney puts forth the position that engagement with the ‘stranger’ is always the choice between hospitality and hostility. Thus, hospitality is a risk, as there the ‘stranger’ may be ‘hostile’ or ‘favourable,’ however, as Kearney points out, the ‘primal scene of most societies’ is the conversion of the enemy to the guest.¹³³ What cannot be overlooked in this account and which Kearney does not explicitly address is the power dynamic underlying the host/guest relationship. Thus, the host inherently assumes authority in this relationship and with that comes an ethical responsibility to sustain the mutuality of the relationship.

Father Flanagan’s incarnate subjectivity is repeatedly illustrated in those scenes where he is shown ‘converting’ the enemy. This is most explicitly demonstrated in his interactions with Whitey. The two begin their relationship in a place of physical conflict, as Father Flanagan goes to the boarding house where the youth is hiding out and gambling with friends. He knocks Whitey’s feet off the table where they are resting, slaps the cigarette out of his mouth and pulls him up by the collar. He proceeds to tell Whitey

¹³¹ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 15.

¹³² Kearney, *Anatheism*, 38.

¹³³ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 15.

that he is coming with him to Boys Town and when Whitey turns to escape, the cleric trips the boy, and he falls to the floor. When Whitey tries to escape again, the priest once more grabs him by the collar and throws him down into the chair. The physical violence at play in the scene is in stark contrast to Father Flanagan's physical interactions that occur in his other scenes, which mirror, the gentle 'touch' of the opening scene with Farrow.

Read from a contemporary lens, the initial meeting between Father Flanagan and Whitey, cannot help but elicit discomfort in the wake of decades of discourse on corporal punishment and Catholic institutions for children. Indeed, the hostility between the cleric and the boy could have been represented without violence, but I would argue that the 'prudent' recourse to violence was fundamental to the hegemonic masculinity which Flanagan represented. Indeed, physical combat, manifest in violent 'touch,' would have been the most socially acceptable means of male-to-male contact. The only other scene where Flanagan resorts to physical violence is the last scene of the film where he 'sucker punches' Joe, keeping him from escaping arrest, once more an acceptable response in terms of notion of virtuous masculinity.

The first meeting between Father Flanagan and Whitey also underlines the significance of 'touch' for the cleric and the embodied wisdom he manifests through it. Through a contemporary lens, the priest's physical handling of the boy seems gratuitous, but within the cultural context demonstrates, 'tact,' that is an awareness of appropriate use of touch. In this case, Flanagan's embodied 'wisdom,' supersedes Whitey's agency.

With that said narrative discourse then focuses on the 'conversion' of Whitey, which culminates in what Kearney terms the 'touch of hand upon hand,' when the cleric rescues

the boy who has been left wounded by his brother inside of an empty Catholic Church.¹³⁴ It is not accidental that the only scene which occurs within the physical space of a church in the film is the ‘reconciliation’ between Father Flanagan and Whitey as the priest carries the wounded boy out of church the scene evokes the definitive image of Christian hospitality from Scripture, Jesus’ parable of the ‘Good Samaritan.’¹³⁵ Flanagan’s hospitality is visually depicted in his physical engagement with the other, in this case his holding of the wounded Whitey as he takes him out of the physical space of the church.

Section II: The ‘Mayor’ Priest as the Model of Immigrant Assimilation

The ‘Mayor Priest

In this section, I will examine the other primary clerical type, the ‘mayor priest,’ that emerged during Hollywood’s Golden Era. Like the ‘social worker’ priest analysed in the previous section of this chapter, the ‘mayor’ priest, as archetype, has been subsequently reappropriated in modern Irish films as a means of examining the evolution of discourses and themes surrounding authority, celibacy, and women’s roles within the communal and ecclesial spheres.

A recurrent element of films featuring a cleric is the absence of a visible figure of governance within the community. This absence in turn, transforms the priest, already the moral exemplar, into the *de facto* civil authority of the community. This substitution can be found in the films of Hollywood’s past as well as in modern Irish films. This section will include a close reading of the cinematic text of *Going My Way* and its representation

¹³⁴ Kearney, *Touch*, 15.

¹³⁵ Luke 10: 25-37 (NRSV)

of the ‘mayor’ priest in the character of Father Charles ‘Chuck’ O’Malley (Bing Crosby). The ‘mayor’ priest of Hollywood’s Golden Age is akin to the historical priest in the modern Irish situation in relation to his authority within the community, as Tom Inglis writes about at length in his seminal work, *Moral Monopoly*.¹³⁶ Neither the cinematic nor historical priest are explicitly given civil control, yet both figures influence moves well past the confines of the physical church space. Where the fictional cinematic ‘mayor’ priest and the historical Irish priest differ is in their locus, with the former situated within the ethnic, urban space of the United States, with the latter primarily emplaced within the rural community.

The analysis of *Going My Way* will be followed by a close reading of the text of *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952), and its representation of the clerical figure, Father Lonergan (Ward Bond). Ford’s film, as one of the most significant films in the Irish canon, due to its sustained cultural influence in the seventy years since its initial release, merits investigation.¹³⁷ Though the character of Father Lonergan is a secondary figure within the narrative, the film’s influence in global conceptions of Ireland and the Irish necessitates an analysis of the priest’s characterization and its fulfilment of the archetype of the ‘mayor’ priest.

Going My Way

Leo McCarey’s, *Going My Way* was released by Paramount Pictures in 1944, with a screenplay written by Frank Butler and Frank Cavett, from a story by McCarey. Similar to *Boys Town*, *Going My Way* was both a critical and box office success, winning seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor for Bing Crosby and

¹³⁶ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998).

¹³⁷ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*; Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

Best Supporting Actor for Barry Fitzgerald. Crosby, who, heretofore had been known primarily as a ‘crooner’ of popular music and as part of the comedic musical comedy *Road* franchise of films with Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour, was lauded by American film critics for his turn as a cinematic cleric. Though the film still allowed for the singer-actor to give full display of his vocal talents, including the title song, critics were equally impressed with his dramatic abilities as his depiction of the ‘mayor priest’ is referred to as, ‘one of the few satisfying interpretations of the priesthood to emerge from Hollywood’¹³⁸

With that said, it is Fitzgerald’s performance which had the distinctive honour of being nominated in both the Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor categories in that year’s Academy voting. In a bit of national chauvinism on both sides of the Atlantic, while the American press foregrounded Crosby’s performances in their reviews, the Irish press praised Fitzgerald’s performance and offered condolences to Crosby for having to ‘suffer by comparison with so brilliant an actor’.¹³⁹ The reviewer for the *Irish Times* goes on to say that though the film has its faults it is ‘tolerant, entertaining and admirably free of sectarian propaganda’.¹⁴⁰ The *Times* also pointed out that, ‘in their heart of hearts the studios know that a “religious” film is a particularly risky gamble, but I think this time Paramount has backed a winner’.¹⁴¹ Similarly in the United States, the mainline Protestant publication, the *Christian Herald’s* film critic, A.O. Dillenbeck said that the film, ‘transcends all bounds of sect or creed in its human, wholesome handling of the politics and problems common to any Church of God.’¹⁴²

¹³⁸ ‘Movie of the Week,’ *Life*, 1 May 1944, 69.

¹³⁹ ‘Film Notes,’ *Irish Times*, 9 October 1944.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Film Notes,’ *Irish Times*, 9 October 1944.

¹⁴¹ ‘Film Notes,’ *Irish Times*, 9 October 1944.

¹⁴² *Christian Herald*, August 1944, 47.

Going My Way represented a watershed moment in American Catholic culture, as it demonstrated the fully realised assimilation of the urban Irish immigrant into American middle-class life. As both Burke Smith and McCaffery acknowledge, *Going My Way* provided a sentimental and comforting visual presence to a nation in the last stages of global warfare.¹⁴³ The film tells the story of newly installed curate, Father Charles ‘Chuck’ O’Malley at the declining St. Dominic’s parish in New York City. The film’s primary narrative arc focuses on the continual conflict between the Irish-American Father Chuck and the Irish born, parish priest, Father Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald), who has been in his position since the church’s inception forty-five years before. Unbeknownst to Father Fitzgibbon, Father Chuck has been placed at St. Dominic’s to save it from defaulting on its mortgage to the bank. While attending to the parish’s financial crisis, Father Chuck also helps a group of neighbourhood boys, led by Tony Scaponi (Stanley Clements) and Herman Langer (Carl Switzer), who are perilously close to being lost to a life on the streets. Father Chuck, a former baseball player and singer, regenerates the boys, by introducing them to music and subsequently turning them into a church choir.

While helping the church in its battle to stay financially afloat, Father Chuck also assists local woman, Mrs. Quimp (Anita Sharp-Bolster), who is six months behind on her rent, and being threatened with eviction by bank representative, Ted Haines, Jr. (James Brown), the son of the bank executive (Gene Lockhart) who is supervising the church’s mortgage. Father Chuck also investigates Mrs. Quimp’s concerns about a young woman loitering about the neighbourhood, Carol James (Jean Heather). The young woman is a runaway, who is seeking success as a singer in New York City. Ted Haines, Jr. falls in love with Carol after making an inquiry about her unpaid rent, and the two wind up

¹⁴³ Burke Smith, ‘America’s Favorite Priest,’ 120; Laurence J. McCaffery, ‘*Going My Way* and Irish-American Catholicism: Myth and Reality,’ in *Screening Irish-America*, ed. R. Barton (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 184.

getting married, much to the consternation of the young man's father. The elder Haines' disapproval is eradicated when he discovers his son has enlisted in the military.

In the midst of all this, Father Chuck reunites with an old friend from high school in St. Louis, Tim O'Dowd, who is also a priest and serving at a nearby parish. O'Malley then happens to run into his ex-girlfriend, Jenny Tuffel (Risë Stevens), who as a singer at the Metropolitan Opera, now goes by the stage name of Genevieve Linden. Father Tim uses his connection with record executive, Max Dolan (William Frawley) to assist Father Chuck in selling a song to raise funds to pay St. Dominic's mortgage. Jenny and the boys choir sing the title song for Dolan and his associates, but they find it 'too high class' for their label. Afterwards, the executives overhear Crosby and the boys choir singing, 'Swinging on a Star,' and buy the song.

After paying off the mortgage, a fire strikes St. Dominic's and the church is burned to the ground. Father Fitzgibbon, who had been planning a return trip to Ireland to see his ninety-year-old mother (Adeline De Walt Reynolds), falls into a deep depression, which is alleviated with the news of Jenny and boys choir's tour raising money to rebuild the church. The film concludes with Father Chuck being transferred to a new parish, before which he sees to having Father Fitzgibbon's mother brought over from Ireland to see her son.

Going My Way: Nationalist Mythologies and the 'Mayor' Priest Archetype

Throughout this thesis, I will be exploring the frequent linking of nationalist mythologies and the priestly cinematic figure in modern Irish film. *Going My Way* arguably depicts a notion of an 'American' Catholicism which serves to buttress a nativist mythology of the United States as 'melting pot.' *Going My Way* and more specifically, Father Chuck, serve as models of 'good citizenship' according to the melting pot

paradigm, wherein, the various cultures, ethnicities, and traditions of the immigrant population ‘melt’ together with the native population in order to create a distinct American citizen.

National myths are hyperbolic narratives of the history and contemporary circumstances of a nation. As D.M Smith says:

such myths provide an idealised representation of the nation—its membership, its defining features, its fundamental values, and principles. Though they portray the nation in an idealized form rather than serve as a reflection of reality, national myths are regularly promulgated by national elites and as a result are typically adopted by a large segment of the population.¹⁴⁴

The myth of the American melting pot can be traced back to the earliest days of the new state with St. John de Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), holding that within the fledgling nation, ‘individuals of all races are melted into a new race of man’¹⁴⁵ In 1908 Israel Zangwill’s play, *The Melting Pot*, was produced and toured the United States to great success and served to disseminate its eponymous myth into the popular discourse.¹⁴⁶ The play told the story of a Russian Jew fleeing the pogroms of his homeland to go to the United States which was portrayed ‘as a place where immigrants shed their past modes of being as ethnics of a different land and contribute certain aspects of their experiences to the genesis of a new type of person, the American’.¹⁴⁷

In *Going My Way*, Father O’Malley is the full realization of the myth of the melting pot: he is the idealized second generation American: fully integrated into the American cultural fabric. He sings popular music, he plays baseball, he comes from the Midwest, ‘America’s heartland,’ not the unduly ‘ethnic’ East Coast. Like all ‘good’ Americans,

¹⁴⁴ David Michael Smith, ‘The American Melting Pot: A National Myth in Public and Popular Discourse,’ *National Identities* 14, no. 4 (Dec 2012): 388.

¹⁴⁵ J.H. St. John De Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, (New York: Dutton, 1957).

¹⁴⁶ DM Smith, ‘The American Melting Pot,’ 390.

¹⁴⁷ DM Smith, ‘The American Melting Pot,’ 390.

he's obviously adept at dealing with financial practicalities based on the fact that he is placed by the bishop at St. Dominic's to assist Father Fitzgibbon.

Anthony Burke Smith says, *Going My Way* represented a new period of cultural pluralism brought about by the Second World War, wherein both ethnic and religious differences were embraced and integrated into the national identity.¹⁴⁸ He holds that Father O'Malley, as a Roman Catholic, 'demonstrated how outsiders were essential to America's best future. Catholics were not foreign aliens bent on destroying democracy but facilitators of the American dream.'¹⁴⁹

The primary criticisms laid at the feet of the melting pot myth are that it was either essentially Anglo-conformity or a homogeneous, dominated by no one element'.¹⁵⁰ In either case its consequences speak of an erasure of ethno-cultural diversity, which is in direct opposition to a conception of 'cultural pluralism'.¹⁵¹ The American born Father O'Malley, is brought in to 'fix' a community previously run by an Irish immigrant and made up entirely of immigrants, or 'at-risk' youth. The improvements Father O'Malley brings to the parish are attributed to rational 'common sense,' are secular and usually revolve around popular music. His religious sensibility is neither explicitly ethnic nor explicitly Catholic, but rather found outside of the church in the space and community which he, for all intents and purposes, governs.

Father O'Malley personifies a homogenized 'Americanness,' and is put forth as a model of ethnic integration. He represents the ideal immigrant: fully integrated, who, not only lives within the codes of civil society, but enforces them as well, as the 'mayor' of his onscreen community. As Burke Smith says, 'O'Malley represents the modern Irish

¹⁴⁸ Burke Smith, 'America's Favorite Priest,' 121.

¹⁴⁹ Burke Smith, 'America's Favorite Priest,' 120.

¹⁵⁰ DM Smith, 'The American Melting Pot,' 392.

¹⁵¹ DM Smith, 'The American Melting Pot,' 392.

American Catholic, who has roots in older ethnic communities but who now embraces mainstream America.¹⁵² Thus, the priest as onscreen authority, models good citizenship to both his cinematic community as well as to the film's ethnic audience, as well.

Going My Way: The Incarnate Characterization of the 'Mayor' Priest and the 'Anacarnate' Event

As the diachronic proximities of their initial constructions suggest, there is an imbrication in the typologies of the 'social worker' priest and the 'mayor' priest. As depicted in *Boys Town* and *Going My Way*, both archetypes invariably serve as the moral arbiters of their respective cinematic universes. However, the 'social worker' priest's domain and intentionality are limited in scope; his authority, moral and otherwise, is restricted to the parameters of the cohorts to whom he ministers, such as, a group of boys or convicts in prison, as seen in *Boys Town* and *Angels with Dirty Faces*. The 'social worker' priest's agency is contingent on the good will of outside authority, which appears in myriad guises: judges, police officers, union bosses or media moguls, to say nothing of bishops and other ecclesial authorities.

Though taken out of the confines of the physical church, the 'social worker' priest is still not integrated within the larger community, and thus, he is in a sense, on the margins, free to take care of his corner of reality, though limited to his ministerial terrain. Les and Barbara Keyser say of this cinematic segregation: 'isolating priests as social workers [...] made them seem a little unfit for the real world; their holiness seems commendable yet a trifle unworldly and unrealistic.'¹⁵³

¹⁵² Burke Smith, 'America's Favorite Priest,' 121.

¹⁵³ L and B Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church*, 13.

That *Going My Way* was released some six years after *Boys Town* and *Angels with Dirty Faces* speaks to changing perceptions of the priest and Catholicism within American culture. Father Flanagan and Father Jerry, the ‘social worker’ priests of the moment just preceding the Second World War, are contained within a very specific cultural enclave, they are seen primarily ministering to, ‘at risk’ ethnic, urban youth, and when they are shown outside of that milieu, it is ministering to convicts in prison. The cinematic America of the 1930s, allows the ‘social worker’ priest a niche on the margins of society, wherein he can reform and indoctrinate wayward, ethnic youth, so as to ultimately contribute to mainstream society in adulthood. The other ministerial option for the ‘social worker’ priest, is working with the incarcerated, that is, those already corrupted, who mainstream American society has cast aside. Thus, the ‘social worker’ priest is limited to ministering within a carcerated sphere and his work is one of indoctrination into mainstream society, or accompaniment outside of it.

With the release of *Going My Way* in 1944, emerged the ‘mayor’ priest type, one who moved fluidly within mainstream American society as well as within the urban ethnic sphere, and who was unquestionably in charge of the cinematic world in which he is situated. He appears to answer to no authority, while also having the final say on all matters within his community. Regarding this conflation of civil and ecclesial spheres, Barton says that the Irish priest served as an authority of ‘an earthy morality that took for granted that the rule of the Church and the State (America) were one.’¹⁵⁴ The cinematic Irish priest had become the symbolic figure of the ‘civilising’ process; first of ‘at risk’ youths and convicts, but ultimately, also the broader context of the American urban community.¹⁵⁵ As Barton says, ‘Hollywood [...]played its part in confirming the tacit

¹⁵⁴ Barton, ‘Introduction,’ 5.

¹⁵⁵ Barton, ‘Introduction,’ 5-6.

understanding that the Catholic Church would assume many of the social duties for which the State might otherwise have been expected to be responsible.¹⁵⁶

Father O'Malley's incarnate characterization, and that of the 'mayor' priest in general, imbricates with the 'social worker' priest archetype in Kearney's notion of hospitality. Throughout the cinematic text of *Going My Way*, Father Chuck is shown making the 'wager' of hospitality in the face of hostility as he easily shifts between the roles of 'stranger' and 'host.' McDannell says that Father O'Malley serves as a mediator 'between Old World traditions and New World innovations.'¹⁵⁷ I would agree with McDannell's assessment and build on it to argue that Father O'Malley's role as mediator, can also be interpreted as a 'reconciler' and 'healer.' O'Malley's gentle 'touch' in his transformative encounters echoes narratives about Jesus in the Gospels. Father Chuck's narrative journey particularly echoes Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, (John 4:1-42), wherein he must travel through Samaria—a community particularly hostile to Jews—where seated by Jacob's well, he asks a Samaritan woman for a drink, her initial response is one of hostility and surprise, as being both male and a Jew would prohibit their having any social interaction. Jesus and the Samaritan woman have an extensive exchange which concludes with her identifying him as the Messiah and proclaiming it to the Samaritan community. After the Samaritan community has had a conversion experience, Jesus departs to continue his healing ministry elsewhere. Father Chuck, similarly, enters into the St. Dominic's community, as a stranger facing mistrust and hostility—starting with a singular female figure, Mrs. Quimp—whereupon through a series of events he brings healing to the community, he quietly departs to continue his ministry of healing elsewhere.

¹⁵⁶ Barton, 'Introduction,' 6.

¹⁵⁷ McDannell, 'Why the Movies, Why Religion,' 15.

In his account of the fundamentally incarnate aspect of Christianity, Kearney points to Jesus' relationship with Thomas, his apostle, as fundamental to its understanding. Kearney claims that Thomas was not just the 'sceptic' of received tradition, but also the one who challenges Jesus in the Upper Room 'to remain true to his wounds.'¹⁵⁸ Kearney goes on to define *ana-carnation*, (the Greek prefix *ana* meaning again or anew in time and space) as the 'repetition of Christ as an infinitely returning stranger—in the reversible guise of host/guest.'¹⁵⁹ I would argue that Father O'Malley's narrative discourse can be interpreted as an 'ana-carnate' event, as he arrives in the 'old neighbourhood,' as McDannell refers to it, as a 'stranger,' is subsequently met with hostility by both the parishioners, as well as his colleague, Father Fitzgibbon, whereupon, through his hospitality and reconciling of the community he brings about healing.

The first scene in which Father Chuck appears illustrates the fractured world of the parish community he is entering. As stated previously, his initial encounter with the community is with Mrs. Quimp, who eyes him with suspicion from her window when he asks for directions to St. Dominic's. Almost immediately, the camera cuts to another woman's head popping out from another window nearby, to mock Mrs. Quimp for harassing the priest. This is then followed by cutting to yet another woman's head emerging from another window and she in turn, joins in arguing with her neighbours. This scene is then directly followed by another featuring Father Chuck a few moments later further down the same city street, as he stops to observe the neighbourhood boys playing baseball. The boys proceed to break the window of Mr. Belknap's (Porter Hall) flat nearby, who proceeds to come out of his window and castigate the priest for playing baseball with the boys. As he does so, Mrs. Quimp walks past, and attempts to assist Mr.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Kearney, 'On Hermeneutics, Reading, Writing,' in *Letters to a Young Theologian*, ed. H. van der Westhuizen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 50.

¹⁵⁹ Kearney, 'On Hermeneutics, Reading, Writing,' 50.

Belknap in upbraiding the cleric, however, he turns on her and tells her to leave. Father Chuck apologizes to Mr. Belknap and says he'll pay for the broken window, but the man will not accept his apology. Father Chuck then says, 'You've got me stymied, I'm contrite, I'm penitent, I told you I'm sorry.' The priest offers the man a pearl rosary as collateral until he can pay for the broken window, when the cleric asks for the baseball back, Belknap proceeds to throw the ball across the street under a parked car. When the priest goes beneath the car to retrieve the baseball, a street cleaner passes by and sprays the priest with water, soaking him in his clerics. These two scenes depicting the community members' hostility toward one another and the priest, coalesce with the visual isolation displayed with each of them, shot with their heads emerging from their separate windows and demonstrating the divided and disembodied worlds which they inhabit. These scenes narratively and visually signify the ruptured community that Father Chuck is accessing, and echoes Kearney's contention that 'hospitality is always a wrestle with hostility.'¹⁶⁰

These opening scenes can be juxtaposed with the final scene of the film, wherein Father Fitzgibbon is shown being reunited with his mother, who has been brought over from Ireland. In the scene the entire St. Dominic's community is shown assembled together in the nave of the church watching on. Father Chuck is the only figure missing and is shown outside looking in on the scene through a window, before departing in the snow-covered night, on to his next assignment. These two scenes bookend the film's narrative and serve to signify the reconciliation Father Chuck brought to the St. Dominic's community, as well as the *ana-carnate* aspect of his characterization.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Kearney, 'Narrative and Recognition in the Flesh,' interview by Gonçalo Marcelo, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 43, no. 8 (2017): 786.

In between these two scenes which bookend the narrative discourse, are scenes which illustrate the means by which Father Chuck serves as multivalent reconciler. Father Chuck does this through what Kearney refers to as ‘sacramental return,’ which he defines as ‘a retrieval of the extraordinary in the ordinary.’¹⁶¹ It is through Father Chuck’s capacity to continually reconcile the binaries of modernity and tradition; the sacred and the profane, and the religious and the secular. In mediating between these disparate spheres, Father Chuck utilizes ‘tact,’ which Kearney says can be understood as a ‘common touch’ by which a person goes about ‘heeding, humouring and handling others.’¹⁶² Father Flanagan’s ‘tact’ is most evident in his interactions with Father Fitzgibbon, a man who is openly hostile to his young curate and what he represents. The conflict between the two men is always representative of that between modernity and tradition.

The elder priest’s antagonism is illustrated in the two men’s first encounter with one another. The two clerics meet in the presbytery of St. Dominic’s, with the young curate coming down into the common living space, dressed in sweatpants and a sweatshirt with the St. Louis Browns’ logo scrawled across the chest. Father Chuck apologises for his apparel, as his clerical attire has been drenched with water by the street cleaner in the previous scene, which I mention earlier. The elder priest then asks him condescendingly, ‘What made you become a priest?’ Before the younger priest can respond, the telephone rings. This happens several more times when the young cleric attempts to respond to the elder priest’s antagonizing query.

The initial sequence featuring the two priest has multiple shifts in locations, as the two priests move about the ecclesial space of the church. They first walk into the exterior

¹⁶¹ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 86.

¹⁶² Kearney, *Touch*, 10.

space of the grotto, where we see the two men are shown in a long shot, walking side by side, with the elder priest dressed in a soutane and biretta, while the younger priest is still wearing his sweatpants and shirt. As they move into the interior of the church space, the curate leaps over a bush to get to the entrance more quickly, demonstrating his youthful vitality.

When the two men walk through the interior space of the church, they stop before a statue of St. Joseph holding the infant Jesus, and it is the young curate who kneels and prays before the statue. When Father Chuck arises from his prayer, he proceeds to take two candles and light them, before placing them beside one another in front of the shrine. Father Chuck then makes a silent gesture to Father Fitzgibbon communicating that his prayer is for concord between the two of them (Fig. 1.3). In this brief, moment of ‘sacramental retrieval,’ Father Chuck communicates his desire for harmony. The young priest, while situated within the sphere of the elder priest’s spatial autonomy, the church, represents through the simple gestures of prayer and the lighting of candles, his hope for reconciliation and unity between the two men—and by extension, what they both represent: tradition and modernity; immigrant and assimilated; the church of the past and the church of the future.



Fig. 1.3 Going My Way. Father Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald) and Father O'Malley's moment of sacramental retrieval.

We see in this series of scenes that like the priest featured in *Regeneration*, which is analysed earlier in this chapter, the elder priest is very much confined to the physical space of the church: the presbytery, the grotto, and the church space proper. His interactions with others are entirely contingent on their Mass attendance, as is shown in a dinner scene between the elder priest and his curate, where Father Chuck mentions that he was speaking with Officer McCarthy about the criminal behaviour of the neighbourhood boys, and Fitzgibbon responds by saying, that the policeman had not been to Mass in ten years. Later in the film, Father Fitzgibbon attempts to move outside of the confines of the physical church and 'runs away,' upon discovering Father Chuck's real purpose for being there from the bishop. The elder priest's departure has the community concerned and he

is returned, like a runaway child, to the care of Father Chuck by Officer McCarthy. This sequence illustrates the finite spatial reality in which the immigrant priest of the past, is contained. Like the priest of *Regeneration*, Father Fitzgibbon cannot function outside the parameters of the physical space of the church.

By contrast, Father Chuck weaves freely in and out of ecclesial and public spaces, ministering to them, literally, 'where they are at.' As such, he is able to engage with Father Fitzgibbon in the ecclesial space, but also is able to flourish in myriad spaces such as, backstage at the Metropolitan Opera; the streets of New York City; or the basement of the presbytery, where he works with the neighbourhood boys turning them into a church choir.

Going My Way: Sex, Women, and the 'Normalising' of the Cinematic Celibate Priest

Going My Way's narrative discourse raises the question of mandatory clerical celibacy, a subject which does not emerge with the 'social worker' priest. In *Boys Town*, there is one brief scene of Father Flanagan engaging with a female character, a religious sister assisting at the infirmary where Rocky is convalescing. He exists in a homosocial sphere, his closest relationship, outside of the boys, is with Morris, who acts as both foil and confidant. His relationship with the boys of his institution is affectionate and avuncular. Affixed to the stability of Flanagan's clerical characterization is his comfort with his life as a celibate.

Though celibacy had existed as an ascetic practice since the time of the early church, universal clerical celibacy did not come into effect until medieval times, as the institutional Church became more centralised in its authority. In the eleventh century,

marriage for priests was banned by Pope Benedict VIII, however, it was not until the Council of Trent (1545-63)—called in response to the Protestant Reformation—that priestly celibacy was made compulsory.¹⁶³ Up until the time of Trent, priestly formation throughout the Western Church varied widely, which was evidenced by the varying degrees of literacy and pastoral skills of clerics up to that time. By introducing and mandating attendance at seminaries, Trent systemised priestly formation and provided a more unified theological and ecclesial outlook for clergy.¹⁶⁴

Father Chuck is presented as a man with a sexual history. Like Father Flanagan and most clerical depictions of the era focused on in this chapter, the stability of the priestly characterization permits a subjective contentment with his chaste existence. The narrative discloses a romantic past between Father Chuck and Jenny, which Burke Smith contends ‘grounds [him] in ‘normal’’ heterosexuality.’¹⁶⁵ This revelation of Father Chuck’s sexual past de-mystifies the priestly type for an American audience only a generation removed from anti-Catholic discourse surrounding clerical sexual degeneracy.

In their first scene together, Jenny sees Father Chuck walking down the city street in a coat covering his clerical attire, while she stands at the front door of the Metropolitan Opera. She calls him over and brings him into her sitting room to talk, while she goes into the adjoining dressing room to change into her costume. The scene then plays out with shots cutting back and forth between the two, as they both transform into their professional identities. They speak through the open door, as Jenny repeatedly asks Father Chuck why he stopped writing to her when she was on tour. Their exchange discloses that they knew each other as teenagers and young adults in St. Louis, when she was named

¹⁶³ Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, ‘The History of Priestly Celibacy in the Church,’ *A FER*, June 2003, 99-100.

¹⁶⁴ Helen Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c. 1100-1700* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 185-186.

¹⁶⁵ Burke Smith, ‘America’s Favorite Priest,’ 114

Jenny Tuffel, not the Genevieve Linden, she is now known as, as an opera star. While Jenny changes into her costume—Bizet’s *Carmen*—Father O’Malley changes into his ‘costume,’ as well. As he removes his coat to reveal his clerical attire, Jenny re-enters the room just as she is asking him the question, ‘What happened?’ Seeing him, she smiles and says, ‘Father Chuck...it’ll take me a while to get used to that.’ Jenny asks him to stay to watch the opera from the wings and as he leaves the sitting room, the camera holds on a close-up of her watching him depart, she is still smiling, but the unconscious tugging she does on her collar reveals her ambivalence.

In the next scene, Father Chuck is shown watching Jenny from the wings, as she performs the titular role of Carmen. She sings the aria, *Habanera*, also titled *L’amour est une oiseau rebelle*, (trans. ‘Love is a rebellious bird’), the lyrics which speak of the instability of romantic love and suggest the history of Jenny and Father Chuck’s relationship, as it has been disclosed in the previous scene that he wrote to her faithfully as she travelled the world for her opera career but stopped writing upon becoming a priest. The opening lyrics of the aria, as translated from the French are:

Love is a rebellious bird
That none can tame,
And it is well in vain that one calls it,
If it suits it to refuse.
Nothing to be done, threat or prayer;
The one talks well, the other is silent,
And it's the other that I prefer;
He said nothing, but he pleases me.
Love! Love! Love! Love!
Love is a Bohemian child,
It has never, never known the law;
If you don't love me, I love you;
If I love you, do stand on guard! Do stand on guard!¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Original lyrics from <https://genius.com/Georges-bizet-carmen-habanera-lyrics>
L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser
Et c'est bien in vain qu'on l'appelle
S'il lui convient de refuser
Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière

The lyrics of the song reveal the ambivalence of Jenny's feelings both about Father Chuck's decision to be a priest, but also perhaps about the history of their relationship, as being an unstable situation with one having stronger feelings for the other at differing times. That Jenny is portraying Carmen, the operatic *femme fatale*, par excellence, who leads Don Jose to his ruin, represents the underlying sexual danger Jenny represents for the celibate Father Chuck. A danger that Stevens, an opera singer by trade, appearing in only her second feature film, is unable to convey in any of her straight dramatic scenes.

Still, after this initial sequence, no mention is made of their romantic past within the narrative and Jenny becomes a part of Father O'Malley's coterie, assisting him in helping to get one of his songs published to save St. Dominic's and helping with rebuilding the church after the fire and looking after Father Fitzgibbon. The romantic relationship between the two is clearly in the past. Jenny's ambivalence about Chuck and his vocation evaporate after these initial scenes. Undoubtedly, the Production Code disallowed any suggestion of the cleric having any semblance of romantic feelings for his former girlfriend, or any woman for that matter, as evidenced in his scenes with Carol. With that said, the sexual history of the celibate priest as a means of signifying 'normalcy,' reappears in the cinematic depictions of the Irish priest in the 21st century. Though the discourses surrounding the trope of the celibate priest's sexual past—and in some contemporary cases, present—from the 1940s to the modern, differ, its use as a narrative 'normalizing' device remains the grounding impulse for its use.

L'un parle bien, l'autre se tait
Et c'est l'autre que je préfère
Il n'a rien dit mais il me plait
L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!
L'amour est enfant de Bohême
Il n'a jamais connu de loi
Si tou ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!

However, Father Chuck's interactions with Carol, the young woman who has run away from home, demonstrate once more, his role as reconciler. *Going My Way* is, if not a Bing Crosby 'vehicle' in the narrowest sense of the term, certainly not withholding, in its representation of the vocal talents of its star. As such, it is in the musical sphere that the film's narrative discourse discloses Father Chuck's broad mediative capacity, as evidenced in his initial scene with Carol, but also when he engages with the neighbourhood boys, and with Jenny.

Carol is first mentioned in the narrative, when Mrs. Quimp mentions her 'hanging out' on the street nearby. Whether or not Carol is a prostitute is secondary to Mrs. Quimp's concern that she is. Carol first appears onscreen when Officer McCarthy brings her to the presbytery to meet Father Flanagan. The policeman has taken the young woman in but says that his wife is unhappy with the arrangement and asks Father Chuck for assistance. Carol and the priest bond over their shared love of music and she sings an up-tempo song, 'The Day After Forever' (Jimmy Van Heusen/Johnny Burke, 1944). Father Fitzgibbon comes down the stairs and looks over to the common space where the priest and young woman are singing and looks on at the scene suspiciously. His initial concern being the young curate accompanying a young woman who is now singing the same song but this time as a romantic ballad.

When the elder priest learns of the young woman's situation, he proceeds to yell at her and tell her to go home to her parents and wait to find a man to marry. Carol startled by the elder priest's hostile response, moves to depart the presbytery. As she leaves, Father Chuck stops her and then turns to the elder priest and asks if he can give the young woman some money, saying, 'She's all alone. She hasn't a thing. Let's open our hearts, huh?' Father Chuck gives the young woman the money and offers gentle counsel to her before she goes off.

The scene is a seemingly innocuous one, but when read from a contemporary lens in the wake of revelations of the Church's treatment of young women of the pre-Vatican II era, attempting to live lives outside the parameters of marital domesticity or religious life, Father Chuck's treatment of Carol is notable in its compassion. Films such as *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002); *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Pat O'Connor, 1998); *Brooklyn* (John Crowley, 2015); and *Philomena* (Stephen Frears, 2013) all address in some aspect the treatment of single, young woman within the Irish situation during after the Second World War. Father Fitzgibbon's treatment of Carol, wherein he scolds her and tells her to go back home is representative of the attitude of the Irish church in these films. However, Magdalene asylums and similar facilities existed for 'fallen women' in the United States, as well. Though the Catholic Church's influence was not as pervasive in the United States, the societal pressure for young Catholic women to conform at the parochial level was strong.

The entire scene showing Father Chuck's interactions with Carol demonstrate how the priest utilizes popular music from the secular sphere as a means of encounter from which he can minister to a young woman living alone in an urban milieu. In his mediating between Carol and Father Fitzgibbon, the younger priest acts as a conduit between the patriarchal religious sphere and that of the secular feminine. Ultimately, the film's treatment of Carol's character is regressive, soon after her encounter with the two priests in the presbytery, she meets and falls in love with Ted Haines, Jr. The young couple marry, Ted is going off to serve in the military during wartime. However, Father Chuck's initial interactions with Carol, demonstrate a more generous, tolerant Catholicism, which is underlined by Father Fitzgibbon's treatment of the young woman.

John Ford, The Quiet Man, and the Emigrant Returns

The ‘mayor priest’ as presented up to now in this chapter has been situated and concerned with the Irish diaspora’s assimilation into urban American society. Indeed, assimilation was a vital component of many of the films made by Irish American filmmakers from the silent era into the time of the Second World War. However, as Lee Lourdeaux contends, immigrant assimilation was not a one-sided affair, as filmmakers, like Ford, who had, initially, calibrated their cinematic archetypes wholly in alignment with mainstream WASP expectations, began ‘to configure new socio-religious values lacking in mainstream society,’ and in doing so, brought about a mutual assimilation between ethnic Catholics and the hegemonic Anglo-Protestant culture.¹⁶⁷

The Quiet Man, then, made a decade after *Going My Way*, is very much the product of a post-assimilation, Irish-American context. Thus, the film, made in the 1950s, inverts the assimilation narrative: Sean Thornton (John Wayne) returns to Ireland from the urban United States, and faces difficulties in attempting to re-assimilate into rural society. Unlike Father O’Malley in the McCarey films, the priests in *The Quiet Man* (there is a ‘second priest’ in the film, the young curate, Father Paul, portrayed by James Lilburn, né Fitzsimons, the real-life brother of the film’s female lead, Maureen O’Hara) do not drive the narrative, but instead are supporting characters. Though Father Lonergan is inherently necessary, he is both within and outside of the narrative, subtly driving it from within and creating it from the outside.

John Ford was born Sean Aloysius Feeney, in the American Northeast to Irish immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century. His father spoke Irish, ran a saloon, and regularly assisted Irish immigrants arriving at the dock in Portland, Maine, near the family’s home.¹⁶⁸ Ford was a practicing Catholic throughout his life, regularly attending

¹⁶⁷ Lee Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 26.

¹⁶⁸ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 89-90.

Mass, going to confession, and often having a priest come on set to bless the film on which he was working. His wife had a priest over weekly for dinner, and he rubbed elbows with such American Catholic notables as Cardinal Spellman, and at one point even had a private audience with the pope.¹⁶⁹

Lourdeaux contends that Ford's Irish Catholicism inscribed in him a strong affinity for the communal as well as a respect for hierarchical institutions, which in turn, informed his approach to filmmaking. Lourdeaux writes of the influence Ford's Roman Catholic upbringing, particularly the Mass, on his structuring of the workplace:

In the American Catholic Church from the 1900s to the 1970s, the pastor, often of Irish extraction, had indirect but complete control of parish life—socially, financially, and liturgically. Ford took a similar approach to his responsibilities on set and off.¹⁷⁰

From the outset of his directing career, Ford oversaw all aspects of his films' production, despite spending a significant portion of his career working in a Hollywood context wherein studio heads and producers' authority was usually unquestioned. Ford cultivated a reputation as, both a great director and 'an ornery cuss,' two qualities which allowed for him to have total autonomy over his productions.¹⁷¹ On set, Ford encouraged a communal energy amongst his cast and crew, who more often than not, he utilized repeatedly on various projects. With that said, like his religion his sets were strictly hierarchical, and it was understood that he would have the final say on all aspects of his productions.¹⁷²

As stated previously, *The Quiet Man* remains one of the most highly visible cinematic depictions of Ireland. The film's iconic cultural status is evidenced by the fact that it is still rerun regularly on St. Patrick's Day in the United States and most countries

¹⁶⁹ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 90.

¹⁷⁰ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 91.

¹⁷¹ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 92.

¹⁷² Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 91.

containing a significant Irish diaspora, seventy years after its initial release. The film remains a staple of the Irish tourism industry, its continuing cultural currency can be found by the numerous *Quiet Man*-themed products in souvenir shops throughout Ireland, where items, such as an eponymous line of wool flat caps and Irish whiskey can be purchased by fans. Indeed, there is a still-thriving museum entirely dedicated to the film, located in Cong, County Mayo, where much of the exteriors of the film were shot.

The Quiet Man has become, as Barton notes, a ‘cinematic ur-text’ explicitly referenced in numerous films, most notably *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) as well as television series such as *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989-).¹⁷³ Multiple books have been written about the film, both from an academic and popular perspective, as well as a documentary film, *John Ford: Dreaming the Quiet Man* (Sé Merry Doyle, 2012).

Nevertheless, the film has historically had an ambivalent relationship with its ‘native’ land and its people, as film critic Paul Whittington says, of the response to the film upon its initial release in Ireland, ‘This was not how 1950s Ireland liked to see itself, and the sunny, joyful, spontaneous country [*The Quiet Man*] represented bore little relation to the poor, drab, priest-ridden, emigration-ravaged reality’.¹⁷⁴

Luke Gibbons’ analysis of the film in *Cinema and Ireland*, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema’ recovered *The Quiet Man* within Irish film scholarship, arguing the film, with its stage Irishmen, feisty colleens, and primitive villagers, is not just another exercise in Hollywood ‘paddywhackery.’ Instead, Gibbons argues that its overtly constructed romanticism allows for a self-reflexivity, reminding the viewer that the film and the cinematic experience is ultimately, an illusory venture.¹⁷⁵ Gibbon’s notes that the

¹⁷³ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 75.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Whittington, ‘Why They Shouted at *The Quiet Man*: John Ford’s Love Letter to the Old Country Is 60 Years Old Next Month.’ *Irish Independent*, 9 June 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Luke Gibbons, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema,’ in K. Rockett, L. Gibbons, J. Hill, *Cinema, and Ireland* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), 200.

film continually draws attention to its own artifice, such as when Thornton arrives at the local train station and encounters a collection of ‘quaint’ villagers, before being intercepted by Michaelleen Óg Flynn (Barry Fitzgerald)--who appears ‘as if by magic’ at the train station to escort Sean to the village. Driving down the rural road on Michaelleen’s pony and trap, they pause at the side of the road, as an exterior location shot is shown from Thornton’s point-of-view, of his family’s cottage, White O’Morn. The camera then cuts to a reverse shot of Sean with a false backdrop behind him, as a voiceover of his deceased mother, speaking of the cottage, plays over the image. The camera cuts back and forth between the natural exterior shots and the artifice of studio backdrops several times in the scene. Gibbons contends that the juxtaposition between the location shots and the artificial studio images, seem to be the film’s deliberate calling attention to its own artifice and ‘throws into relief the fictive status of [Thornton’s] vision.’¹⁷⁶

In the scene which immediately follows, Sean sees his soon-to-be love interest, Mary-Kate Danaher (Maureen O’Hara) for the first time. The scene is, as Gibbons refers to it, the ‘pastoral ideal’ as Mary-Kate’s red hair, blue shirt and white apron, pop against the green of the forest glen. Thornton reacts to the image of the red-haired colleen: ‘Hey, is that real?’ As Gibbons says:

It is this ability of certain strains of Irish romanticism to conduct a process of self-interrogation, to raise doubts at key moments about their veracity, which cuts across any tendency to take romantic images as realistic accounts of Irish life. This suggests that it is not so much realism which offers a way out of the impasse of myth and romanticism, but rather a *questioning* of realism or any mode of representation which seeks to deny the gap between image and reality.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Gibbons, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema,’ 200.

¹⁷⁷ Gibbons, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema,’ 200.

McLoone builds on Gibbon's argument to contend that *The Quiet Man* is not so much concerned with the native Irish, but rather the Irish-American imagination, and more specifically, the stereotypes and myths that Ford, its director, had promulgated in his earlier films as 'a process of mutual assimilation in America'.¹⁷⁸ He goes on to argue that the film released in 1952, serves as a means for Ford in closing the door on those stereotypes and myths which had 'worked to offer important cultural and ideological support at a key point in the assimilation of the Irish diaspora in the USA'.¹⁷⁹ With that said, McLoone acknowledges that *The Quiet Man* typifies a tradition of representation that is problematic when it re-emerges within contexts not infused with the self-awareness and internal subversion of Ford's film.¹⁸⁰

The Quiet Man's shadow looms large over Irish film where it frequently serves, as Barton says either, 'as a prototype or a point of departure for counter-representations.'¹⁸¹ Though critics of the film have given much attention to the film's use of stereotypes, such as Barry Fitzgerald's cheeky, drunken 'leprechaun' and Maureen O'Hara's fiery colleen, little attention has been given to the parish priest, Father Lonergan. As stated previously, Father Lonergan is a supporting character, yet his presence is essential. As is frequently the case in historical films set in rural Ireland, there is no civil authority represented in the cinematic community, and thus, the parish priest becomes the de facto leader, the 'mayor priest,' as it were.

Father Lonergan: 'Mayor Priest,' director proxy, and keeper of the mythic

¹⁷⁸ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 54.

¹⁷⁹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 58.

¹⁸⁰ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 59.

¹⁸¹ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 71.

Father Lonergan's role as 'mayor priest' is affirmed in the early moments of the narrative. During the scene of Thornton and Michaelen on the horse and trap, a large Celtic cross is shown in the corner of the frame signalling the priest's entrance. This is directly followed by a longshot, with the pony and trap shown in the background coming up the road, while in the foreground, Father Lonergan is shown with his back to the camera walking toward them. We then hear Father Lonergan say in a voiceover: 'Now then, here comes myself, that's me there walking: that tall, saintly looking man. Peter Lonergan, parish priest.' The scene then cuts to an exchange between Lonergan and the two men, the priest is shown in a medium close-up, looking as if he stepped right out of a Canon Sheehan novel, dressed in clerical attire, topped off with a black fedora. Father Lonergan introduces himself to Thornton, telling him that he knew his grandfather, 'He died in Australia. In a penal colony. Your father. He was a good man, too.' When Thornton tells Lonergan that his mother is deceased, the priest says he will say Mass at seven the following morning for her and all but orders Sean to be in attendance.

This sequence, both within and outside the diegesis conveys a lot of information about Father Lonergan. That he is, not only introduced by voiceover, but introduces himself, speaks to an extra-textual agency that no other character in the film enjoys. Indeed, outside of the aforementioned scene of Sean gazing across the landscape at White O'Morn, while his mother's voice from the past is heard, the rest of the film's voiceovers are all spoken by the parish priest.

Additionally, that Father Lonergan knows Sean's father and grandfather, speaks to his embeddedness within the village; he is not only their priest, but an entrenched member of the community going back generations. In his mentioning of Thornton's grandfather's time in the penal colony and that Sean's father 'was a good man, too,' we also get a brief gesture to Lonergan's republican sympathies, which are briefly alluded to again in the

film when he mentions being at a ‘meeting.’ Toward the end of the film when Mary-Kate confides in him about her troubled marriage, they speak Irish to one another. Lonergan’s tacit ordering of Thornton to attend morning Mass and the latter’s passive compliance demonstrate the cleric’s unquestioned, yet benevolent, authority. Thus, Lonergan’s authority within the community, his West of Ireland heritage, his speaking of the Irish language and republican sympathies, conform with a notion of Irish-Irishness born out of cultural nationalism.

Later in the film, when Thornton and Mary-Kate’s brother, Will Danaher (Victor McLaglen) are on the verge of breaking into a fight at the local pub, Father Lonergan, in a *deus ex machina* of sorts, enters the scene and demands both men, not only stop fighting, but shake hands (Fig. 1.4), demonstrating his role, not only as authority figure, but also as mediator and peacemaker.¹⁸²

That Father Lonergan is entrenched within the local community is illustrated when juxtaposed with the town’s other cleric, the Church of Ireland pastor, Reverend Playfair (Arthur Shields). Barton has noted the film’s romanticised ecumenism, yet it is repeatedly made clear within the cinematic text that the Protestant minister has a diminished position within the town’s hierarchy.¹⁸³ Playfair is concerned about being relocated by his bishop and mentions that he has only a handful of congregants. The Protestant minister is aligned in the narrative with Thornton, ‘the outsider,’ and serves as his confidante and chief supporter, illustrating his liminal role within the town. By contrast Mary-Kate, the native of the local community, seeks out Father Lonergan for counsel, and all social events within the community—including the courting rituals and the climactic donnybrook—are

¹⁸² In the previous scene we see Father Lonergan enter the pub in a hurried state, obviously aware of what was about to transpire between Thornton and Danaher; however, how he knew this is never revealed in the narrative.

¹⁸³ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 75.

explicitly or tacitly legitimized by the priest. Even the community's kind-hearted support of the Reverend and his wife at the film's conclusion, wherein they pretend to be his congregants to fool his visiting bishop, is done at the instigation of the parish priest, further illustrating the imbalance between the two clerics in the cinematic community.



Fig. 1.4 The Quiet Man. Father Peter Lonergan (Ward Bond) maintains peace within the community. Sean Thornton (John Wayne) and Will Danaher (Victor McLaglen) reluctantly shake hands.

Lourdeaux likens Ford's role on his production to that of an Irish father, who was the 'head of his film family.'¹⁸⁴ I would argue that an analogy to Ford's filmmaking process could just as easily be made with that of a parish priest, at least the priest as he is presented in *The Quiet Man*. I would like to suggest that Father Peter Lonergan can very much be seen as Ford's cinematic surrogate: his all-encompassing presence, wherein he is within the narrative, yet also outside of it.

¹⁸⁴ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 93.

Lonergan's interventions within the narrative include conspiring with Michaeleen, Reverend and Mrs. Playfair in deceiving Danaher into allowing Mary-Kate to marry Thornton. Though, they work as a collective, the success of the scheme is contingent on Lonergan's cooperation, not only as leader of the community, but also as moral exemplar, thus, when asked by Danaher if the lie Michaeleen told him about the widow was true the priest responds, 'I can't say it's true and I won't say it's not.'

He explicitly intervenes when stopping Thornton and Danaher's fight in the pub early in the film. Conversely, his refusal to intervene proves to be just as significant to the narrative, most notably, during the donnybrook sequence at the end of the film. In this sequence, we see Father Lonergan, who is once again by the water, fishing, told by Father Paul of the fight between Thornton and Danaher. The priest excitedly runs into the village to see the brawl, yet, instead of making his physical presence known to the community which is all that would be necessary to end it, he instead, watches enthusiastically hidden behind a stone gate. When Father Paul asks him if they should, in fact, put a stop to the donnybrook, he responds, 'We should, lad, it's our duty,' yet he does nothing to stop it, and continues to enjoy the spectacle, as the final initiatory rite into the community.

Within the diegesis Lonergan is more visibly present than aurally, he is frequently shot hovering quietly in the background or at the side of the frame, yet his voice is most prominent outside of the narrative. It is in his voiceovers, where, like the voice of God, Lonergan moves the story along. Lonergan works quietly 'behind the scenes,' intervening, when necessary, from seemingly out of nowhere, as in the stand-off between Thornton and Danaher at the pub.

Analysing *The Quiet Man* through Gibbons' self-reflexive hermeneutic allows for a reading of Father Lonergan as a surrogate for the film's director, John Ford. Lonergan, like Ford is a figure of indirect and magnanimous authority, who serves as mediator

within the community of Inisfree, just as Ford was on the sets of his productions.¹⁸⁵ Lonergan's character acts within the diegesis to unite the community through his interventions. He also upholds the moral standard through counsel and correction as seen in his scene when Mary-Kate seeks him out to tell him about the state of her marriage, this aligns with Lourdeaux's account of Ford's relationship with his actors and crew.¹⁸⁶ Yet, the analogy between Lonergan and Ford goes deeper than just their role in their respective communities, both inter and extra cinematically, as their figures also merge in their singular roles as perpetuator of myth. Lonergan, as narrator, fictionally constructs the myth, vocally guiding the audience through the narrative, while simultaneously constructing its parameters. He takes on the role of storyteller for the 'actual' storyteller, John Ford.

Lonergan is arguably the only Irish character in the film who is not a stereotype, but rather an archetype, informed, in part by Ford's own clericalism, but also, I would argue because he is Ford's cinematic proxy. Thus, instead of a stereotypical clerical representation, Father Lonergan is presented as an intelligent, benevolent authority figure, unafraid to poke gentle fun at himself, as heard when in voice over he introduces his onscreen self as, 'that tall, saintly looking man.' Lonergan also has a comedic thread which runs through the narrative regarding his lack of success as a fisherman; the effect of which is softened by the clear scriptural allusions to Peter—who also shared a ministerial partnership with a man named Paul—yet another unsuccessful fisherman.

Conclusion

¹⁸⁵ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America*, 94.

The archetypes of the ‘social worker’ priest and the ‘mayor’ priest that emerged from Hollywood during Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age,’ were amongst the most prominent cultural images of the Irish cleric in the twentieth century. Thus, providing Irish filmmakers with a discursive template from which to create their own cinematic clerical figures.

With that said, the textual readings of *Boys Town* and *Going My Way* in this chapter, disclose the discourses affixed to the cinematic figure. The representation of the ‘social worker’ priest, as analysed in this chapter in the depiction of Father Flanagan in *Boys Town*, cannot help but call attention to the problem of the cinematic priest ministering to the poor, wherein there is always a question of allegiance.

The ‘social worker’ priest, who supplanted the Protestant female as the cinematic redemptive figure for the urban poor during Depression, spoke to a developing, albeit contingent acceptance of the ethnic Catholic by mainstream, Protestant America. The ‘social worker’ priest was no longer contained within the confines of the ecclesial space of the church, as his immigrant predecessor had been, as shown in the depiction of the priest in *Regeneration*, as well, as the character of Father Fitzgibbon in *Going My Way*. On the contrary, the ‘social worker’ priest was never shown within the confines of a church, but instead, shown primarily in the carcerated spaces of ethnic, urban America, either rehabilitating boys or accompanying recidivist men outside of society. Indeed, the primary project for the ‘social worker’ priest, as illustrated in the spate of films featuring the archetype during the latter part of the 1930s, was to compel the socio-economically disadvantaged boys of the ethnic, urban, United States to conform to prevailing societal standards and mores, as constructed by the upper-class, Protestant mainstream, which only served to perpetuate their disenfranchisement. Whereas it could be argued the anti-hero of the gangster film of the early years of the Depression provided an ‘alternative’ means of success and flourishing outside the parameters of mainstream American society,

the ‘social worker’ priest could be said to hinder the development of the urban, poor for the sake of maintaining the ‘status quo.’ This question of the allegiance of the priest, will continually re-emerge in modern Irish cinema in multiple guises, particularly in relation to the nationalist project and the rural poor.

The question of the ‘allegiance’ of the Irish priest in relation the urban poor is not eradicated by the emergence of the archetype of the ‘mayor’ priest, during the years of the Second World War. Indeed, it could be argued that his role as the model of assimilation represents a betrayal of his ethnic roots for the sake of his own upward mobility. The ‘mayor’ priest is representative of a more fully assimilated ethnic, urban Catholic. The cleric is no longer confined to either the ecclesial or carcerated spaces, as his predecessors were, but navigates freely between the urban milieu of his congregants and the more exclusive venues of the mainstream Protestant world, as evidenced in *Going My Way* when Father O’Malley is shown on the golf course and at the Metropolitan Opera, both icons of the WASP establishment.

The ‘mayor’ priest of urban, ethnic America, as represented in the McCarey films is ‘normalized’ both in being removed from the shadowy, mysterious spaces of European Catholicism, as well as in his presumed heterosexual past, as depicted by his ‘old flame’ Jenny. In his interactions with the elder, immigrant Father Fitzgibbon, as well as the immigrant neighbour, Mrs. Quimp, Father O’Malley is shown as ‘caretaker’ to his less assimilated compatriots, who are depicted as childlike and helpless. O’Malley’s modern, American Catholicism is juxtaposed with Fitzgibbon’s traditional, European Catholicism, with the former’s alignment with youth, athleticism, and music clearly superior to the insular, restrained, and antiquated faith of the elder cleric.

While the ‘social worker’ priest’s containment within the carcerated sphere precludes any disruption of the homosocial world which he serenely inhabits, the ‘mayor’ priest of the urban, ethnic American neighbourhood does interact with women, and as previously mentioned, in the case of Father O’Malley, is given a romantic past. With that said, with Father O’Malley’s relationships with both Jenny and Carol within the cinematic text emerges what will prove to be an insoluble situation for the female and the ‘embodied’ clerical figure. The context of Hollywood in the 1940s, still very much under the lash of the Production Code, allows for an evasion of narrative discourse surrounding the priest’s sexual history, however, it has the collateral effect in *Going My Way*, of inhibiting Jenny from any character development or complexity, outside what is alluded to in her operatic solo, as the iconic femme fatale, Carmen. This seeming inability to reconcile female complexity and the incarnate cleric will continually recur in the modern Irish cinematic context.

The ‘mayor’ priest as represented by Father Lonergan in *The Quiet Man* is a hybrid of the Classic Hollywood and modern Irish cinematic cleric. Father Lonergan’s ‘mayor’ priest echoes the stability of his American antecedents in his tacit, unquestioned authority. His authority is cohesive with his moral benevolence, which allows for the narrative to proceed on the assuredness of his constancy. Father Lonergan is also representative of an illusory notion of Irishness, at once asserted by the exile and affirmed by the cultural nationalist. As parish priest he is both a part of the community, as well as ‘above’ it, as illustrated in Lonergan’s depiction within and outside of the diegesis, both a part of, and also narrating the cinematic story. Father Lonergan is perhaps the apotheosis of the Irish priest on film, in terms of both his necessity to the narrative, as well as his liminal placement within it.

The situation of the American Catholic Church and its dialectic with Rome throughout the twentieth century demonstrates the young nation's growing influence on matters both ecclesial and cultural of which Hollywood played a significant role. While I am not suggesting that these depictions were catalysts for the changes in the Church which were promulgated during Vatican II, I would contest that they were amongst the first global expressions of an American Catholicism, which was more democratic, individualistic, and less aligned with the devotional practices of its European ancestors. For better or worse, these representations mirror the modernising of the institutional church on a global scale as evidenced by the decrees of Vatican II. They also cast a light on the Irish situation and its discourses surrounding modernisation, church/state relations, and religious tolerance. Similarly, the discourses surrounding onscreen masculinity, star personas, and celibacy have continually resurfaced in contemporary Irish cinema, which along with the narrative trope of the second priest continue to be utilised in analysing the state of the Church in contemporary Ireland.

Chapter Two: The Priest, a Church in Decline, and the Ascent of an Indigenous Irish Cinema

Introduction

Chapter One of this thesis analysed the heritage of the Irish cinematic priest of Hollywood's 'Golden Age.' That analysis demonstrated that the archetypes of the 'social-worker' priest and the 'mayor' priest that arose in Hollywood films in the 1930s and 1940s served as discursive mechanisms in the negotiation of Irish-American Catholic assimilation and wartime notions of masculine leadership.

This chapter will begin this project's study of the contingency of the clerical figure in modern Irish cinema. The instability of the cinematic Irish priest can be traced diachronically, thus this chapter will focus on the originary domestic representations of the priest as they emerged during the 1960s and into the 1990s. The thirty-five-year period between the Department of Finance's publication of T.K. Whitaker's *Economic Development* in 1958 to the establishment of the Second Irish Film Board in 1993 were marked by moments of significant change, as well as periods of notable stagnation, for both the Catholic Church and Irish society. The 'modernizing' impulse born out of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the mid-1960s, in ecclesial circles was continuously met with corresponding resistance particularly in areas regarding female sexuality and clerical celibacy. Irish society from the 1960s through the 1980s, so closely linked as it was to the Catholic Church, had similar starts and stops in its own process of modernisation.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Roy Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Louise Fuller, 'Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,' in *Irish Catholic Identities*, ed. Oliver Rafferty (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 307-320; Brian Girvin, 'Church, State and Society in Ireland Since 1960,' *Eire-Ireland* 43, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2008):74-98.

Indigenous cinematic output during this time was erratic, with the late 1970s and early 1980s being a period of notable consequence in terms of the quality, if not the quantity of films being produced by Irish filmmakers. This period, frequently referred to as the ‘first wave’ of Irish cinema, is noted for the work of a handful of independent filmmakers whose work called into question established images of Ireland and the Irish people, as promulgated by Hollywood and British cinema up to that time.¹⁸⁸ Directors such as Cathal Black—whose film *Our Boys* (1981) I analyse in Chapter Three of this thesis—Bob Quinn, Joe Comerford and Pat Murphy interrogated themes such as religion, cultural nationalism, modernisation and feminism through films, such as *Poitín*, (Quinn, 1978), *Traveller* (Comerford, 1982), and *Maeve* (Murphy, 1981). This period of filmmaking is notable for the experimental style of much of its output, which frequently gestured in the direction of the avant-garde.¹⁸⁹

The 1980s also saw the emergence of two of the most significant names in modern Irish film, Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan, whose output during this time had a significant influence on the establishment of the Second Irish Film Board in 1993. Those highlights aside, Irish filmmaking practices struggled for the most part during this time to establish some semblance of consistency. The initial Irish Film Board, established in 1981, from which Jordan’s debut film *Angel* (1982) received financing, ground to a halt by 1987, undone, as much by the divergent interests and cross-purposes of its membership, as by the lack of financial return that was given as the official reason for its suspension.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 131.

¹⁸⁹ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 85-103. McLoone, *Irish Film*, 131-150.

¹⁹⁰ See Barton for a more in-depth account of the events surrounding the fall of the First Irish Film Board, *Irish National Cinema*, 104-105.

In this thesis I argue for the instability of the cinematic Irish priest which can be traced through a figurative process of *katabasis/anabasis*, marked by a descent into excarnation, wherein the ‘flesh becomes word,’ followed by an ascent into incarnation, wherein the ‘word becomes flesh.’ This chapter analyses the point of *katabasis* of the cinematic priest as he descends into the excarnate. I will utilize three representations of Irish clergy from films made over the period between 1968-1994: *Rocky Road to Dublin* (Peter Lennon, 1968); and two films by Bob Quinn: *Budawanny* (1987) and *The Bishop’s Story* (1994). Through a close reading of the cinematic text of each of these films, I will demonstrate the cinematic instability of the priest, from central figure and moral arbiter within the local community and Irish society, which I also refer to as the archetype of the ‘mayor’ priest, as depicted in *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952)—analysed in Chapter One of this thesis—to a figure whose position within the community is neither entrenched nor unequivocal. This chapter will illustrate that the displacement of the ‘mayor’ priest is due in part to the incompatibility of modernizing Irish society along with real-life priests’ attempts to ‘modernize’ in the wake of Vatican II.

This chapter demonstrates the correlation between the cinematic cleric’s contingency and the problem of mandatory clerical celibacy, an issue which could be ignored in the priest’s earlier cinematic incarnations, such as *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944), as this thesis examines in Chapter One. This chapter’s analysis of the two films by Bob Quinn, discloses the problem for the modern cinematic priest in the transactional exchange of embodiment for authority. Thus, for the modern Irish priest to be incarnate necessitates his sequestering and silencing.

A recurring theme throughout this thesis is the erasure of the female within the cinematic context of the embodied priest. This chapter’s evaluation of clerical celibacy, as depicted in the two films by Quinn, illustrate the eradication of the female being in direct

correlation with priestly sexuality, while also foregrounding the larger on-going problem of the modern women's role in relation to the Catholic Church and Irish society.

The case studies of this chapter also serve as symbolic illustrations of the mind/body divide intrinsic to the classical theism of Irish Catholicism for which these films offer no solution. The 'mayor priest' of the 1940s and 1950s becomes a fractured characterization in the modern Irish film, as clerical depictions are shown as being either figures of authority, isolated within the realm of administration and theory, or embodied subjects whose carnal nature is always subordinate to his priestly vocation. However, the modern Irish cinematic priest can never be both incarnate and in authority, and as depicted in Quinn's films he must choose between the two.

This chapter consists of two sections, both of which will examine the socio-historical situation of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church during the over three-decade span between the Department of Finance's publication of its study, *Economic Development* in 1958—which served as a catalyst for the modernising reform of the 1960s and 1970s—to the time of the establishment of the Second Film Board in 1993.

In this chapter, the 'mayor' priest archetypes analysed in *Going My Way* and *The Quiet Man* in Chapter One of this thesis, are shown to be deconstructed in the modern Irish film. In this chapter's analysis of *Rocky Road to Dublin*, real-life priest, Michael Cleary's flailing and failed attempts at modernizing in the tradition of *Going My Way*'s 'mayor' priest, Father O'Malley are examined. Similarly, Bob Quinn's *Budawanny* (1987) and *The Bishop's Story* (1994) depict a rural clerical authority in the tradition of *The Quiet Man*'s 'mayor' priest, Father Lonergan; yet one who is shown to possess neither the effortless virtue nor unquestioned communal authority of John Ford's seminal Irish cinematic priest.

The first section of this chapter will provide a close reading of Lennon's, *Rocky Road to Dublin*, and its portrayal of 'singing' priest, Michael Cleary. The reading of Lennon's cinematic text will be accompanied by an account of the significant changes taking place within Irish society during the 1960s and the Catholic Church's attempts to 'modernize' in light of them. The depiction of Father Cleary in *Rocky Road to Dublin* will also be assessed through the lens of the ecclesial changes which emerged from Vatican II and the impact the reforms of the council had on Irish society.

The second section of this chapter will present a close-reading of the cinematic text of both Quinn's films: *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*. Both films explore discourses surrounding mandatory clerical celibacy and the implications of its evasion within the modern Irish context. Both of Quinn's films and their clerical depictions will be explored in light of the growing separation between the increasingly modernizing mores of the Republic, particularly in relation to sex and female sexuality, and the Church's traditional stance on said issues.

Section I: The Modernization of Ireland and Vatican II

A Historical Overview

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) coalesced with the rapid acceleration of modernity occurring in Ireland during the 1960s. Though it would be simplistic to suggest that the origins of the modernising project in Ireland can be attributed solely to then Secretary of the Department of Finance, T.K. Whitaker's 'white paper.' *Economic Development*, published in 1958, it does stand as a symbolic tipping point in the national narrative. However, as Ruth Barton points out, indigenous documentaries from the 1940s

and '50s, such as, *A Nation Once Again* (Brendan Stafford, 1946), funded by the recently established National Film Institute, give evidence that attempts at modernising had been going on long before Whitaker's document came forth.¹⁹¹

Still, the First Programme for Economic Expansion (1958-1963) which followed *Economic Development*, and its overhaul of the Republic's insular economic policies, seemed to expedite the modernising project on a multiplicity of levels. In 1959, Taoiseach Sean Lemass, set forth his intention to create the first State-owned television service and on New Year's Eve 1961, Radió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), was launched, becoming Ireland's first native television station.¹⁹² Television was, in its own way, just as significant to the modernising project as the change in economic policy. Indigenous shows such as *The Late Late Show* introduced topics such as sexuality and feminism, previously *verboten*, into Irish public discourse.¹⁹³ The 1960s also saw the introduction of free second-level education, a population shift from the rural to urban areas, and an expansion in public policy.¹⁹⁴

Modernity's ascent in Ireland coalesced with, what theologian John O'Malley terms, 'the most important religious event of the twentieth century,' The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) (1962-65).¹⁹⁵ Vatican II created a seismic shift in the Western Church, theologically, liturgically, and politically, the effects of which continue well into the twenty-first century. The locus for the changes Vatican II wrought are rooted in Pope John XXIII (born Giuseppe Angelo Roncalli, 1881-1963)—who first announced the

¹⁹¹ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 66.

¹⁹² Robert J. Savage, *A Loss of Innocence? Television and Irish Society 1960-72*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) 1-3.

¹⁹³ Mary Kenny, 'Gay Byrne: The "Conservative Catholic" Who Changed Ireland,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly* 110, no. 438 (Summer 2021): 176-179.

¹⁹⁴ John A. Weafer, *Thirty-Three Good Men: Celibacy, Obedience and Identity* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2014), 27-28.

¹⁹⁵ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 1.

council in 1959—and the council fathers’ desire to ‘modernize’ the Church, as evidenced in the pontiff’s call for *aggiornamento* or ‘appropriate adaptation [...] to the needs and conditions of our time.’¹⁹⁶ As the German bishop and theologian, Walter Kasper says of the council and its documents, ‘the question of the Church is second to the question of God’.¹⁹⁷ Kasper’s comment speaks to the council’s movement away from exclusionary, dogmatic minutiae, and the fortress mentality, which had prevailed within the hierarchy since the Reformation of the 16th Century and The Council of Trent (1545-1563), and a movement toward a more inclusive, Christocentric ethos.

The reforms that took place were most visibly manifested in the liturgy, most specifically in the transition from the Mass being said in Latin to the vernacular, as well as in its formal structure, as it transitioned from the Tridentine model which had been used throughout the West since 1570—essentially an outcome of the Counter-Reformation—and the introduction of the Mass of Pope Paul VI, commonly referred to as the *Novus Ordo* or Ordinary Rite. The ‘new’ Mass, established in 1969, initially left room for new and different variations within the liturgy, which speaks to both the ecclesial situation, as well as the significant transitions occurring within secular culture in the United States and Western Europe.¹⁹⁸ Declan Kiberd remarks of these rather jarring liturgical shifts of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Ireland:

The soaring melodies of the Latin Mass were now toned down, to make way for a so-called Folk Mass conducted by guitar-toting, three-chord clerics, many clad in Aran sweaters. They laid violent hands on the anthems of the young, rewriting

¹⁹⁶ John XXIII, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 29 June 1959. sec. 61, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_29061959_ad-petri.html.

¹⁹⁷ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM, 1989), 153.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Letter from Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops on the Occasion of the Publication of *Summorum Pontificum*,’ 7 July 2007. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707_lettera-vescovi.html

many world-famous lines as they did so. 'The answer is blowing in the wind' became 'The answer is living in all men.'¹⁹⁹

Kiberd's account gestures toward the heavy-handed, almost contrived nature by which many clerics interpreted and implemented the documents of the council in an attempt to bring the Church into the modern world.

In relation to this study, the most profound liturgical change which came out of the council was the repositioning of the priest. No longer would he be facing *ad orientem*, literally, 'toward the east', in reference to the typical construction of churches, wherein the entrance was at the west end and the altar and direction of worship was in the east, traditionally thought to be 'toward God.' Thus, a priest positioned *Ad orientem* would be facing toward the altar attached to the back wall of the church, so that both he and the congregation are facing the same direction. Because it is the common orientation for the priest in the Tridentine Mass, some theologians criticized the position because it presents an image, not so much of a community of believers praying together, but instead of hierarchical obstructionism, wherein the priest, quietly prays the Mass on his own, with his back to the congregation, who look on, often fully immersed in their own private devotions.

Though the priest's facing the congregation during the liturgy, or *versus populum* is not explicitly mentioned in the council's primary document on the liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), the document, '*Inter Oecumenici*, Instruction on Implementing Liturgical Norms', put forth by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in September 1964, states:

¹⁹⁹ Declan Kiberd, 'Ireland After "Aggiornamento,"' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly* 101, no. 404 (Winter 2012): 433.

The main altar should preferably be freestanding, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people. Its location in the place of worship should be truly central so that the attention of the whole congregation naturally focuses there.²⁰⁰

Thus, as John McGahern says of the post-conciliar liturgical changes in his short story, set in a village in rural Ireland, ‘Oldfashioned,’ ‘the priest now faces the people, acknowledging that they are the mystery.’²⁰¹

With the clergy’s physical turn to face the people within the confines of the ecclesial space, so also with Vatican II, came the institutional Church’s metaphoric turn to the laity. No longer was the community of the faithful to be simply passive participants in the life of the Church, but were now invited to full participation and recognized as ‘priests’ in their own right, as Article 10 of the Conciliar document, *Lumen Gentium* says:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.²⁰²

The document takes its scriptural support from passages in Revelation, the First Epistle of Peter and Acts; ironically the very passages that Martin Luther cited in his ‘To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation’, written in 1520 in his attempt to obliterate the division between the clergy and the laity, and formalize a universal priesthood.²⁰³

However, *Lumen Gentium* stops short of the universal priesthood and clearly

²⁰⁰ Consilium (of Sacred Congregation of Rites), ‘Inter Oecumenici: Instruction on Implementing Liturgical Norms,’ (26 September 1964), 91, <https://adoremus.org/1964/09/26/inter-oecumenici/>,

²⁰¹ John McGahern, ‘Oldfashioned,’ in *The Collected Stories* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1992), 269.

²⁰² Second Vatican Council, ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 21 Nov. 1964,’ sec. 10, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

²⁰³ Martin Luther, ‘To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Respecting the Reformation of the Christian Estate,’ in *Luther’s Primary Works: Together with His Shorter and Larger Catechisms*, eds. C.A. Buchheim and Henry Wace, trans. C.A. Buchheim (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883), 164-169.

distinguishes between the clerical state or ‘ministerial priesthood,’ and the ‘priesthood of the people’:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.²⁰⁴

The empowerment of the laity and the seeming democratization of the Church that the council documents promised, had an immediate effect in Ireland. Kiberd writes, ‘Newspapers, which had once reproduced pastoral letters of bishops without comment, now no longer did so...all across the land, lay discussion groups such as the Patrician societies or Tuairim resounded to the voices of ordinary parishioners and Catholic intellectuals in earnest debate.’²⁰⁵ In the Jesuit published journal, *Studies*, future Fine Gael Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, wrote in 1964 of a pluralistic Ireland of the future, one wherein Catholics and Protestant traditions would build on one another ecumenically, the political sphere would consist of a fusion of liberal and socialist ideas, and the cultural traditions of the Gaelic, Anglo-Irish, Ulster-Scots and English would all be celebrated.²⁰⁶ The Ireland of the future would ‘glory in our mixed inheritance, despising none of it and elevating no part to a position of pre-eminence over the rest’.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, sec.10, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html,

²⁰⁵ Kiberd, ‘Ireland After “Aggiornamento,”’ 435.

²⁰⁶ Garret Fitzgerald, ‘Seeking a National Purpose,’ *Studies: An Irish Quarterly* 53, no. 212 (Winter 1964): 337-351.

²⁰⁷ FitzGerald, ‘Seeking a National Purpose,’ 350.

The critical and egalitarian discourse that arose out of Vatican II was in sharp contrast to the ‘monolithic Victorian ecclesiocracy’ that had prevailed in the Irish Church for the previous century and a half.²⁰⁸ The decidedly ‘Top down’ ecclesial model that had pervaded since the early 19th century, inevitably brought about an insular, unquestioning, piety amongst the laity of Ireland, frequently referred to as ‘the simple faith.’ This understanding of prayer, worship, and morality, rested on an unquestioning obedience to clerical authority and regular reception of the sacraments.²⁰⁹ Tom Inglis writes, that the pervasiveness of this brand of piety ‘meant that many Irish Catholics did not develop an intellectual interest in, or critical attitude towards, their religion’²¹⁰

However, no set of documents, however revolutionary, was going to be able to instantaneously expunge, what Inglis terms the ‘religious habitus’ of Catholics in Ireland, that is, ‘the different ways [Irish Catholics] have lived their religion; their beliefs, their practices [...] how they decide what is good or bad’.²¹¹ The documents of Vatican II were inviting the people of God to take action and ask questions, and tacitly acknowledging that the institutional Church was not the omniscient monolithic entity which had been its primary identity since the Reformation. The invitation to a more ‘adult,’ complex, reflective, faith life that Vatican II was offering was not easily accepted by a nation of believers, who for a century and a half had been conditioned to understand belief in God as intrinsically tied to deference and subordination to the hierarchy.

Father Michael Cleary and *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (Peter Lennon, 1968)

²⁰⁸ Kiberd, ‘Ireland After “Aggiornamento,”’ 435.

²⁰⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 2-3.

²¹⁰ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 2.

²¹¹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 17.

Cinematically the reforms from Vatican II and the simultaneous modernising movement occurring in Ireland, can first be seen in Peter Lennon's 1968 documentary, *Rocky Road to Dublin*. Lennon's essay-style film interrogates multiple aspects of the Republic's political and cultural landscape. As Lennon says in voice-over at the film's beginning, it is 'a personal attempt to reconstruct with a camera the plight of an island community which survived more than 700 years of English occupation, and then nearly sank under the weight of its own heroes and clergy.' The film's pessimistic interrogation of the Ireland of the late 1960s, was obviously quite controversial for its time and, despite a positive reception at the Cannes Film Festival in 1968, the film was not shown for commercial or television release in Ireland until the 2000s.²¹²

The Church is never far from the foreground of the film's critical eye—as evidenced in the opening shot of a schoolboy reciting the definition of 'Original Sin' verbatim from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. With that said, the film's primary ecclesial focus rests on Father Michael Cleary, a diocesan priest of the Dublin diocese, who at the time of the film was in his mid-30s. The sequences focusing on Cleary take up much of the last half of the film.

The Cleary scenes commence with a disjointed montage, showing still photographs of the then Dublin Archbishop, John McQuade, alongside former Taoiseach's Eamon de Valera, and Sean Lemass, followed by a quick succession of photos of various leaders—civil and ecclesial—underscored by Gaelic folk music. The camera then cuts to a collection of families with their backs to the camera entering a Dublin church. These hand-held longshots by French cinematographer, Raoul Coutard, are taken from across the street, as cars are shown driving past, obstructing the camera's view, which gives,

²¹² Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 86.

along with the images of the church-goers turned, backs facing the camera, the audience the sense of being excluded. Over the montage, a voice-over is heard of a priest leading his congregation in the *Confiteor*—the prayer of penitence, which occurs at the beginning of Mass. The prayers of repentance are in turn ‘voiced- over’ by Lennon, who like Inglis, also makes reference to ‘the simple faith’ of the Irish people, saying:

The traditional approach of the clergy has always been not to disturb the ‘simple faith,’ of the people. For generations the priest has enjoyed an undisputed authority in Irish family life, but the ecclesial councils of the early ‘60s have badly shaken the Irish hierarchy. And the old favourite sport of private mockery but public servility to the clergy has among the young, begun to develop into public defiance and challenge. Some of the younger priests with the reluctant consent of the hierarchy are trying a more modern approach.

The camera then cuts to the interior of a hospital, where Father Michael Cleary is shown, in a medium shot, facing front toward the camera. Behind Father Cleary, to the left of the frame can be seen an elderly woman in a nurse’s uniform, while the cleric stands before a group of bedbound female patients. Father Cleary’s casual physicality and loose posturing as he attempts to entertain the women, suggest something more akin to Las Vegas than St. Peter’s. He is tall and lanky, bedecked in clerical attire; his rapidly balding pate betrays the youthful persona he is attempting to construct. He sings the song, *Chattanooga Shoeshine Boy*, a pop song made famous by American country and western artist, Red Foley in the 1950s, but covered by myriad vocalists of the era, including Bing Crosby.²¹³ The camera pans back and forth between two patients, whose beds are across from one another, one in her early twenties, the other elderly. Both women smile appreciatively and attempt to clap along with the music with variable success. However, the image of these two bedbound women listening to a priest sing a secular pop song, has

²¹³ ‘A Bing Crosby Discography,’ *BING* Magazine. International Club Crosby, <http://www.bingmagazine.co.uk/bingmagazine/crosby1bDecca.html>.

less the feel of new innovative pastoral care and more of a vainglorious cleric enamoured with his own perceived vocal talents, performing for, a captive audience.

In some respects, Cleary, the real-life priest—who at the time of filming, was a curate at St. Vincent DePaul parish in the Dublin suburb of Marino—would seem to have much in common with Crosby’s fictional Father O’Malley.²¹⁴ Indeed, Cleary was dubbed the ‘singing priest,’ by the Irish media and was a regular guest on *The Late Late Show* (RTÉ, 1962-). He would eventually croon for an audience of a half-million people at the Youth Mass in Ballybrit, Galway, serving as sort of an ‘opening act’ for Pope John Paul II, during his landmark 1979 visit to Ireland.²¹⁵

At the time of the film, Cleary was clean-shaven, and had yet to grow the beard that would come to be his trademark in the subsequent decades, and thus had a fresh-faced, youthful quality that would seem to make him the ideal poster boy for the young, modern priest. Add to that, he shared the same athletic bent of Crosby’s clerical alter-ego—that all important semiotic shorthand for conveying masculinity in a celibate subject—playing Irish football for Dublin in 1958, the year he was ordained to the priesthood.²¹⁶ Cleary was as much a celebrity as a priest could be in late twentieth century Ireland, hosting a call-in programme on the radio where he vehemently upheld the Church’s teaching on sex, sexuality, divorce and abortion.²¹⁷

With that said, Lennon’s film exposes the inauthenticity of the seemingly ‘modern priest,’ as manifested in Cleary. Coutard, who had previously worked with such titans of the French New Wave as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, demonstrates his

²¹⁴ Phyllis Hamilton with Paul Williams, *Secret Love: My Life with Father Michael Cleary* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Press, 1995), 36.

²¹⁵ Andrew Hamilton, ‘Youth Pray in Stadium,’ *Irish Times*, 18 December 1979.

²¹⁶ Michael O’Regan, ‘Tributes Paid to Father Michael Cleary,’ *Irish Times*, 01 January 1994.

²¹⁷ O’Regan, ‘Tributes Paid to Father Michael Cleary.’

cinematic pedigree with a loose, seemingly casual style, that never undermines the relentless, interrogative eye of the camera. This deceptively ruthless approach allows for the contrivance at hand to surface in a seemingly organic manner, as if the camera were merely an impartial bystander. In the scene in the hospital ward, the camera holds on a shot solely of Cleary's lower body, with his left leg and foot awkwardly attempting to keep time to the music; the camera then cuts to a long shot of Cleary clapping, once more, decidedly out of tempo with the song (Fig. 2.1). The camera's focus on Cleary's awkward physical dissonance with the music's rhythm exposes Cleary's strained uncomfortability, so at odds with the casual ease of the Crosby tradition that he is so clearly trying to evoke.



Fig. 2.1 Rocky Road to Dublin. Father Michael Cleary entertaining in a hospital ward.

Cleary is subsequently shown at a wedding breakfast—to the obvious chagrin of an elder priest in the scene, who actually presided at the ceremony—offering a mini-sermon

on the sanctity of marriage to the bride and groom, all the while smoking a cigarette. There is a long sequence of Cleary observing a set dance, as the camera wanders around the room, observing the various men and woman, shifting from partner to partner. The camera continually returns to the solitary figure of Cleary, looking on from the side, overseeing the goings on, yet also clearly disconnected from the social engagement occurring right in front of him. It is a significant shift from the previous two sequences, wherein he had been the focal point of attention, 'entertaining' an audience. Now, when the complexion of the exchange moves from the performative to the communal, he is rendered irrelevant, due in part to his celibacy, but also from the fundamental contrivance of his 'role' as a 'modern' priest.

This scene is then followed with an on-camera talking head interview with Cleary, where he says that singing is his 'God-given gift.' and he uses it to try to access the younger generation, who look for 'camaraderie' from their priest, someone 'who seems to be on their wave-length.' This is followed by a quick cut to the same set-up, this time with Cleary taking a drag from a cigarette, he pauses, exhales, and then says, 'Well, we're not against sex...' and then goes on to talk about Catholic sexual morality and how sex needs to be placed in its 'proper perspective' and with 'proper restraint.' The camera then cuts again, again to the same set-up, Cleary is now leaning to the right of the frame, while still smoking, he says, 'But celibacy is a problem for the priest. I, personally, would like to be married. I would like to have a family. But this is the sacrifice that's involved for me, in (pause) in accepting the priesthood.' Celibacy did, indeed, prove to be very much a problem for Cleary, as it was discovered upon his death in 1993, that he had been in a

long-term romantic relationship with Phyllis Hamilton, his housekeeper, whom he met while working as a curate at the very hospital he is seen singing at in the film.²¹⁸

The next scene opens on a shot of two little boys sparring with one another in a boxing ring, outside of which we see Cleary, standing with some other young boys watching intently. He offers coaching from the side and sympathetically apes the jabs and punches of the miniature pugilists in the ring. Once more the camera subverts Cleary's attempts to manufacture a particular persona, and the priest is not assisted by his own lanky, hunched physicality. He looks ill at ease and aware of the camera's presence, all the while attempting to look like 'one of the guys' and on the youths' 'wavelength.'

This sequence is almost a replica of a narrative scenario in *The Bells of St. Mary's*, wherein Bing Crosby's, Father O'Malley and Ingrid Bergman's, Sister Benedict, are seen overseeing the pugilistic tutelage of two schoolboys in an attempt to show who can mentor the 'better man.' Coutard's cinematography once again exposes the blatant contrivance of Cleary's attempts at being the 'modern' Irish priest, in this case, by attempting to ape antiquated Hollywood tropes of the young, athletic, 'modern' priest. Cleary's physical uncomfortability in front of the camera betrays any possibility of the scene being taken as an authentic representation and instead discloses the fabricated nature of Cleary's cinematic clerical representation.

The film concludes with the voice-over of a young married woman who speaks of her experience of attempting to practice Church sanctioned birth control, which is *coitus interruptus*, which ultimately led to pregnancy and a subsequent miscarriage. She speaks about seeking guidance on sexual matters from her parish priest and his suggestion that she 'offer it up,' which alludes to the traditional Catholic practice of 'offering up' one's

²¹⁸ Donal Lynch, 'The Twist of Fate that Links Richard Boyd Barrett and Father Michael Cleary,' *Irish Independent*, 19 May 2013.

sufferings to God, for the reparation of sins for oneself and other sinners. She goes on to say that the priests are ‘always on the man’s side,’ and that in the future she does not think she will go to a priest for advice.

The woman speaking is never shown on-screen, as the entirety of her monologue is done in voice-over over shots of various idyllic images of the sea and the landscape of the West of Ireland. The juxtaposition of the panoramic images of the Irish landscape--which as Gerardine Meaney notes have traditionally been identified with Irish feminine archetypes, including ‘Mother Ireland’—with the disembodied voice of an Irish woman speaking about the inadequacy of religious sexual counsel—elucidates both the Church’s reduction of the female to procreative mechanism, as well as Catholicism’s imbrication with essentialist accounts of Irishness.²¹⁹

The film’s highlighting of Father Michael Cleary’s attempts at being a ‘modern’ priest, wherein he appropriates images of the Irish priest from Hollywood cinema, speaks to the difficulties that both Vatican II and the modernising project brought to the Irish Church in the 1960s. Hollywood, which had previously been condemned by the Irish Church, was now being utilized by it for its populist iconography, in an attempt to integrate into a rapidly modernizing Irish society. *Rocky Road to Dublin*’s disclosure of the transparent artifice of Cleary’s attempts at *aggiornamento*, serve as one of the first representations of what would eventually become an extremely hostile relationship between Irish film and television and the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church which, particularly in the American context, had benefitted greatly from its cinematic representation during the Depression and World War II, found itself, with the advent of social realism, subject to

²¹⁹ Gerardine Meaney, ‘Landscapes of Desire: Women and Ireland on Film,’ *Women: A Cultural Review* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 246-247.

re-evaluation, as discourse around institutional authority and its mechanisms grew throughout the West.

Section II: The Question of Mandatory Clerical Celibacy and the 'Problem' of the Female for the Irish Catholic Church of the 1970s and 1980s

Post-Vatican II Ireland and the Ascent of 'Procreation Politics'

The contentiousness regarding the Catholic Church's influence on Irish society was aggregated by the emergence of The Troubles in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. The sectarian and the political components of The Troubles cannot be easily extricated from one another, and Catholicism's quasi-inscription within the Republican cause, could not help but call into question the privileging of cultural nationalism in discourses surrounding the State. Martin McLoone says that the conflicts in the North 'added considerably to the [Republic's] reassessment and rethinking of its nationalist heritage.'²²⁰

Indeed, the conflict in the North engendered a reassessment of the privileging of Catholicism and its teaching within the Republic's legislation, most visibly in the 'special position' given to the Church in the Irish Constitution and its impact on national unity.²²¹ The 'special position' of the Church in Ireland as stated in Article 44 of the Constitution was particularly problematic; indeed according to the *Report of the Committee on the Constitution* assembled in 1967, 'these provisions give offense to non-Catholics and are also a useful weapon in the hands of those who are anxious to emphasize the difference

²²⁰ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 89.

²²¹ Fuller, 'Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,' 314.

between North and South'.²²² In 1972 a referendum was put forth to delete the segment of Article 44 pertaining to the Church's 'special position, with the proposal being passed by 88 percent of those voting'.²²³

The overwhelming margin by which the referendum passed—despite the fact that surveys throughout the 1970s demonstrated that Catholic attitudes, practices and beliefs in the Republic had not diminished—speaks to the changing discourse surrounding the relationship between Church and State.²²⁴ Indeed, the 1970s would arouse numerous debates regarding the legitimacy of Catholic moral propositions being enforced on a religiously heterogeneous population.

However, it would be in the three distinctively Catholic prohibitions: birth control, divorce, and abortion where the growing unease over the Church's influence on the State would manifest. That these particular issues aligned with the concerns of the emergence of the Feminist movement, through organizations such as the Irish Women's Liberation Movement and the Council for the Status of Women in Ireland in the early 1970s is not accidental.²²⁵ As Irish historian, Roy Foster argues, 'the 1970s feminist saw the social values of Catholicism as a major obstacle inhibiting equal opportunities for women in Ireland, however personally devout they might be.'²²⁶ Foster contends that for feminists, what he terms, 'procreation politics,' i.e., birth control, divorce, and abortion, provided the discursive landscape for directly addressing Catholic social power in Ireland.²²⁷

Modernization and the implementation of liturgical and theological reforms in the aftermath of Vatican II, brought with it a change in how Irish Catholics—most

²²² *Report of the Committee on the Constitution* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1967), 47, para. 136.

²²³ Fuller, 'Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,' 314.

²²⁴ Fuller, 'Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,' 314.

²²⁵ Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change from 1970*, 41-42.

²²⁶ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 48.

²²⁷ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 47.

specifically, Irish women—practiced their faith²²⁸ Thus, the publication of the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, or *Of Human Life* (1968), seemed counter-intuitive for a global Church concurrently implementing modernising reforms. *Humanae Vitae* magnified the underlying hostility within a Church, that as Louise Fuller acknowledges, was already having a ‘crisis of authority.’²²⁹ *Humanae Vitae*, written by Pope Paul VI, reaffirmed the previous papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* or *Of Chaste Wedlock* (1930), written by Pope Pius XI, which had prohibited the use of artificial birth-control. *Humanae Vitae* was controversial perhaps most significantly because the pontiff went against counsel, he had received from the commission assembled on the subject.²³⁰

The long-time Dublin Archbishop, John Charles McQuaid’s 1971 Lenten pastoral letter affirmed *Humane Vitae*’s position on artificial birth control, emphatically declaring it, along with divorce, as ‘evil’.²³¹ McQuaid’s endorsement was consistent with the Irish government’s position on Catholic teaching since the advent of the Irish state. The State had followed *Casti connubii*’s guidance with the implementation of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1935, banning contraception. However, the 1970s which brought with it the growth of women in the labour sphere, politics and the media, saw continual challenges to the prohibition of artificial birth control demonstrating the growing dissonance between Irish society and those in position of authority, both civil and ecclesial.²³² In 1973, the ban on contraception was ruled unconstitutional by the Irish Supreme Court, though it would not be legalized within the Republic until the Health

²²⁸ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 40.

²²⁹ Fuller, ‘Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,’ 312.

²³⁰ Fuller, ‘Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,’ 313.

²³¹ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 42.

²³² Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 46-47 and Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935, section 17.

(Family Planning) Act of 1979 and would subsequently be amended more than once in the ensuing years.²³⁴

As the 1970s transitioned into the 1980s, the Church would flex its influence in the social sphere for the last time. This was arguably due, in part, to the visit of Pope John Paul II in September 1979, just two months after the passing of the Family Planning Act. The papal visitation was the catalyst leading to the ‘consolidation of conservative lay Catholic groups who, from that time, increasingly resisted liberalising tendencies.’²³⁵ They would be particularly opposed to Fine Gael leader and soon-to-be Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald’s attempts at constitutional reform appealing to Northern Protestants, in light of the continuing Troubles. As Fuller notes, John Paul II’s anti-materialist preaching echoed Éamon de Valera’s 1943 St. Patrick’s Day speech, where he said:

The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.²³⁶

Thus, the 1980s presented a reversion of sorts for Irish society, as attempts to eliminate legislation prohibiting divorce and abortion, the other two principal issues at stake in ‘procreation politics,’ fell by the wayside. In 1983 the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution was passed which gave the right to life to both mother and unborn child, and according to Foster, ‘showed a decisive difference between Dublin and rural

²³⁴ *McGee v Attorney General* (1974) IR 284.

²³⁵ Fuller, ‘Identity and Political Fragmentation in Independent Ireland,’ 316.

²³⁶ Éamon de Valera, ‘On Language and the Irish Nation,’ 17 March 1943, RTÉ Studios, Dublin.

Ireland, reflecting a dissonance in Church influence.’²³⁷ Three years later in 1986, a proposed amendment to the Irish Constitution removing the prohibition on divorce was rejected in a referendum by a two thirds majority.²³⁸ Thus, the Catholic Church’s influence at the legislative and social level was continually challenged at an unprecedented level throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, with regards to those aspects of its teaching which were in opposition to modernization and the changing role of women in Irish society. As such, the public face of the Catholic Church was vulnerable in a way it had not been in recent history, I would contend that this frailty manifested cinematically in the fissuring of the clerical figure. The cinematic priest would be bisected so as to represent two incomplete parts of a whole in line with the dualistic theology that informed Irish Catholicism, wherein the body and the soul were separated into discrete parts.

The ‘Casey Affair,’ the ‘Rebel Priest’ and the Problem of Clerical Celibacy

The upsurge in public goodwill and the consequent social currency that John Paul II’s 1979 visit had brought to Ireland, all but evaporated as the 1990s commenced, as a series of revelations of clerical indiscretions, soon followed by more alarming revelations of abuse were to mark the decade. At the beginning of May 1992, Eamonn Casey tendered his resignation as Bishop of Galway for what, he cited, as ‘personal reasons.’ In the wake of his resignation the *Irish Times* reported that Casey had been making regular payments for the previous fifteen years to an American woman by the name of Annie Murphy.²³⁹ This was directly followed by the revelation that Casey had fathered a child with Murphy while she was visiting the then Bishop of Kerry, at his home in Inch on the Dingle

²³⁷ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 53.

²³⁸ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 53.

²³⁹ Andy Pollak and Conor O’Clery, ‘Dr. Casey resigns as Bishop of Galway,’ *Irish Times*, 7 May 1992.

peninsula in 1973. A son, Peter was born the following year, and according to Murphy, Casey tried to persuade her to put the child up for adoption, which she refused to do. Instead, Murphy returned with the child to the United States, where she raised the boy with the assistance of her parents and financial support from Casey, who refused to have any personal interactions with the boy.²⁴⁰

After the revelations, Casey lived in exile for the next fourteen years, first in Latin America and then in the south of England.²⁴¹ The ‘Casey affair,’ as it would be called, would have, according to the former *Irish Independent* editor, Gerard O’Regan a ‘convulsing’ effect on the Catholic Church and Irish life. O’Regan says of the aftermath of the ‘Casey affair’:

Prior to that moment the Catholic Church was perceived as a kind of unyielding monolith [...] there may have been a toleration of priests who clearly had an alcohol problem—and indeed there were others who laboured under foibles such as a tendency to gamble too much on horses or greyhounds. But when it came to matters of the flesh our priests, and especially our bishops, simply had to be above reproach. Looking back, when it came to such matters, Ireland was a land of innocence.²⁴²

O’Regan goes on to say that, as shocking as the events of the ‘Casey affair’ were at the time, they would, in hindsight prove to be relatively innocuous in comparison to the revelations yet to come, as he says:

The years would go by, but subsequent controversies would show, that the so-called Casey affair was of a profoundly different hue to the child sex abuse scandals, which would shame much of Irish life. At the end of it all, he was involved in a consenting relationship with another adult.²⁴³²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Clodagh Sheehy, ‘Bishop Casey rocked the Catholic Church with scandal,’ *Irish Independent*, 14 March 2017.

²⁴¹ Sarah McDonald, ‘Years in exile,’ *Irish Independent*, 14 March 2017.

²⁴² Gerard O’Regan, ‘News of the “Bishop Casey affair” Left Catholic Ireland in State of Disbelief,’ *Irish Independent*, 14 March 2017.

²⁴³ O’Regan, ‘News of the “Bishop Casey Affair” Left Catholic Ireland in State of Disbelief.’

²⁴⁴ In 2019, two years after O’Regan’s article was published, it was revealed by both the diocese of Kerry and Limerick that allegations of sexual abuse against Casey had been made. Patsy McGarry, ‘Allegation of Historical Abuse Against Eamonn Casey Confirmed by Kerry Diocese,’ *Irish Times*, 26 March 2019.

As Inglis points out, what was most telling with regards to the Casey situation was how the institutional Church chose to respond, or not respond—as the case may be—as they silenced the bishop and sent him out of the country. As Inglis says:

the Church which for so long had insisted on confession and had extracted the most exact details concerning the nature of sexual sin, was not itself able to confess. Instead of the Church being able to talk openly and honestly about the problems with celibacy and engaging in critical self-reflection about the way in which it has talked and taught about sex, there was a denial of what had happened, especially its significance, and an attempt to discredit the individuals involved.²⁴⁵

Thus, if nothing else, ‘the Casey affair’ demonstrated that sex and sexual morality, which as Inglis notes, the Irish Church had placed an inordinate emphasis on, in its control of both its practice and discourse, became its double-edged sword that brought it to its knees.²⁴⁶

Some five years before the ‘Casey affair’ came to light, Bob Quinn released the small, independent film *Budawanny* (1987), which I will examine later in this chapter. The film was based on the Irish language novel, *Súil le Breith* by Pádraig Standún—published in 1983, which told the story of a priest who falls in love and has a child with his housekeeper.

Standún, a priest and novelist follows in the tradition of Canon Sheehan (né Patrick Augustine Sheehan)—a celebrated Irish author/priest who lived and wrote during the end of the 19th century—in his frequent use of the ecclesia world as a setting for his writing. Unlike, Sheehan, Standún’s novels—including *Súil le Breith*—are frequently written in the Irish language. In 1983, at the time of *Súil le Breith*’s publication, Standún was serving as a curate in Carraroe in the Gaeltacht of Connemara, which fell under the authority of the diocese of Galway, where Eamonn Casey was serving as bishop. In 1985

²⁴⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 218.

²⁴⁶ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 156-157.

Standún publicly criticized Casey in the media regarding the bishop's position on women's sexual autonomy.²⁴⁷ Standún, was called the 'rebel priest' by the *Irish Times*, because of his activism, which included writing a letter to that same publication in support of the divorce referendum up for a vote in 1986, mentioned earlier in this chapter, and led to his being silenced by the archbishop of Tuam.²⁴⁸²⁴⁹

Standún featured frequently in both local and national newspapers for his advocacy throughout the 1980s, including for an arrest due to non-payment of taxes on his automobile, protesting against the poor state of the roads in Connemara. He also spoke out publicly against corporal punishment in schools and advocated for government assistance in the development of Connemara and the Aran Islands where he served as curate at parishes on two of the Irish-speaking islands.²⁵⁰

In his work, Standún was particularly vocal against mandatory priestly celibacy, the subject of *Súil le Breith's* and another of his novels, *Cíocras* published in 1991.²⁵¹ The latter work tells the story of a priest who goes on a hunger strike to protest abstention from sexual activity by the clergy. Standún would reveal in his 2004 Irish language memoir, *Eaglais na gCatacómai*—published in English in 2017 as *Catacomb Church: Portrait of the Artist as an Ageing Priest*—to living with a woman and helping to raise her daughter for twenty-five years during his ministry.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ 'Priest Defends Right to Sterilisation,' *Irish Times*, 14 September 1985.

²⁴⁸ The Diocese of Galway which Bishop Casey governed from 1976 to 1992 is one of five suffragan dioceses within the ecclesiastical province of Tuam, which is overseen by the archbishop of Tuam.

²⁴⁹ Michael Finlan, 'Pro-divorce Priest is Silenced,' *Irish Times*, 20 June 1986.

²⁵⁰ Michael Finlan, 'Priest Before Rebel,' *Irish Times*, 21 January 1993.

²⁵¹ Standún also published an English language version of *Súil le Breith*, titled *Lovers* (1991) and an English language version of *Cíocras*, titled *Celibates* (1993).

²⁵² Pádraig Standún, *Catacomb Church: Portrait of the Artist as an Ageing Priest* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Blessed Hope, 2017), 102-3.

Standún's admission, the revelations about Bishop Casey and Michael Cleary (see earlier in this Chapter), along with public statements against sexual continence by other Irish priests and religious, suggest a much larger clerical faction living 'outside' the Church's stricture's on celibacy in Ireland in the latter part of the twentieth century than would have been suspected.²⁵³ Indeed, in sociologist John A. Weafer's study of Irish diocesan priests ordained between the years 1960 to 2010, he found that those ordained before Vatican II and the two decades after were more inclined to oppose priestly celibacy than those ordained in the 1990s and 2000s, which speaks to the liberalizing influence of the Council, as well, as that same spirit's seeming lack of sustainability.²⁵⁴ By the time of Vatican II, priestly celibacy was already a contentious issue, so much so that it—along with birth control and the reform of the Roman curia—was withheld from discussion by John XXIII's successor, Pope Paul VI at the Council.²⁵⁵

However, the liberalizing spirit that came out of the Council only increased the overt opposition to compulsory sexual continence, as Cahal Cardinal Daly, Archbishop of Armagh, notes in his memoir, when at a meeting of European bishops in the late 1960s, Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens—one of the most prominent figures of Vatican II—called for the abolition of clerical celibacy.²⁵⁶ However, just as the Church hierarchy seemingly went against prevailing wisdom in its opposition to artificial birth control in its promulgation of *Humane Vitae* (see earlier in this chapter), so too was its response to the post-Conciliar discourse surrounding clerical celibacy. Pope Paul VI wrote the encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* ('Of Priestly Celibacy') in 1967, reaffirming the Church's stance by stating that, 'the present law of celibacy should today continue to be linked to the

²⁵³ Michael Finlan, 'Asking the Question on Compulsory Celibacy,' *Irish Times*, 9 May 1992.

²⁵⁴ Weafer, *Thirty-Three Good Men*, 12.

²⁵⁵ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 6.

²⁵⁶ Cahal B. Daly, *Steps on My Pilgrim Journey: Memories and Reflections* (Dublin: Veritas, 1998), 132.

ecclesiastical ministry.’²⁵⁷ While some have linked the significant exodus of men from the priesthood in the twenty years following Vatican II to the Church’s continued insistence on compulsory celibacy, others suggest a confluence of factors, of which sexual continence is just one element²⁵⁸

What is clear is that discourse around priestly celibacy in the post-Vatican II Irish Church, was significantly more contested than what was being presented in the mainstream media. The ‘Casey affair’ proved to be emblematic, not just in terms of the problem of clerical celibacy per se, but also regarding the problem of the Church’s controlling of the discourse surrounding sex and sexuality and the consequent silencing of the dissenting voice.

Of course, absent from the discourses surrounding clerical celibacy in the ecclesial sphere as mentioned above is, at least in Casey or Cleary’s case, the woman. While many of the opponents of clerical celibacy, including Standún, feel justified in their reneging on their promise of celibacy, what they fail to see is the power imbalance inherent in an intimate relationship between a cleric and a layperson, situated as they are within the larger ecclesial context that privileges the authority of the cleric, while simultaneously not recognizing a sexually active clergy. Thus, this problematizes O’Regan’s comment earlier in this chapter where he speaks of O’Casey’s relationship with Murphy as being between ‘consenting adults’.²⁵⁹ This is not to suggest that Casey’s relationship with Murphy

²⁵⁷ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 24 June 1967, sec. 14, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis.html

²⁵⁸ Former Irish priest and journalist, David Rice in his study of men leaving the priesthood, *Shattered Vows: Exodus from the Priesthood* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1990) argues strongly against mandatory celibacy. Sociologist Dean Hogue and his team, working through the National Federation of Priests’ Councils and the Life Cycle Institute of the Catholic University of America, in *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Catholic Priests*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002) argues for a multiplicity of reasons for priestly departures and the decline in vocations.

²⁵⁹ O’Regan, ‘News of “Bishop Casey Affair” Left Catholic Ireland in State of Disbelief.’

should be viewed in the same light as child sexual abuse, however the power dynamics of a relationship between a Catholic woman and a cleric, representing the said patriarchal institution, whose teachings on female sexuality and reproduction are considered reductive and essentialist from a modern Western perspective, is inherently imbalanced. One has to question the degrees of consent given to a high-ranking member of the Catholic hierarchy and a recently divorced twenty-five-year-old woman who had just suffered a miscarriage and sent by her father to Ireland to ‘recover,’ as was the case with Murphy when she met Casey.²⁶⁰ Thus, the problem of celibacy goes much deeper than the sexual health of the cleric themselves.

Budawanny and The Bishop’s Story

Budawanny, released in 1987 and *The Bishop’s Story* released in 1994, are ostensibly the same film, as both share a significant amount of their narrative content with one another. Both films contain the same primary narrative told within the framework of a ‘story within a story’ structure, with the ‘framing story’ being what distinguishes each film from the other. *Budawanny* and *The Bishop’s Story*’s embedded narrative—or ‘story within the story’—use the same footage rendered in the style of a silent film shot in black and white; without diegetic sound; and using intertitles to forward the narrative. Bob Quinn, who made a name for himself in the late 1970s and early 1980s as one of the most prominent figures in the ‘first wave’ of Irish indigenous cinema, directed both films.²⁶¹ Like his contemporary Cathal Black, whose film *Our Boys* (1981) is analysed in Chapter Three of this thesis, Quinn’s work is largely experimental and falls outside the parameters of mainstream filmmaking. In his work, Quinn has shown a particular interest in the

²⁶⁰ Catherine Murphy, ‘Annie Murphy: The Woman Who Rocked the Church-20 Years On,’ *Irish Independent Weekend*, 28 January 2012.

²⁶¹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 131.

Gaeltacht areas of the West of Ireland, where *Poitin* (1979), his feature debut is set, a film which is also the first to be entirely spoken in the Irish language.

Budawanny is an Irish term that translates into English as ‘the monk’s penis,’ which serves both as a scatological reference to its subject matter, as well as the name given to a prominent boulder on Clare Island off the coast of County Mayo, where the film was shot.²⁶² According to Pádraig Standún, the author of *Súil le Breith* on which the film is based, Quinn expressed interest in the author/priest’s debut novel after reading an early English language draft when the director was living in Carraroe, where the cleric was ministering.²⁶³

Budawanny and *The Bishop’s Story* tell the story of a parish priest (Donal McCann) ministering on an island off the West Coast of Ireland. The priest falls in love with Marian (Margaret Fegan), a young woman from his past, who comes to the island looking for him. On the boat on the way to the island, Marian jumps off the boat in an apparent suicide attempt. She is rescued and brought to the priest’s home, the presbytery, to recover. The priest then hires her as his housekeeper, soon after they have sex and attempt to keep their relationship a secret from the small island community. Marian becomes pregnant and the church sacristan (Tomás O’Flaithearta), overhears her telling the priest the news. The priest goes before his congregation and tells them what has happened and that he intends to take care of Marian and her unborn child. Informed of the situation by the local publican, the local bishop (Peadar Lamb) summons the priest to come to the mainland for a meeting, where he proceeds to reprimand him. While the priest is away, the community ostracizes Marian. When the priest returns, he encounters Marian at the dock about to depart back to the mainland; a villager runs up and tells the priest that there

²⁶² Finlan, ‘Priest before Rebel,’ 11.

²⁶³ Standún, *Catacomb Church*, 97.

has been an accident and he leaves her at the quay. It is revealed that the ‘accident’ is the finding of the sacristan’s body after he has committed suicide by hanging. The priest then returns to the presbytery to find a brief note from Marian explaining why she left him.

As stated earlier, it is in the handful of scenes which make up each film’s ‘frame story,’ where they differ. In *Budawanny*, these ‘framing’ scenes are set entirely in the aforementioned bishop’s office, these scenes—unlike the scenes in the rest of the text—are shot in colour and use diegetic sound. The first of these scenes has the bishop dictating a letter to his secretary, a younger priest (Jonathon Ryan), regarding a book sent to him, titled *Budawanny: A Priest’s Tale*, which is the story of the priest and Marian on the island. The ‘framing’ scenes featuring the bishop which follow interspersed throughout the film, are of the bishop alone, reading his letter of response to the priest about his book, as he articulates his concern with the scandal that the priest’s admission has brought and what it will do to the ‘people of God.’ The bishops’ verbal tangents are interspersed with voiceovers that are presented as a coinciding interior monologue on religion and God. These interior monologues reveal the bishop’s atheistic views and his disdain for the ‘simple faith’ of those under his care. He admits to himself that he is not bothered by what the priest has done, but that it was revealed to the public which he finds problematic. This view is consistent with the Catholic Church’s theology of ‘scandal,’ derived from the ‘manualist’ tradition of the preceding three centuries, which allows for the justification of ‘cover-ups’ to avoid scandal among the people of God. As moral theologian Justin Anderson says of the Catholic Church’s preoccupation with scandal, ‘we are in possession of a theology of scandal that seems to indicate gross injustices can be silenced for “the good of the Church.”’²⁶⁴ Thus, the bishop’s concern over permitting

²⁶⁴ Justin Anderson, ‘When Must One Permit Scandals to Arise? A Comparison of Two Traditions,’ *Irish Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 3, (August 2021): 256.

‘scandal’ amongst the people of God overrode all other concerns; foreshadowing the revelations of the next two decades.

Like its predecessor, *The Bishop’s Story*’s ‘frame story’ contain diegetic sound, however, unlike *Budawanny*, the scenes are shot in black and white. With that said, the black and white scenes are shot on 35-millimetre (mm) film stock, as opposed to the inferior quality 16 mm colour stock used in *Budawanny*. These scenes are also shot in multiple locations, both interior and exterior, as opposed to the office interior which served as the singular setting for the prelate’s scenes in the earlier film.

The titular prelate of *The Bishop’s Story* is McCann’s priest character, now represented as older as evidenced by his full, grey beard. McCann’s bishop has voluntarily placed himself in a rehabilitation centre for unspecified reasons. The frame story focuses on his interactions with a younger priest (Ray McBride) who has been placed in the facility, ostensibly for a problem with alcohol, though he subsequently admits to sexually abusing ‘altar boys.’ In his early scenes, McCann’s bishop’s remarks echo the cynicism of Peadar Lamb’s bishop from the earlier film, when he notes to the young priest, while shooting snooker, ‘a simple faith is a luxury. The poor can afford it. A bishop certainly can’t.’

The younger priest then coerces McCann’s bishop into speaking about his past with Marian. As the film transitions to the embedded narrative about the priest’s relationship with Marian, McCann’s bishop supplies, through voiceover, the background of his relationship with Marian, information the first film did not provide. McCann’s bishop says in voiceover that he originally met Marian in London one summer while working with ‘down-and-outs.’ He says that Marian was volunteering at the same place but ‘she had problems, too. It was supposed to be therapy for her.’ Not too long after this

revelation, we see the in the same sepia-toned silent footage from the earlier film, Marian throwing herself off the boat as it makes its way to the island. This is then followed by a scene of the priest, sitting at her bedside in the presbytery, placing his hand on her arm and turning it to reveal to the camera the evidence of intravenous drug use. Though this scene is also shown in *Budawanny*, it's a brief moment and easily overlooked without the knowledge of her history and the history of their relationship.

The subsequent scenes between McCann's bishop and the younger priest in the rehabilitation centre are far more brief and less verbal than the corresponding 'framing' scenes in *Budawanny*, though there are a handful of moments wherein McCann's bishop recites the previous film's bishop verbatim. Toward the end of the film the two men argue when McCann's bishop calls the pope an 'idiot,' whose pronouncements are 'medieval prejudices' that nobody is listening to anymore. This rejection of the pontiff is notable in light of the fact that in the earlier film, Lamb's bishop is frequently shot with a photograph of John Paul II in the background, so as to underscore the bishop's complete absorption into the hierarchy. By contrast, McCann's ridicule of the reigning pontiff within the context of a rehabilitation institute gesture toward the same futile and spurious dissent which marked his attempt to legitimize his relationship with Marian in the island narrative.

The Clerical Figures of *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story* and Space:
Deconstructing the Romantic Legacy of the Western Island.

Throughout this thesis, I examine the use of cinematic space and its relationship to the depicting of the clerical figure. In modern Irish cinema, the geographic emplacement of the priest within the cinematic text serves as a discursive signifier for clerical authority, while also demonstrating its instability. The Irish film's alignment of spatiality and power also serves to disclose the contingency of Catholicism and cultural nationalism. As such,

the potency of clerical authority is informed by the emplacement of the clerical figure within the interior administrative space, which is directly in opposition to that most noteworthy of nationalist signifiers, the rural landscape.

The representations of clergy in both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story* make a clear division between priest and bishop both formally and narratively. *Budawanny* manifests this divide through the clear separation of the two figures in their respective narrative worlds, which intersect only once toward the end of the film, when the priest is summoned to the mainland for a meeting at the bishop's residence. Outside of this, the two clerical figures are sequestered within their own cinematic universes, with the priest in the silent, sepia-toned, natural world of the island and the bishop, filmed in full colour, accompanied by diegetic sound, sequestered within the administrative space of his office.

The Bishop's Story division of priest and bishop is more ontologically complicated, as it depicts the same character within differing temporal contexts. As I stated earlier, the visual distinction between the bishop's 'frame story' and the priest's 'story within a story' is no longer distinguished visually by the contrasting of sepia-toned and colour film but is instead differentiated by the clarity of the image. The black and white 35 mm image of McCann's bishop are more defined than the grainy, 16mm print of his past priestly self from the older footage. As was the case in *Budawanny*, the bishop and priest's respective narratives are formally distinguished by the usage of diegetic sound, however, in *The Bishop's Story*, two-thirds of the way through the film, the actors' speaking, heretofore articulated in intertitles, transitions into dubbed Irish language dialogue. The audial modification, revealing McCann's priest speaking Gaelic, serves as a means of detaching him from his English-speaking self, now a member of the Church hierarchy, on the mainland.

In an ironic turn, the formal rendering of the bishop within the world of colour and sound, situates him within the drab, oppressive confines of an interior administrative space. Quinn utilizes the same perverse cinematic logic in his emplacement of the priest within the traditionally celebrated terrain of the West of Ireland. In doing so the film disallows the audience from experiencing the Western landscape's much-celebrated spectrum of colour, vibrancy, and light; while muting its vast collection of sounds, as well as the voices of the island's denizens. The bishop, by contrast, is allowed to orate on-screen continuously, both interiorly and exteriorly. This is significant in relation to his 'ex-carnate' characterization, which I will address later in this chapter, as he is alone for the majority of his screentime, speaking continuously to no one within the solitary, administrative space.

An analysis of the use of cinematic space in *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, necessitates an analysis of the discourses surrounding the West of Ireland, in particular, the Western Island. Deconstructing the mythology of the West is fundamental to director Bob Quinn's work. Gaelic culture, particularly the Irish language, conjoined as they are to the West within the discourses surrounding romantic mythology, feature largely in Quinn's corpus. Indeed, his first two significant cinematic projects, the 'featurette' *Lament for Art O'Leary* (1975) and the full-length feature, *Poitín* (1979), both take place in the Gaeltacht of Connemara, with the dialogue of both films primarily spoken in the vernacular. Quinn's 1984 documentary series, *Atlantean*, uses the West as a vehicle for interrogating the received notion of a pure Celtic, Irish origin, arguing instead for a heritage rooted in the North African Arab seafarers arriving along the Western seaboard.

Quinn's treatment of the West is informed by three main discourses: the first being the aftermath of British colonization and its implications on the Irish economy, particularly in relation to lack of employment opportunities in working class and agrarian areas. As film

scholar Jerry White notes, Quinn's work is concerned with the 'legacy of colonialism,' as it manifests in the 'oppressions of living within a rural community.'²⁶⁵

The second discourse for Quinn is American culture's—particularly Hollywood's—reification of the West as romantic idyll, as depicted in a multiplicity of films throughout the second half of the twentieth century, with *The Quiet Man* (Ford, 1952) being the most notable. As Quinn himself notes, 'Ireland has long been a figment of the American imagination.'²⁶⁶

The third discourse is the nationalist movement's appropriation of the West and its accompanying mythology for their own ideological ends. The 'myth of the West,' as Irish geographer Patrick Duffy says, 'was a central motif in the Irish cultural nationalism which evolved towards the end of the nineteenth century.'²⁶⁷ These three discursive elements work in consonance in Quinn's fictive cinematic output which is primarily concerned with illustrating the grim 'reality' of life in the Western Gaeltacht in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In the case of Quinn's clerical films—released after his first two Irish language efforts—he moves even further west and off the mainland. The locus of both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story's* 'story within a story,' is an unnamed island adjacent to the western coast, mirroring Ireland's own geographic placement with Great Britain. The island, imagined or otherwise, has been a principal motif in the literary tradition of Ireland going back to the stories of the *Fiannas*, the warriors of the Ossianic cycle, who

²⁶⁵ Jerry White, 'The Films of Bob Quinn: Toward an Irish Third Cinema,' *Cineaction*, 1995, 3.

²⁶⁶ Gabriel Byrne, et al., 'Irish Cinema at the Crossroads: A Filmmakers' Symposium,' *Cineaste* 24, no. 2/3 (1999): 73.

²⁶⁷ Patrick J. Duffy, 'Writing Ireland: Literature and Art in the Representation of the Irish Place,' in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 67.

travelled to the ‘Isles of the Blessed,’ which include *Tír na nÓg*, the island paradise.²⁶⁸ Real islands were also represented within the universe of the Gaelic myth, notably, the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of Invasions), which tells of the *Fir Bolg* people being overthrown by the invading *Tuatha Dé Danann* and fleeing to the Aran Islands for refuge.²⁶⁹

As Christianity overtook the mainland, ecclesiastics saw the western islands as ‘fit sites for a symbolic stand, at [the Church’s] outermost purchase on Christendom and the known world, against the forces of paganism and darkness.’²⁷⁰ Indeed icons of Irish Christianity, such as St. Enda and St. Brendan, saw the Aran and Blasket Islands, along with Skellig Michael, as ideal settings for monastic communities and hermitages utilizing extreme ascetic practices.²⁷¹ As J.W. Foster notes the islands ‘carried for early Irish Christians associations with purgatory, martyrdom and apocalypse.’²⁷²

At the end of the nineteenth century—particularly after the establishment of the Gaelic League—the western islands became the symbolic locus of a ‘reborn’ Irish state. Historian and literary critic, John Wilson Foster notes that this was due to the islands being ‘as far away from England’ as possible, primarily Irish speaking, and relatively untouched by invasion; thus, providing a link with an ‘unconquered Celtic Ireland.’²⁷³

The western islands’ remoteness afford them the unique geographic status of being ‘west of the West,’ as it were. Declan Kiberd writes of the islands’ perceived geographical distance when noting their influence on the Irish Literary Revival, ‘These

²⁶⁸ John Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance,’ *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 66, no. 264 (Winter 1977): 262.

²⁶⁹ Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart,’ 262

²⁷⁰ Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart,’ 263.

²⁷¹ Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart,’ 263.

²⁷² Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart,’ 263.

²⁷³ Wilson Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart,’ 264.

islanders and Gaeltacht-dwellers truly were the last Europeans, perched precariously on those very fastnesses where a whole civilization ran out of continent.²⁷⁴ The western islands' legacy in the Irish literary tradition is perhaps most visible in the work of Revivalist playwright, John Millington Synge, who was greatly inspired by time spent on the Aran island of Inishmaan on and off over the course of several years.²⁷⁵ Synge's initial interest in the islands was encouraged by reports of the 'primitive' nature of the islands by fellow Revivalist W.B. Yeats and British poet, Arthur Symonds, after they toured the Aran Islands together in 1896.²⁷⁶ The Dublin born, Anglo-Irish, Synge made the western islands the setting for his one-act play *Riders to the Sea* (1904), and immortalized them in his travelogue *The Aran Islands* (1907). What appealed to Synge and his fellow Revivalists about the western islands was their primeval, utopian nature, as Foster writes:

the interest of the Irish writers sprang largely from the appearance there [the islands] of passionate communality such as we had all lived before cities, industries, class, and warring systems—before, in fine, the separateness of self. Hence the descriptions of the islands themselves not as impoverished anachronisms but as places primitive, archaic, prehistoric, medieval, pagan, even heroic and mythic.²⁷⁷

Morash and Richards contend that Synge and his fellow Revivalists' depictions of the idealized, 'primitive' western island, are not necessarily as straightforward as they appear, as the texts of works such as *Riders to the Sea* continually gesture toward capitalist production and commerce on the mainland, thus implicitly acknowledging the geographical interconnectedness of Ireland even at that time.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 287.

²⁷⁵ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 169.

²⁷⁶ Heather Clark, 'Leaving Barra, Leaving Inishmore: Islands in the Irish Protestant Imagination,' *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 30.

²⁷⁷ Wilson Foster, 'Certain Set Apart,' 268.

²⁷⁸ Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

The romanticised image of the western islands was sustained and nourished with the release of, what was to become their most high-profile cinematic depiction, Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934). The film is a fictionalized, documentary-style, account of one family's life on the islands just off of Galway Bay. Luke Gibbons refers to the film, with its emphasis on the eponymous protagonist's (Tiger King) battles against the violence of nature, as exemplifying the notion of 'hard primitivism,' a type of ascetic 'romanticism' in opposition to the 'soft primitivism' of a film such as *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952). 'It is in hard primitivism' Gibbons contends, 'that the drift toward realism can be detected, not as a means of challenging romanticism but, as a way of authenticating it, of adding credibility to what are otherwise characteristically romantic situations.'²⁷⁹ Thus, the film's emphasis on the hardships of island life and its documentary-style attempt to replicate it, do not in fact, provide a mimetic antidote to the Technicolor greens, stage Irishmen and feisty colleens of Ford's whimsical western idyll, but instead present merely a different prism for viewing through the same romantic lens, this time reaffirming the mythic image of a primeval, pre-invasion, Gaelic universe.

Man of Aran, though, well-received in nationalist circles, was never free of criticism for the liberties it took with 'reality' in its insistence on perpetuating the romantic mythology of the western island. As Martin McLoone points out, *Man of Aran* has been problematic since its initial release, in no small part because of its 'ambivalent relation to objective reality and the impression that it gives, not of myths being challenged but myths being reinforced.'²⁸⁰ The film's release coincided with the installation of de Valera's Fianna Fáil government which 'was reinvigorating the ideals of cultural nationalism and

²⁷⁹ Luke Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema,' in Kevin Rockett, Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1988), 200.

²⁸⁰ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 38.

[*Man of Aran*] provided an almost perfect cinematic expression of the ascetic romanticism that lay behind this whole project.’²⁸¹

Just as he did with the west of the mainland in his earlier films, Quinn deconstructs the western islands’ romantic mythology, particularly their image as remote, premodern idylls, both formally and narratively. As noted earlier, the film ‘mutes’ the cinematic universe of the island aurally, but also ‘silences’ it visually, as well. The landscape shots withhold from the audience the visual spectacle of the natural world so intrinsic to the island’s romantic mythos. Instead, as in Quinn’s previous film set in the Irish West, *Poitín*, the ‘primitive’ beauty of the island is occluded, visually represented in grainy, sepia tones, in direct contrast to the bright, visual splendour of the landscape shown in *The Quiet Man*. Similarly, much of the island footage of both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop’s Story* is comprised of interior shots of domestic and ecclesial spaces, or prosaic shots of roadways and the quay. The images of the island’s terrain and the surrounding sea are subdued and unremarkable, in stark contrast to the lush black and white images of the violently awesome, natural setting presented in *Man of Aran*.

The muting of the diegetic sound in the island footage silences the priest and Marian, on multiple levels, and disallows that other sensory trope of island mythos: the sound of the sea. However, as I mentioned earlier in this section, the addition of dubbed Irish language dialogue in the late-narrative island sequences of *The Bishop’s Story*’s disclose the muting of the Irish language from the earlier film. The film’s unwieldy, formal interpolation of the Irish language during the last portion of the footage, draws attention to its imposition on the heretofore, silent, island world. The overt contrivance of the insertion of the Irish language within the cinematic text is in consonance with the film’s

²⁸¹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 38.

overarching deconstruction project, wherein the romantic mythology of the western island is subverted through the visual and auidial mechanisms that have traditionally served to reaffirm the image of the island as a primeval idyll.

On the narrative level, the film dismantles the romantic mythology in its opening scene on the mainland quay, wherein Marian is shown asking the men working on the boat if the priest is on the island. This is then followed by a shot of Marian on the boat leaving the mainland and heading toward the island. This early sequence illustrates Marian's investment in the image of both the priest and the island itself, as 'romantic idyll,' serving as an escape from 'reality,' i.e., life as a recovering addict on the mainland. The 'flight' to the island, is a trope of Irish narrative, so it is hardly a stretch to suggest that Marian's desire for escape with the priest on the island is not disconsonant with the 'escape' she received from intravenous drug use.

By situating the opening scene on the mainland, the film also, in turn, situates its audience from the 'visitor's or 'outsider' perspective in relation to the island. The audience, along with Marian must journey from the mainland to the island. This initial situating of the narrative on the mainland never allows the island to have its own cinematic 'universe,' but instead necessitates an implicit referral back to its larger island neighbour. This scene along with the 'frame story' scenes in the bishop's office, and the scenes of the priest departing and returning to the island, preclude the island from being 'remote,' the mainland is always lurking. An idyll cannot be an idyll if civilization and reality is proximate, thus signifying the island's necessary connection and dependence on the mainland.

As Marian's relationship with the priest physically develops and she becomes pregnant, it is made clear through her continual scenic placement within the domestic

space of the presbytery that the island will not be an 'escape' from the modern world, where she can bask in the liberty that the romantic mythology of the island promises. Instead, Marian is relegated to the domestic, interior space of the presbytery which will soon be followed by motherhood and domestic partnership as mundane and typical as found in any modern Western society.

Marian's relegation to the interior, domestic space is more fraught due to the island's remoteness, and its assimilation of the mainland's ethos. Thus, she is ostracized for being the pregnant partner of a celibate priest in an insular community which views such behaviour as taboo. Marian's isolation is underlined in a scene at the pub after the priest has gone to the mainland to meet the bishop. Marian waits to be served at the bar, only to be ignored by the publican and the other patrons before finally walking out of the establishment in disgust. The scene demonstrates that the bourgeois ethical code of the mainland is very much enmeshed within island society and eradicates any romanticized notions of the island as being removed from modern moral conventions. This echoes Morash and Richards' reading of Synge's western island setting in *Riders to the Sea*, 'this is no prelapsarian Ireland. Instead, we can read [the island] as a peripheral location permeated and encroached upon by an expanding world...'²⁸² Indeed, the future of Marian's life on the island, as mother of the parish priest's child and de facto wife, is arguably more alienating and oppressive than the reality of her lived existence as an addict attempting to recover on the mainland. This is also consonant with the notion of the 'island' as analogue for Ireland, itself.

The priest is primarily situated both within the interior, domestic space of the presbytery and the interior, public space of the church. The priest is infrequently located

²⁸² Morash and Richard, *Mapping Irish Theatre*, 108.

outdoors, however when he is placed within the island landscape, he is shown riding his motorbike, a decidedly ‘modern’ mode of transportation, especially in comparison with the ‘native’ islanders shown traversing on foot. In one scene the priest rides his motorbike to the cottage of a local family for a visitation. Such visits, Inglis points out, were a ‘crucial element in maintaining the Church’s monopoly of the religious field’ in Ireland well into the latter part of the twentieth century.²⁸³ Arriving at the cottage, the priest is greeted by a young father building a currach (Oliver O’Malley), and his adolescent son (Dominick O’Malley), who is excited to get the opportunity to ‘play’ with the priest’s motorcycle. The juxtaposition of the priest’s ‘modern’ means of transportation with the ‘primitive’ hand-built watercraft differentiates the cleric from the island’s denizens, a delineation which is further underscored when the meagre, interior space of the traditional white-washed, thatch-roofed cottage that the man shares with his pregnant wife (Áine O’Malley) and three children is revealed a few moments later. The cramped, domestic space for the soon-to-be family of six, is decidedly different from the spacious interior of the modern, two-storey house which serves as the presbytery.

Throughout the island narrative, the priest is situated within the traditional clerical spaces which are primarily interior, domestic and ecclesial, but outside of the traditionally masculine social space of the pub. The island community that Quinn depicts is consistent with most rural Irish communities of the twentieth century, in its insularity and clericalism within particular spatial contexts, such as the domestic and ecclesial, as Inglis has noted.²⁸⁴ As the parish priest he is both with and above the community, however this is contingent on the fulfilment of his priestly duties, both publicly and privately. Thus, after his public declaration of his affair with Marian, his pastoral authority erodes. This is

²⁸³ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 48.

²⁸⁴ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 48.

demonstrated in a scene wherein a number of men in the community start a brawl, including the sacristan and the young father, both of whom the priest was seen benevolently ministering to earlier in the film. The scene echoes a scene early in *The Quiet Man* which I discuss in Chapter One, wherein the film's protagonist Sean Thornton (John Wayne) and his nemesis, Will Danaher (Victor McLaglen) almost come to blows before being decisively shut down by the parish priest (Ward Bond). McCann's priest similarly tries to halt a physical altercation between the men, but they pay no attention to him, and he is ultimately knocked to the ground in the brawl. In the last scene of the film, when the priest encounters Marian on the dock about to depart, he is simultaneously pulled away by the villagers to see to the sacristan's suicide, representing the choice he is forced to make between being the community's priest and being an embodied subject. His decision to leave Marian at the quay and let her return to the mainland, signifies his recognition of the contingency of his clerical authority within the island community.

The 'Excarbate/Incarnate' division of the Bishop and Priest in *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*

I would contend that the spatial placements of the priest and bishop characters in both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story's*, conjoined as they are to the formal constraints of their respective cinematic worlds, serve as a means of reinforcing the disembodied and embodied characterization of their respective clerical positions. In both films the bishops' characterizations manifest cinematically, as what Kearney would term 'excarbate,' that is, 'flesh become word,' while the priest character is 'incarnate,' that is, 'word become flesh.'²⁸⁵ What both films manifest in their excarnate/incarnate fracturing of ecclesial classifications is the intrinsic limitations of the cinematic clerical figure, which mirrors

²⁸⁵ Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 2.

the dualist theology from which they emerge. The ‘excarnate’ bishop, whose pastoral responsibility is for the care of the people and clergy of his dioceses, is instead confined to the world of the mind, as represented by the administrative realm of the office space. The depiction of the ‘incarnate’ priest proves to be a failed experiment as it were, for even after he is ‘relegated’ outside of mainstream society, as represented by the western island, his incarnate subjectivity proves to be unsustainable, as evidenced by the last scene of the film.

The priest demonstrates the multivalent problem of clerical embodiment. He demonstrates what Richard Kearney refers to as, ‘carnal hospitality’, which manifests in a multiplicity of embodied exchanges, but most clearly so in ‘touch,’ where ‘the most basic act of exposure to others occurs.’²⁸⁶ Kearney holds that touch is the most humane of all senses, ‘for it alone involves a “doublesensation” of touching and being touched, even in the most inhospitable of circumstances.’²⁸⁷ With that said, while there can be little question about the incarnate nature of McCann’s priest; what does need to be examined is the meaning behind his physical exchanges with Marian. Kearney, using the handshake as an example of carnal exchange, points out, there is a ‘hermeneutic responsibility to discern between handshakes—those that express hospitality and those that mask hostility [...] and what is true of the handshake is true of other carnal gestures of hospitable portent.’²⁸⁸

In both films, the priest’s apparent carnal hospitality is demonstrated through touch in his first scene with Marian, having taken her into his home, the presbytery, to convalesce after jumping off the ferry, he goes and sits at her bedside as she rests. The intertitles

²⁸⁶ Richard Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality: Between Word and Touch,’ *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion* 1, no. 1 (2019): 79.

²⁸⁷ Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality,’ 80.

²⁸⁸ Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality,’ 85.

inform the audience that he tells her she can stay as long as she likes. The camera then cuts to a shot of his hand resting on her arm. He then gently turns her arm over to reveal the fresh scars of intravenous drug use. As stated previously in this chapter, in *The Bishop's Story*, this visual revelation is given more significance by McCann's voiceover, where he speaks of meeting Marian in London and her work with him there as 'therapy' for her 'problems,' which evidently include addiction.

The scene as a standalone speaks to a 'doublesensation' as both the priest and Marian are touched and touching one another. His physical touch, placing his hand on her arm and literally bringing her wounds into the light, would seem to be a moment of healing (Fig. 2.1) It could also be argued that Marian's embodied presence and tangibility provides 'healing' for the celibate priest, were this scene an isolated instance of their physical interactions. However, even this scene, which occurs before their physical relationship is visible onscreen, is problematic due to the unseen narrative that has preceded it, which illustrates an inherent power imbalance in the relationship which does not allow so much for a 'doublesensation,' of touch, but instead, what Kearney terms a 'one-way sensation of violence.'²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Kearney, 'Double Hospitality,' 85.



Fig. 2.1 The Bishop's Story: The priest's (Donal McCann) touches Marian's (Margaret Fegan) wounded arm.

Marian is not a 'stranger' to the priest, they have a history and more significantly he is aware of her vulnerabilities. Flashback scenes of their time in London later in the film, show the priest placing his hand on her neck, suggesting a history of physical intimacy, preceding their time on the island. Along with her drug problem, Marian is shown in her first moments onscreen exhibiting troubling behaviour, as she is shown throwing herself off of the boat and into the water, in what appears to be a half-hearted suicide attempt.

After Marian's convalescence in the presbytery ends, the priest offers her a position as his live-in housekeeper. They seal the arrangement with a handshake, that embodied exchange, which along with the kiss, Kearney contends are 'paramount symbols of peace and hospitality.'²⁹⁰ However, they can also be easily subverted, as he says, 'handshakes are easily perverted or abused as ceremonial clichés, malevolent contracts, devious strategies or power plays of privilege. Who has the right to shake hands with whom? To

²⁹⁰ Kearney, 'Double Hospitality,' 80.

what purpose and with what motives—open, hidden, or ulterior?’²⁹¹ I would argue that Marian and the priest’s handshake, a gesture that not only symbolizes peace and hospitality but also ‘chaste concord’, is in ‘bad faith,’ as they are both aware that their employer/employee relationship is contrived and will quickly, turn/re-turn to a relationship of sexual intimacy.

The inevitable ‘love making’ scene is both cliched and troubling, set as it is within the context of a night-time thunderstorm straight out of the Irish gothic novel. Marian is frightened by the storm and runs to the priest lying in bed and into his arms. The screen fades to black as his embrace tightens around her. Once more, Marian—in keeping with the traditional genre convention of the gothic novel—is portrayed as a feminine victim in need of protection. Yet, this sequence, in light of the previous information revealed about the character, does not serve its intended ‘romantic’ aim but rather, further underlines Marian’s status as a vulnerable adult. In the scene, she is frightened by a storm outside and runs to a man for protection. That she is depicted as incapable of self-care, makes the ensuing—and off-camera—sexual encounter and the priest’s role in it, problematic bordering on predatory.

The ensuing ‘morning after’ scene consists of Marian sheepishly drinking a cup of tea at the breakfast table, with the priest entering and tossing his hands in the air, as the intertitles read, ‘So much for celibacy.’ Marian laughs, followed by a close-up of the priest covering his face with his hands, followed by a reverse over-the-shoulder shot of her looking at him affectionately. The flippancy of the priest’s attitude toward the event in relation to both his own vocational promises, but also to the well-being of a vulnerable adult, speaks to both the power the clergy in Ireland presumed to possess and the heedlessness it engendered.

²⁹¹ Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality,’ 84.

In the scene which follows, the priest and Marian are shown on the beach with a local girl (Susan O’Flaherty) with special needs and her dogs. The priest gestures towards one of the canines with a chain hanging from his neck, as the intertitles read: ‘Sometimes my collar feels like that...’ There is another intertitle soon after which reads: ‘But there is the odd consolation,’ as the camera then cuts to a shot of his hand reaching into her coat pocket and taking her hand (Fig. 2.2)



Fig. 2.2 The Bishop’s Story: The priest (Donal McCann) places his hand inside Marian’s (Margaret Fegan) pocket.

Once again, there is a lack of reciprocity in the physical interaction between the two, as the priest’s placement of his hand in Marian’s pocket has an invasive and presumptuous quality to it. The predatory nature of the priest’s ‘touching’ of Marion is magnified both in his comment about his vocation, as well as the placement of the girl with special needs within the scene. Marian and the girl serve as an ersatz wife and child for the priest—indeed a local youth drinking beer nearby with the sacristan, observes of the trio: ‘That’s a quare Holy Family.’ There is also the matter of Marian and the girl

mirroring one another in their vulnerability—the young girl will subsequently go missing at a later point in the film, having the villagers up in an all-night vigil, from which the priest is noticeably absent.

The priest's preoccupation with his own vocational 'problem' and his indifference to the needs of the vulnerable woman beside him—an addict who has sought him out on a remote island while attempting suicide in the process—give a sinister quality to his hand placement. Marian allows him to be 'incarnate,' through her he is cinematically embodied, she is a solution to his problem of celibacy. Conversely, he is a problem for her well-being, as he demonstrates no concern for the multiple power imbalances at play in their relationship: priest/layperson, employer/employee, vulnerable adult/caretaker.

When Marian tells the priest that she is pregnant, his response is, once again, flippant, and insensitive, as he asks her, 'Is it mine?' She responds to this by physically attacking him, though he holds her at bay, at which point they embrace, as the intertitles read: 'Don't worry, I'll look after you.' Once more the scene plays out like the worst kind of melodrama and underlines Marian's emotional instability. The scene also raises the question as to how the priest will care for her, when he has been oblivious to her needs, outside of the physical realm, up to that point.

In spite of the insertion of melodramatic narrative tropes, I would argue that Quinn is aware of the problems inherent in Marian and the priest's relationship and its consequent referral to the societal insolubility of the incarnate priest. As Martin McLoone says of Quinn: 'His films offer no final resolutions, indeed pretend to no definitive statements, but in their scepticism, irony and self-deflating humour, they offer important instances of

the kind of conditional negotiations with tradition and modernity which is characteristic of the best indigenous films.’²⁹²

Quinn demonstrates the impossibility of mutuality between Marian and the priest in part by its muting of diegetic sound. As Kearney notes, ‘sound and touch are ontogenetically primary, their synergy providing a base camp of bodily sensibility and security throughout our lives [...] touch and sound have always been so crucial to bonding and caring.’²⁹³ The withholding of sound from the priest and Marian’s scenes together, filled as they are with tactile exchanges, speaks to the imbalance of power and the lack of reciprocity inherent in their relationship. Neither character can be ‘heard’—nor does the priest appear to have any interest in ‘hearing’ what Marian has to say, as he is preoccupied with his own need for physical intimacy.

The film’s conclusion also gestures to its awareness of the problematic nature of Marian and the priest’s relationship. He encounters her preparing to depart the island as he steps onto the quay returning from his meeting with the bishop on the mainland. He is told by one of the villagers that there has been an accident, as he sees Marian standing on the quay with her suitcase, the intertitles read her saying to him: ‘It’s alright. I’ve left a note.’ He hesitates for a moment, but then rushes off to the accident. When he returns to the presbytery after finding the sacristan dead, he sees the note, which is scribbled on the back of an envelope and reads: ‘It’s my life too’ with her signature underneath. Marian’s note can be read as her acknowledgement of the normative similitude of island society with that of the mainland and thus, the impossibility of the priest and her living openly with a child on the island, where they would always be regarded as a ‘quare holy family.’

²⁹² McLoone, *Irish Film*, 134.

²⁹³ Kearney, *Touch*, 28-29.

I would also suggest that the paucity of words used by Marian in both the intertitles and her note to the priest, coupled with the entire ‘story within a story,’ being without diegetic sound, allows for a reading of the film as intentionally muting the ‘voice’ of the female, even within the perspective of the soundless cinematic world in which she inhabits. The note’s message conveys her awareness of her diminished voice and visibility which, along with its brevity and placement on the back of a used envelope, serve to affirm. Quinn juxtaposes the paucity of language used by Marian with the verbosity of the bishop within the frame narrative. The seemingly interminable, patriarchal voice of the bishop is held up and against the silence of the woman.

Indeed, both Peadar Lamb and Donal McCann’s bishop figures’ loquaciousness defines their characterizations. Their depictions serve to underline Kearney’s point that the ‘optocentric’ perspective holds a privileged position in the Western tradition. Kearney holds that in the West, from the Classical era onward, there has been a ‘dichotomy between the “intellectual” sense of vision and the “animal” sense of touch.’²⁹⁴ This dichotomy manifests cinematically in the ordered, confined interiors of the institutional spaces which both bishops find themselves situated. Both prelates verbally interact with another cleric within their narratives, yet the entirety of their exchanges revolve around ‘theological discourse,’ with Peadar Lamb’s bishop using his secretary/priest as a sounding board for expressing his own hypotheses about religion. Indeed, in the realm of both Quinn’s films, the vocational teleology of the bishops, the representative of ecclesial authority, manifests as the ‘flesh becoming word.’ This ‘excarnate turn’ is accompanied by an atheistic shift.

²⁹⁴ Kearney, *Touch*, 36.

Budawanny and *The Bishop's Story*, in their depictions of their respective bishop figures, can be read as making a figurative argument that the excarnate teleology of the prelate's vocation is conjoined with an explicit rejection of the 'simple faith' and by extension, what Kearney refers to as 'sovereign theism,' which has marked Irish Catholicism for the previous two hundred years. Tom Inglis defines the subject practicing the 'simple faith' as:

one who received the sacraments regularly and who followed the rules and regulations of the Church. Innocence was regarded as a virtue. People were not encouraged to question their religion or their priests. The appropriate responses to any questions one might have were learnt off by heart in the catechism. One could be forgiven for breaking the rules of the Church but questioning them was a different matter.²⁹⁵

This hierarchical understanding of faith led to extreme imbalances in power between the clergy and the laity. The 'simple faith' was necessarily informed by a theology disproportionate in its verticality, or what Kearney refers to as 'sovereign theism.' Kearney defines such a theology as 'the belief in an omnipotent God [...] the divine grand master who sustained triumphalist notions of religion for millennia.'²⁹⁶

Kearney posits that the God of sovereign theism is the God of 'metaphysics and theodicy', the very God that Nietzsche and Marx declared 'dead' as the twentieth century commenced.²⁹⁷ Greek metaphysics has been the cornerstone of Christian theology since the time of the early Church Fathers, and its inherent susceptibility to dualism has been a fundamental reason why Christianity, and Catholicism in spite of being, nominally, a religion of incarnation, is susceptible to the division of soul and body. The 'sovereign theism' which the bishops signify is represented in the scene where Lamb's bishop is

²⁹⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 2.

²⁹⁶ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2010), 58.

²⁹⁷ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 59.

dictating a letter to his secretary, wherein he states that it is his job to ‘make religion work.’ He goes on to explicate the dualism inherent in the sovereign theism he upholds, when he says that he is not allowed ‘fervent emotion’ and that he must stand back and observe things ‘rationally,’

I would argue that the personal ‘loss of faith’ articulated by the bishops is consistent with, what Kearney refers to as an absolutist atheistic negation of sovereign theism. Kearney contends that ‘sovereign theism’ and the ‘absolutist atheist negation’ are integrally connected to one another, with one, the latter, the inevitable fulfilment of the former.²⁹⁸ Both bishops refers to religion as a ‘complete myth.’ Towards the end of *Budawanny*, the prelate gives a definitive statement on the bishop’s role as one that requires an intelligence that precludes faith when he says, ‘Someone must hold the line, must sustain the system of belief. Must do so. Even without the support of that belief. I think one is entitled to some credit for that. For continuing on in the middle of this (pause) void.’ The bishop is in a sense making a ‘martyr’ of himself and his own nihilistic atheism—necessarily born out of sovereign theism—for the sake of civil order and the common good.

While it can be argued the bishop figure in *The Bishop’s Story* has not completed the ‘excarnate turn,’ the prelate in *Budawanny* has fulfilled his vocational *telos*, moving from ‘flesh to word.’ Lamb’s prelate’s full disembodiment is demonstrated through his placement solely within the interior administrative space, which serves as a spatial analogue for the interior area of the mind which he inhabits. This mental spatialization is further underlined in the voiceovers of the bishop’s thoughts throughout his scenes, which serve to reveal the ‘truth’ beneath the words he is speaking. Lamb’s bishop is very much

²⁹⁸ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 16.

within the world of Platonic ideals, wherein abstraction, theory, and ideas have subsumed relationality and the sensate.

McCann's bishop is in the process of fulfilling his vocation's teleology, which is the 'flesh made word.' Unlike Lamb's bishop, McCann's bishop has continual interactions with the younger priest. He also refers to the reigning pontiff, (at the time of both films, the theologically conservative John Paul II was Pope) as an idiot at one point in their conversation, a veiled attempt at rejecting the hierarchy of which he has already been subsumed. By voluntarily placing himself in the rehabilitation facility, he has disallowed himself from spontaneous interactions with the Other. His lone interactions within the film are with an admitted sex offender, therefore necessitating a physical distancing, which coupled with the bishop's hierarchical status prevent any sort of intimacy.

McCann's bishop frequently echoes the bishop from *Budawanny*, including his rejection of the 'simple faith,' demonstrating his movement toward Nietzschean atheism and by extension a disembodied notion of ministry. Furthermore, he has no interest in the other priest's difficulties, indeed when he is told about the younger cleric's affinity for altar boys his response is 'there are worse things...like getting caught.' This line not only speaks to the callousness of McCann's bishop, but also to the preoccupation with 'scandal' which is discussed earlier in this chapter, consonant with the sovereign theism with which he has been indoctrinated. This line also gestures to the intrinsically pragmatic nature of the prelate's role, as it is, as Lamb's bishop argues in *Budawanny*, his job is to sustain that system of belief because, 'ordinary people do not understand the social necessity of religion. That laws are useless without the foundation of religious belief.' As such, the bishop holds that it is for the common good to make 'religion work' in society, regardless of his own personal beliefs.

Ultimately the clerical representations in *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story* serve as figurative demonstrations of the mind/body divide that is fundamental to the sovereign theism that is inscribed within Irish Catholicism. The films' depiction of the role of bishop as being the 'flesh made word,' while simultaneously demonstrating the role's incompatibility with the very 'faith' it promulgates, provide an 'excarinate' template for clerical roles in Irish film for years after. The excarnate characterization of the bishop in both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, serve as symbol and sign for the Church hierarchy in Ireland and would subsequently become the model for the majority of clerical cinematic representations throughout the Celtic Tiger era.

The depiction of the priest in both films as incarnate is intentionally problematized in order to illustrate the incompatibility of celibacy with an embodied ministry that necessitates empathy and compassion. The embodied priest also foregrounds the limits of the extreme patriarchal model of governance utilized by the Church. The imbalance of power between the priest and Marian does not allow for a relationship of reciprocity of 'doublesensation,' but instead manifests as a one-sided exercise in coercion. Both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story* locating of the priest on the western island deconstructs received conceptions of the island as a primeval utopia, unencumbered by the detritus of colonialism and modernity, by demonstrating its assimilation of the societal norms of the mainland.

Conclusion

Vatican II, along with the modernizing project that gained momentum in Ireland during the 1960s loosened the stranglehold the Catholic Church had on Irish society over the previous century. The council's emphasis on a more 'horizontal' theology, wherein the 'people of God' were given more agency in ecclesial matters, was in direct opposition

to the ‘vertical’ theology that had grounded the Catholic Church in Ireland for at least two centuries and had been fundamental to the perpetuation of the ‘simple faith,’ that had sustained the Church’s authority.

The Church’s place of prominence in Peter Lennon’s documentary, *Rocky Road to Dublin*, spoke to its imposing position within Irish society, at large. However, the film’s focus on ‘singing’ priest, Father Michael Cleary, illustrated the increasing problems the Church was facing in an ever more modern society. Cleary’s continual on-camera attempts to ape ‘modern’ cinematic priests of Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age,’ visibly demonstrate the Church’s struggle to remain relevant within a rapidly changing cultural milieu, as well as their inability to discern the means by which this should be enacted. Of even more significance, is Cleary’s articulation of the Church’s teaching on mandatory clerical celibacy, considering later revelations of his own inability to remain faithful to his promise of sexual continence. Unlike later clerical depictions, Cleary does not so much read as villainous, but rather as pathetic and confused, which is further emphasised by his staggering lack of self-awareness. Even without the benefit of the contemporary knowledge of his own incapacity for celibacy and the consequent domestic arrangement he created with his maid for decades, Cleary still presents in Lennon’s film as over-confident and oblivious to the reality of the rapidly changing Irish situation. Indeed, Cleary’s flailing attempts to present as a ‘modern’ priest disclose his epistemological bind. As such, his attempts to ‘play’ the ‘modern’ priest indicate Cleary’s intrinsic understanding of his vocation in the traditional clericalist image. The influence of Hollywood priests from the 1930 and 1940s, particularly Bing Crosby’s archetypal portrayal of ‘mayor’ priest, Father O’Malley in Leo McCarey’s *Going My Way* is evident in Cleary’s attempts at crooning and dancing within Lennon’s documentary, speaking to Hollywood’s cultural impact, as well as to the disorienting effect modernity was having

on the Irish Church. Thus, Cleary's endeavour to portray himself as 'modern,' while appealing to cinematic images from twenty years previous, speak to his discomfiture with the changes occurring at both the ecclesial and societal level, while also disclosing his self-perception as being 'above' the laity in direct contradiction to the reforms of Vatican II.

While Cleary's delinquency regarding clerical celibacy would only become known some thirty years after *Rocky Road to Dublin's* initial release, questions concerning priestly continence had come to the fore during the late 1960s, in light of the progressive changes that had emerged during Vatican II. Bob Quinn's two films explicitly addressing clerical celibacy, *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, do not so much attempt to provide answers to the question of mandatory clerical celibacy, but instead disclose the problematic discourses affixed to the celibate cleric who transgresses.

Quinn's films are based on the work of real-life priest, Pádraig Standún, whose public activism regarding female reproductive rights and other progressive causes, made him perhaps a more authentic bearer of the title 'modern' priest than Father Cleary. Like Cleary, Standún also transgressed against the mandate for clerical celibacy, though, unlike his predecessor, Standún's disclosure was a self-revelation of his own volition. Still, the two clerics were not alone in their lack of adherence to priestly continence in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the 'Bishop Casey affair,' revealed.

Both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, interrogate the mythology of the Western Island and in doing so diffuse it of its romantic mystery while disclosing both its mundanity and interconnectedness to the mainland. Quinn also deconstructs the cultural nationalist linkage of the cleric with the rural West, and in doing so reveals the instability of the cinematic priest. Quinn's films both show, in their depiction of the unchaste cleric,

the 'incarnate' quality which manifests in the sexually active priest, as well as the power imbalance intrinsic to such a relationship and the damaging consequences for the female. Donal McCann's depiction of the priest in *Budawanny*, who in turn becomes bishop in *The Bishop's Story*, discloses the correlation between embodied clerical subject and the displacement of authority that occurs in the modern Irish cinematic space. McCann's priest's relationship with Marian also illustrates the insoluble conundrum that is fundamental to the Catholic Church's engagement with the modern Western women.

The priest figure as portrayed by McCann in both *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, serves as a subversive variation of the 'mayor' priest archetype in the rural Irish community, best exemplified in the figure of Father Peter Lonergan in *The Quiet Man*. As I discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, Father Lonergan was fully entrenched within his rural village, while also serving as its undisputed moral and civil authority. McCann's 'mayor' priest's authority is always contingent, and his place within the community separate. McCann's priest is an outsider on the island, whose position as moral authority rests on his ability to fulfil the traditional role of chaste cleric. While Father Lonergan frequently offers his confidence and guidance to the women of the fictional Innisfree with unquestioned good faith, McCann's priest fractures the boundaries of cleric/laity relationship, the consequences which proves to be destructive both for Marian and the sacristan.

Peadar Lamb's portrayal of the bishop in *Budawanny* anticipates the clerical depictions that would come to dominate Irish film and television during the Celtic Tiger era. The film's containing of Lamb's bishop, solely within the confines of the administrative space, wherein his voice is heard within the diegesis—but only by himself—speak to the excarnate *katabasis* that will be the Irish cleric's primary mode for the next decade. Indeed, what become clear in analysing the priest of Irish film for most

of the latter part of the twentieth century is the contingency of his authority on the spatial and the body. The lack of carnality which authority seems to necessitate in particular, is consistent with the prevailing theology of Irish Catholicism, at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three: The Abuse Crisis, the Celtic Tiger and the ‘Ex-carnate’ Irish Cinematic Priest

Introduction

This chapter will continue to analyse the diachronic contingency of the clerical figure in modern Irish cinema. In Chapter One of this thesis, I argue that the Irish cinematic cleric has its heritage in depictions of the priest in Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s. I contend that during this period archetypes were constructed, such as the ‘social worker’ priest and the ‘mayor’ priest, which would be subsequently inverted and reappropriated by Irish filmmakers in the modern era. I also posit that the depiction of the Irish priest in Hollywood’s Golden Age served in assimilating ethnic Catholics into mainstream American society, while simultaneously filling a cinematic need for solitary masculine authority figures during the period up to and including the Second World War.

In Chapter Two, I argue that the modern cinematic representations of the Irish cleric are inherently unstable and demonstrate the figurative descent, or *katabasis*, of the priest from embodied to dis-embodied characterization. Utilizing the theoretical framework of Richard Kearney’s notion of the ‘incarnate,’ that is ‘image made flesh’ and ‘excarnate,’ or ‘flesh made image,’ I argue that a diachronic ‘dis-embodiment’ of the Irish cleric can be seen in cinematic depictions from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s. I also analyse discourse surrounding celibacy and the relationship between space and authority.

In this chapter, I will continue to utilize Kearney’s theoretical paradigm, to argue for the complete ‘dis-embodiment’ of the Irish priest as represented in the collection of clerical abuse films which manifested during the Celtic Tiger era. I would like to suggest that the Irish priest became fully ‘without flesh’ and pure ‘image’ in the monstrous

characterizations presented in the abuse melodrama of the late 1990s and 2000s. I would argue that the economic boom in Ireland from the mid-1990s to 2007, known colloquially as the Celtic Tiger; and its attendant materialist culture of consumerism, coalesced with the storm of abuse revelations that occurred during that same period, to create a cultural horizon favourable to the construction of the excarnate priest.

In the Summer of 1946, Father Edward J. Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town, a residential facility for at-risk boys, which had been the subject of the Academy Award winning film from 1939, returned to Ireland for the first time since emigrating to the United States in 1904.²⁹⁹ During his month long stay, Flanagan was followed by the press as he travelled throughout the Republic and Northern Ireland, visiting various institutions including the Borstal in Belfast and reform schools in Dublin.³⁰⁰ Upon returning to the United States, Flanagan was openly critical of what he had seen during his visit, stating that the borstals and reform schools were ‘a disgrace to the nation’.³⁰¹

Flanagan was publicly reprimanded by the Minister of Justice, Gerald Boland, who called his language ‘intemperate and offensive’ for an ‘ecclesiastic,’ to which Flanagan replied, ‘If trying to help the forgotten boys of reform schools and prisons, whether it be in Ireland or the United States, is intemperate and offensive, I’m afraid I’ll have to plead guilty.’³⁰² Flanagan went on to say of his visit:

Ireland, because of its Christian faith, is a great country, and great work is being done for youth through athletic associations and social clubs. However, the Borstal system which prevails in both Northern Ireland and in Eire, and which is based on severe physical punishment for the inmates is hardly in keeping with the high ideals of a Christian nation [...] I do not believe that a child can be reformed by lock and key and bars, or that fear can ever develop a child’s character. Those

²⁹⁹ ‘Boys and Girls “Were Never Created for Crime,”’ *Irish Times*, 10 June 1946.

³⁰⁰ ‘Father Flanagan Replies to the Minister for Justice,’ *Longford Leader*, 31 August 1946.

³⁰¹ ‘Father Flanagan Replies to the Minister for Justice,’ *Longford Leader*.

³⁰² ‘Father Flanagan Replies to the Minister for Justice,’ *Longford Leader*.

who inflict physical punishment on a child are not psychologists, and therefore cannot particularly tell the reaction of the child in the particular case.

I have always spoken out in defence of youth and I have worked toward bringing about a more enlightened system of caring for those unfortunate boys who have got into trouble.³⁰³

The significance of Flanagan's critique was due in large part to success of the film, *Boys Town* (Norman Taurog, 1938)—analysed in Chapter One of this thesis—which was, as much a celebration of the institution's founder, as it was of the place itself. Indeed, *Boys Town's* cinematic Father Flanagan, as portrayed by Spencer Tracy would, alongside Bing Crosby's Father O'Malley from *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944) and *The Bells of St. Mary* (McCarey, 1945) provide the template for the cinematic Irish priest.³⁰⁴ While the film's release in the United States drew attention to the eponymous institution and its founder, in Ireland it drew unwanted attention to the methods utilized in domestic juvenile establishments. In a review of a Flanagan biography from the early 1950s, in the Catholic publication, *The Furrow*, John Walsh says:

Too many of our Irish schools give little heed to the fact that each boy is a distinct individual, with his own peculiar problems, his own intimate fears and hopes, loves and hates...we will not speak yet of the physical cruelty that sometimes defaces our educational efforts.³⁰⁵

Flanagan's criticisms would come back to haunt the Irish Church as the twentieth century came to a close, as reports of systemic abuse occurring in myriad schools and institutions run by Catholic clergy and religious, were made public. In an ironic turn, just as the story of Flanagan and other priests who worked with children, proved to be the inspiration for cinematic narratives during the 1930s and 1940s, it would also be by means of the media: television and film, particularly, that the stories of child abuse at the hands of clergy and religious, would be brought to the forefront of public discourse at the

³⁰³ 'Father Flanagan Replies to the Minister for Justice,' *Longford Leader*.

³⁰⁴ Chapter One of this thesis provides a full analysis of the representation of the Irish priest in these films.

³⁰⁵ John Walsh, 'Review of *Father Flanagan of Boys Town*,' *The Furrow* 1, no. 10 (1950): 549.

turn of the millennium. The mainstream film industry in the Anglophone West, as I discuss in Chapter One, which had done so much to legitimize the Catholic Church and its clergy in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War, had, some fifty years later, done an about-face in its depictions of the Church and its clergy. Of course, this reversal had its impetus much earlier, a consequence of the anti-institutional turn in the West which occurred in the late 1960s, infiltrating cinematic discourse, just as it had done in every relevant cultural milieu. What the abuse revelations did, was provide—just as the stories of the ‘social worker’ priests a half-century before had done—new material for cinematic narratives foregrounding Catholicism. The level of cultural visibility that the abuse crisis received enabled the production of these films, and in a perverse turn, once more foregrounded the Catholic Church and its clergy in media representation.

The public disclosure of clerical abuse during the 1990s and 2000s, was not a phenomenon particular to Ireland, as high-profile revelations came forth in Australia, Canada and the United States during approximately the same period.³⁰⁶³⁰⁷³⁰⁸ With that said, the most prominent cinematic depictions of clerical abuse during the Celtic Tiger era

³⁰⁶ In the late 1990s it was revealed that Frank Little, the archbishop of Melbourne had transferred Father Wilfred Baker to various locations throughout the diocese in the twenty years after he had first received complaints about the paedophile priest’s behaviour. Peter Ellingsen, ‘Speak No Evil,’ *The Age*, 4 May 2002. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/speak-no-evil-20020504-gdu6hz.html>

³⁰⁷ The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Response of the Newfoundland Criminal Justice System to Complaints, also known as the Hughes Inquiry, was published in 1991 revealing that the Christian Brothers had covered up and transferred brothers who had committed sexual abuse at Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John’s, Newfoundland. The events of Mt. Cashel would be the subject of the Canadian telefilm, *The Boys of St. Vincent* (John N. Smith, 1992) mentioned in this chapter. Mike Devine and Dennis Kimberley, ‘Failures in Child Protection in Newfoundland and Labrador: From the Hughes (1991) to Markesteyn and Day Inquiries and Beyond,’ *Canadian Public Policy* 38, no. 1 (2012).

³⁰⁸ Multiple dioceses in the United States had revelations of abuse during the period, the most visible being a series of Pulitzer Prize winning articles by the *Boston Globe* which reported the cover-up of hundreds of cases of sexual abuse by dozens of members of the Catholic clergy within the Archdiocese of Boston in 2002. The investigation by the Boston Globe was subsequently depicted in the Academy Award winning film, *Spotlight* (Tom McCarthy, 2015), Marian Ronan, ‘The Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis and the Mourning of American Catholic Innocence,’ *Pastoral Psychology* 56, no. 3 (2008): 321.

were in Irish films, notably: *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997), *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002), and *Song for a Raggy Boy* (Aisling Walsh, 2003).

Throughout this chapter, I will continually refer to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA), whose findings are known colloquially as the Ryan Report, which was published after nearly a decade long investigation in May 2009.³⁰⁹ The Ryan Report was one of a collection of documents issued in the first decade of the new millennium, the result of government sanctioned inquiries into allegations of child abuse by clergy and religious of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Along with these were a multiplicity of smaller scale inquiries into individual clerics and vowed religious throughout all the diocese of both the Republic and Northern Ireland.³¹⁰

The Ryan Report is of particular interest to this thesis because its focus is primarily concerned with abuse that occurred in residential institutions for children, the subject matter of two of the films analysed in this chapter. It speaks to the influence of the media, that all government sponsored reports were published in the wake of the televised and cinematic accounts of abuse by members of the clergy and religious. As Emilie Pine, Susan Leavey and Mark T. Keane note, the initial government inquiry that would eventually produce the Ryan Report was not initiated until after the airing of the television documentaries, *Dear Daughter* (RTÉ, 1996) and *States of Fear* (RTÉ, 1999)

³⁰⁹ The name Ryan refers to Judge Sean Ryan who headed the CICA beginning in 2003 upon the resignation of the original chair, Justice Mary Laffoy whose resignation was published, 'Letter to Mr. Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General,' *Irish Times*, 8 September 2003.

³¹⁰ Contemporaneous reports include: *The Ferns Report* (2005), which investigated claims of the abuse in the Diocese of Ferns in County Wexford, <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/560434/thefernsreportoctober2005.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>. *The McCoy Report* (2007), which investigated claims of abuse against children with intellectual disabilities at the Holy Family School, run by the Brothers of Charity in Galway, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2007_11_McCoy_Brothers_of_Charity_Report.pdf. *The Murphy Report* (2009), which investigated allegations of abuse in the Archdiocese of Dublin, <https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504>.

both of which reported on child abuse at Church run institutions.³¹¹ It would be nearly a decade after the CICA's establishment that the Ryan Report would be published at five volumes and some two thousand pages, long after the release of the films analysed in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into two sections, the first section will be anchored in a close textual reading of Cathal Black's *Our Boys*, a short film which takes up the baton from Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968) which is analysed in Chapter Two. Lennon's film presents an Irish Church foundering in its attempts at maintaining relevance and authority in a rapidly modernising Irish state of the late 1960s—embodied cinematically by 'singing' priest Father Michael Cleary. However, it is *Rocky Road to Dublin's* multiple scenes within the classroom of a Christian Brothers' primary school which serve as a direct jumping off point for Black's film some fifteen years later.³¹²

As I will explain later in this chapter, for a multiplicity of reasons, the figure of the Christian Brother has become the modern cinematic signifier for abuse. *Our Boys* and *Song for a Raggy Boy*—both analysed in this chapter—feature Christian Brothers, and are set at the congregation's institutions, which speaks to the prevailing discourse surrounding the religious order, child abuse and the Catholic Church.³¹³

Considering the foregrounding of the Christian Brother as archetypal abuser, their school in turn, manifests cinematically as the space of memory of abuse. As I have done in the previous chapters, I will analyse the relationship between space and authority as

³¹¹ Emilie Pine, Susan Leavy, Mark T. Keane, 'Re-reading the Ryan Report: Witnessing Via Close and Distant Reading,' *Éire-Ireland* 52, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2017): 199-200.

³¹² Peter Lennon, like Cathal Black, was a product of a Dublin Christian Brothers' school.

³¹³ That *Song for a Raggy Boy*, both book and film, were set in a Christian Brothers' reformatory, is not factually accurate, nor stated explicitly in either text, but a matter of cultural assumption, speaking to the prevailing image of the Christian Brother as signifier of abuse. Patrick Galvin, the books' author was incarcerated at St. Conleth's run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).

they manifest in the clerical abuse film. I argue that the Christian Brothers' school, as seen in *Our Boys* serves as, what Pierre Nora refers to as, a *lieu de memoire*, which is a 'site of memory,' whose primary purpose is 'to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial.'³¹⁴

Once more utilizing the thought of Richard Kearney, I will argue that the theology of Irish Catholicism, as manifested cinematically in *Our Boys*, serves as a means of affirming and justifying the clerical abuse that is depicted. I use Kearney's notion of 'onto-theology,' a theology rooted in Greek philosophical principles, to argue for an understanding of an omnipotent, ubiquitous deity, lacking in compassion and mercy, which was misused by an authoritarian church hierarchy allowing for abuse and its concealment.

In the second section of this chapter, I will analyse through a close textual reading of the film *Song for a Raggy Boy* the archetype of the 'abusive' priest, which emerged during the years of the Celtic Tiger. Ruth Barton says of the Celtic Tiger that it was a time of 'radical change in the make-up of Irish life.'³¹⁵ The decline of the Catholic Church was one of the most significant cultural shifts of this period; perhaps more surprising than the Church's actual diminishment—which had been heading in that direction since the 1960s—is the rapidity in which it occurred during this time. The revelations of sexual misconduct and abuse by clergy, which first began to come out in the media at the beginning of the 1990s, was boilerplate content by the end of the decade. The rapid media response led the shift in popular discourse and from it came forth new cultural compositions of the Irish cleric.

³¹⁴ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,' *Representations* (Spring 1989): 19.

³¹⁵ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 5.

The 'abusive' priest is an inversion of the 'social work' priest archetype that featured on the heels of the Depression and into the years of World War II in Hollywood. As I discuss in the first chapter, the 'social worker' priest is an embodied figure representative of the socio-historical landscape of first half of the twentieth century, so too is the 'abusive' priest, in part, representative of the context of late twentieth century Ireland. The 'abusive' priest is 'excarinate' in his characterization as he is primarily utilized as a signifier of the institutional church and the abuse it both perpetrated and concealed. The excarnate 'abusive' priest also serves as analogue for the dualistic theology that informed Roman Catholicism in Ireland from the 19th century onward, wherein a clear binary was constructed between body and soul. The adversarial relationship between the soul and the body manifested in an ascetic piety emphasizing the negation of the 'flesh.' The representation of the 'abusive' clerics, Brother John (Iain Glen) and Brother Mac (Marc Warren) in *Song for a Raggy Boy* illustrate the perversion of dualistic theological principles and the destruction it caused.

Section I: Cinematic Representations of Clerical Abuse before the Celtic Tiger

The Christian Brother: Cultural Signifier of Clerical Abuse

If, as Ruth Barton argues, the Catholic Church has replaced British colonialism as the 'historical locus of oppression' in Irish cultural memory; the face of that oppression, cinematically manifested primarily in the guise of the Christian Brother.³¹⁶ Two of the cinematic texts analysed in this chapter: *Our Boys* and *Song for a Raggy Boy*, are set in

³¹⁶ Ruth Barton, 'Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,' *The Journal of English Language and Literature* 63, no. 4 (2017): 642.

Christian Brothers' institutions. Other examples of abuse-centred films set in Christian Brothers' establishment include the Irish film *Lamb* (Colin Gregg, 1985) and the Canadian telefilm, *The Boys of St. Vincent* (John N. Smith, 1992).

Since the mid-1990s when revelations of clerical abuse first came to the forefront of public discourse in Ireland, the Christian Brothers have been its most visible symbol. This is, despite numerous high-profile cases of abuse at the hands of members of other congregations, female religious and diocesan clergy. So prevalent is the equating of Christian Brothers' institutions and abuse that the events of the film, *Song for a Raggy Boy* are set in a Christian Brothers' establishment even though Patrick Galvin, the author of the memoir of the same title on which it is based, was a ward of St. Conleth's Reformatory School in Daingean, County Offaly, which was run by a different religious congregation, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). This alteration did not go unnoticed by the Irish Christian Brothers, and shortly after the film's release, a letter was sent to the *Irish Times* by Brother Edmund Garvey, the then, director of communications for the religious order, which read in part:

Your newspaper is not alone in reporting a connection between the film *Song for a Raggy Boy* and the Christian Brothers [...] Patrick Galvin, the author of the book on which the film is based, never attended any residential or non-residential institutions run by the Christian Brothers [...] The Christian Brothers had nothing to do with Patrick Galvin, his life experiences, his books or with any institution he attended as a child. They have had no contact with Aisling Walsh, who made the film. It would seem fair therefore, that the Christian Brothers should not have to accept any responsibility for either the fiction or the non-fiction...³¹⁷

Apart from the fact that claims of abuse at Christian Brothers' institutions are myriad—the Ryan Report's investigation committee received over seven hundred complaints from former residents of its schools---I would argue there are three key reasons why the Christian Brothers and their institutions became the primary cinematic

³¹⁷ Edmund Garvey, 'Song for a Raggy Boy,' *Irish Times*, 23 October 2003.

signifier for abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland. 1. The Christian Brothers were an indigenous religious congregation whose ascendancy within Irish society dovetailed with the burgeoning nationalist movement 2. The Christian Brothers' size and commensurate influence in post-revolutionary Ireland and consequent entanglement with, what would come to be understood as a regressive understanding of Irish identity. 3. The Christian Brothers' originary mission of working with indigent boys.

The Christian Brothers is one of two male religious congregations to be the subject of its own chapter in the Ryan Report and the only one which was established in Ireland.³¹⁸ The Congregation of Christian Brothers, as it is officially known (Latin: *Congregatio Fratrum Christianorum*, or CFC) was founded by Edmund Rice, a wealthy businessman and widower, in County Waterford, in the early 19th century, modelling his order on the example of Nano Nagle's Presentation Sisters, another Irish foundation.³¹⁹ As Dáire Keogh argues, Rice's organization was founded on Catholic and Nationalist values, conceived as it was, on the heels of the Rebellion of 1798 and the subsequent Acts of Union in 1800, in the hopes of inducing a 'moral regeneration' in Ireland.³²⁰ Indeed, 'Faith and Fatherland' would be the driving principles behind the Christian Brothers mission through the time of revolution and long into the post-independence era.

During the 19th century, the Christian Brothers were alone amongst all the Catholic religious orders in Ireland, in their severing of all ties with the National Schools system, taking no financial support from the state and creating their own textbooks and

³¹⁸ The Rosminians, officially known as the Institute of Charity (Latin: *Societas a charitate nuncupata*, or I.C), was founded in Italy in 1828. See *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* Vol. 2, Ch. 1, 1.

³¹⁹ Barry Coldrey, "'A Strange Mixture of Caring and Corruption': Residential Care in Christian Brothers Orphanages and Industrial Schools During Their Last Phase, 1940s to 1960s', *History of Education* 29, no. 4 (July 2000): 343.

³²⁰ Dáire Keogh, 'Our Boys: The Christian Brothers and the Formation of Youth in the "New Ireland" 1914-1944,' *History of Education* 44, no. 6 (2015): 700.

curriculum focused on Irish history and the Irish language.³²¹ The congregation became synonymous with the national project; indeed seven of the fourteen men executed as part of the 1916 Rising were products of Christian Brothers' schools, and five of the original seven members of cabinet of the first Dáil assembled in 1919 were alumni, as well.³²² In 1944, the Free State's first head of government, W.T. Cosgrave speaking on the centenary of Rice's death, said that the Christian Brothers were, 'Ireland's votive offering to Christianity, its contribution to civilization, [and] its thanksgiving to Providence for its preservation from infidelity.'³²³

The vast influence of the order would last well into the latter part of the twentieth century, as half of all the religious brothers in Ireland were from the domestic-born congregation and their alumni were amongst the most prominent figures in Irish society. Tom Inglis says of their societal impact: 'It is not that [the Christian Brothers] educated every Irish male. It is rather that they [...] educated and trained nearly every male who attained a high position in Irish society.'³²⁴

Yet, it is perhaps the order's singular focus on working with indigent boys that sets them apart from other religious congregations, such as the aforementioned OMIs, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), who have also had members indicted for child abuse but, because of the multi-faceted nature of their respective missions (higher education, parish work, community outreach) are not as exclusively identified as the Christian Brothers with their work with young boys.

³²¹ John W. Mahon, 'Joyce Among the Brothers,' *Christianity and Literature* 53, no. 3 (Spring 2004):351.

³²² Keogh, 'Our Boys,' 704.

³²³ W.T. Cosgrave, 'Edmund Rice Centenary Address,' Mansion House Dublin, 26 May 1944, 25.

³²⁴ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 52.

The primary focus of Rice's congregation was always exclusively on the education of children, specifically those in poor and marginalized communities.³²⁵ Their Constitution and Rule, amended in 1923, reaffirmed Rice's commitment to ministering to indigent youth as it stated:

The main end of the Congregation is that all its members labour for their own sanctification by the observance of the Evangelical Counsels and of these Constitutions. The secondary end is that they endeavour to promote the spiritual good of the neighbour by the instruction of youth, especially the poor in religious knowledge, and their training in Christian piety.

The Brothers conduct schools in which they teach the poor gratuitously; Institutions for orphan and neglected children...³²⁶

When the industrial school system was put into place in Ireland in 1858, the Christian Brothers' ministerial prioritization of impoverished children inevitably led to their being at the forefront of management of this model of institution at the national level, as the Ryan Report—says, 'The new industrial schools fitted in with [the Christian Brothers'] charism of educating and helping the poor.'³²⁷ The Christian Brothers were to oversee six industrial schools throughout the state, located at Artane, Tralee, Salthill, Glin, Letterfrack and Dun Laoghaire, as well as two boarding schools for orphans. As the Ryan Report recognizes, 'The Christian Brothers became a powerful and dominant organisation in the State and were responsible for providing primary and post-primary education to many Catholic boys in the country.'³²⁸

The Christian Brothers' ministry: educating to at-risk boys and those from the lower economic strata, was accompanied by an implicit class bias in larger Irish society. The prevailing discourses surrounding class and Christian Brothers education can be found in

³²⁵ Coldrey, "A Strange Mixture of Caring and Corruption," 343.

³²⁶ Congregation of Christian Brothers, *Constitutions*, (Rome: Author, 1923).

³²⁷ Justice Sean Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Volume I Chapter 6, 70 (Dublin: The Stationary Office, May 2009). <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL1-06.PDF>.

³²⁸ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Vol. I Ch. 6, 71.

James Joyce's—himself a product of Jesuit education—*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Simon Dedalus, the protagonist's father, says of the order, 'Christian brothers be damned! [...] Is it with Patty Stink and Mickey Mud? No, let him stick to the Jesuits in God's name since he began with them. They'll be of service to him in after years. Those are the fellows that can get you a position.'³²⁹ Simon Dedalus' aspirational, middle-class bias is indicative of the 'old boy' public schools mentality that was pervasive in Irish society long after independence.³³⁰

Both films featuring Christian Brothers in this chapter are set in differing types of institutions and locales. *Our Boys* is set in a second level, inner-city, Dublin school, while *Song for a Raggy Boy* takes place at a boy's reformatory school in a rural area outside of Cork. The second-level school's enrolment policy—and whose tuition would be free for those who couldn't afford it—would be relatively straightforward. Similarly, those boys committed to a reformatory would have to be officially convicted of an offence by the courts, be between the ages of twelve and seventeen, and serve a sentence of no longer than four years.³³¹

The third type of establishment the Christian Brothers' oversaw, the industrial school, had a more ambiguous criteria for confinement, with many boys in the years between 1936 and 1970 committed by the judicial system under the category of 'needy'—in accordance with the Children's Act of 1908 (with Amendments in 1929 and 1941). 'Needy' proved to be an expansive term, under which fell such 'offences' as: begging,

³²⁹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; reissue, Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1993), 72.

³³⁰ Keogh, 'Our Boys,' 712.

³³¹ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Volume I, Chapter 3, 43. <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL1-03.PDF>.

homelessness, abandonment, keeping company with reputed thieves or prostitutes (except for the mother), and living in a house of prostitution.³³²

In looking at the operation and organization of the Christian Brothers' run industrial schools, what becomes evident is the state's negligence and/or impotence with regards to supervision and intervention, which was largely due to being overridden by the institutional mandates put forth by the Christian Brothers. The Ryan Reports notes:

when a Community of Brothers operated an industrial school, the [Christian Brothers] Provincial Council ensured that their Superior was also the Resident Manager. These dual roles are relevant when considering the statutory demands of the position of Resident Manager. The practice also made it difficult for the Brothers to accept the recommendation [...] that the Minister for Education should control the appointment of Resident Managers. The Congregation was obviously going to guard its right to appoint Superiors of its own Communities.³³³

What made this particularly problematic is that according to the Ryan Report there was no overarching managerial organization at the individual schools, and thus, no official system for addressing complaints, meaning 'boys could only speak about the actions of a brother to another brother and were naturally reluctant to do so, fearing that they would be disbelieved or reported back to the brother about whom they complained of.'³³⁴

Our Boys

Our Boys is a short, experimental docu-drama set at an Irish Christian Brothers school during a handful of diverse moments in post-Independence era Dublin. The film's title is taken from the name of the monthly periodical published by the Christian Brothers, which ran for the better part of the twentieth century. *Our Boys* magazine was a reactionary measure brought about by the Irish clergy's concern about the 'destructive impact' British boys' story papers, such as *The Gem* and *Boys Own*, were having on young Irish males on

³³² Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Vol. I Ch. 3, 41-42.

³³³ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Vol. I, Ch. 6, 72.

<http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL1-06.PDF>.

³³⁴ Ryan. *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, Vol. I Ch. 6, 72.

the cusp of the War of Independence.³³⁵ Unlike its English counterparts, *Our Boys* made an explicit attempt to educate, edify, along with entertaining its youthful readers, so as to serve as an ‘auxiliary’ to the teaching done at Christian Brothers’ schools. Indeed, when *Our Boys* began its circulation in 1914, compulsory school attendance did not exist in Ireland, and would not be introduced for another decade.³³⁶ With that said, *Our Boys* magazine’s primary concern, consistent with the cultural nationalist project with which the Christian Brothers were so deeply entrenched, was to form ‘manly boys,’ who would become ‘the torchbearers for a renewed Catholic nation.’³³⁷

The docu-drama *Our Boys*, is one of a collection of indigenous films released in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, which are discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, which are often referred to as the ‘First Wave’ of Irish cinema.³³⁸ Though these films varied in terms of content, style, and quality, they are aligned in their attempt to subvert conventional cinematic images of Irish society, while simultaneously analysing discourses that had come to the fore as the state continued to modernise.³³⁹ These films share an experimental spirit which, while manifesting in divergent practices, could all be categorized under the broad parameters of the ‘avant-garde’. As Martin McLoone says of the ‘First Wave’:

The films [...] vary in the degree in which they adhere to a traditional cinematic narrative norm and in the way they attempt to explore the medium of film itself in innovative or experimental ways. Nonetheless, taken together they amount to an impressively adventurous group of films that augured well for a critically engaged indigenous cinema.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ Keogh, ‘Our Boys,’ 700.

³³⁶ Keogh, ‘Our Boys,’ 702.

³³⁷ Keogh, ‘Our Boys,’ 700.

³³⁸ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); McLoone, *Irish Film*.

³³⁹ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, 85.

³⁴⁰ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 131.

Given the cultural climate of Ireland in the late 1970s, it is not surprising that a film questioning the Church's hegemonic authority came forth, however, the weight and pointedness of *Our Boys*' critique was deemed to be, in fact, too severe, at least by some. It speaks to the Catholic Church's influence at the time, that in spite *Our Boys*' positive reception at film festivals in Cork and Dublin in 1981 along with a prize-winning showing at the Melbourne Film Festival, it was promptly shelved by Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)—ironically, one of its backers—for a decade.³⁴¹

Our Boys was written by Cathal Black, along with Dermot Healy—based in part on Black's childhood experiences at a Christian Brothers' school—and made on a budget of approximately £5,200.³⁴² *Our Boys* is Black's second short film, following *Wheels* (1976), based on a short story by John McGahern. *Our Boys* is shot entirely on black and white film given to Black by his former employers at RTÉ. The film took three years to make from initial shooting to post-production due primarily to continual difficulties in finding financing for the project.³⁴³

The film's experimental vein manifests primarily in its hybridity: integrating actuality footage with talking head interviews weaved into a fictional narrative. The non-fictional sections of the film consist of newsreel footage of events surrounding the 31st International Eucharistic Congress, which took place in Dublin in 1932, as well as footage from a St. Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin sometime during the early 1960s. The film also includes interviews with two former pupils of Christian Brothers' schools (Damian Moore and Tony McMahan) as well as with a Christian Brother (John C. Moore) who taught at one of their schools.

³⁴¹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 138.

³⁴² McLoone, *Irish Film*, 138

³⁴³ Ciaran Carty, 'How to Make a Movie for £3,500,' *Sunday Independent*, 29 November 1981.

Our Boys: Time and Space and the Christian Brothers School as Lieu de Memoire

The fictive portion of the *Our Boys* has two non-contemporaneous narratives. One of which follows the parent of a student at the Christian Brothers' school, Mr. O'Brien, (Tom Jordan), as he is pressured by his wife (Anne O'Connor) into confronting Brother Gilmartin (Mick Lally) about his physical abuse of their son, Hugh. The film's other narrative thread depicts the Christian Brothers' withdrawing and departing from the institution, as it transitions into a secular community school.

The fictive scenes in the film are, outside of one sequence, set within the interior of the Christian Brothers' school. Several scenes within the school are shot through a gridded window into the school's interior, giving the audience both a sense of the contained spatiality of the institution, as well as a perspectival distance from the events they observe. Thus, *Our Boys* can be understood as a memory exercise. The experimental aspect of *Our Boys*' formal and narrative discourses constructs an experience of memory shared by a significant portion of the Irish (male) population. Thus, I would like to suggest that the cinematic Christian Brothers school of *Our Boys* serves as, what Pierre Nora refers to as a *lieu de memoire*, which he defines as, a site 'where memory crystallizes and secretes itself.' Nora goes on to say that there is, 'the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.'³⁴⁴ Thus, just as the Christian Brothers themselves, serve as the cultural signifier of abuse within the Irish Catholic Church, so too do their institutions become the 'embodiment of memory' of abuse, not only for their alumni, but for all who suffered abuse by those affiliated with the Church. As Nora says, the *lieu de memoire* serves to 'anchor, condense, and express the exhausted capital of our collective memory.'³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 7.

³⁴⁵ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 24.

It is in its filmic construction that the Christian Brothers' school manifests as a *lieu de memoire*. The film is presented as a collage of mixed archival footage, talking head interviews and two asynchronous fictive narratives, through which the Christian Brothers' school becomes the epicentre of memory for a particularly grim period in recent Irish history. The school, as the locus of child abuse in the pre-modern Irish state, gestures to Nora's contention that *lieux de memoire* 'are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination.'³⁴⁶

Nora says of memory, that it is, 'by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual.'³⁴⁷ *Our Boys* integrates sundry accounts of experiences at Christian Brothers schools, including co-screenwriter, Black's, along with talking head interviews with alumni, Damian Moore, and Tony McMahon, to underline this paradoxical notion of memory. Black, who attended two Christian Brothers' schools in the Dublin vicinity: St. Vincent's in Glasnevin and Coláiste Mhuire in Cabra, said that *Our Boys* 'deals with an experience common to generations of men in Ireland.'³⁴⁸³⁴⁹ Black says his contributions to the screenplay were drawn from his memories of his time at the Christian Brothers' school in Cabra, as he says, 'There's a part of me that finds it hard to forget.'³⁵⁰ Black's sentiment is underscored by the public response to *Our Boys* when it was televised to a wide audience on RTÉ ten years after its completion, as Irish Times' columnist Fintan O'Toole, himself an alumnus of Christian Brothers' education says, 'The shock of the film is not the shock of sensation but the shock of recognition.'³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 19.

³⁴⁷ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 9.

³⁴⁸ Michael Dwyer, 'Film Gets its Premiere on RTE—Ten Years Later,' *Irish Times*, 08 February 1991.

³⁴⁹ Hugh Linehan, 'In Black Country,' *Irish Times*, 4 January 1996.

³⁵⁰ Carty, 'How to Make a Movie for £3,550.'

³⁵¹ Fintan O'Toole, 'Secret Histories: It has taken 10 years to show this important film about the Christian Brothers,' *Irish Times*, 9 February 1991.

The film's atemporal discontinuity serves to reinforce the notion of the Christian Brothers' school as a site of memory, or more appropriately, memories. As film critic Ciaran Carty notes in his review of the film, 'There is a flow of images of cold-tiled corridors and furtive soutaned figures that tantalise the imagination and touch the raw nerve of tribal memory.'³⁵² In one of the film's first scenes, located in the interior of the school's chapel, a priest (Dermot Lynskey) is shown facing the camera looking down at the altar, behind him stand a group of brothers. The priest's positioning with his back to the congregants, signifies the scene as taking place at some point before the liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council—discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. This places the film's temporal context in the broad range of anywhere between post-Independence and pre-1960s Dublin. As the brothers begin to sing a hymn, their echoing voices carry over into the next scene as the camera cuts to a tracking shot down the aforementioned 'cold-tiled' corridor of the school. The corridor is empty and the audio shifts to the sound of an echoing of men's laughter. The use of the tracking down the empty corridor, along with the echoing sounds of voices and laughter, are recurring motifs utilized throughout the film to evoke a sense of the irretrievable past.

Brother Gilmartin is the only figure ever shown walking down the corridor, which he does at both the beginning and end of the film. In the first sequence he is shot walking in the darkness, before making his way to the end of corridor and turning on the lights to begin the school day. In the latter scene, he is shot walking with his back to the camera, the school is empty, now a dilapidated, empty space. Brother Gilmartin stops and turns and looks into the camera, as if looking for something that is no longer there. These two 'corridor' scenes bookend the fictive narrative and illustrate the Christian Brothers'

³⁵² Carty, 'How to Make a Movie for £3,500.'

school as it once was—the site of Church hegemony—and as it became—a cultural signifier for child abuse.

The temporal ambiguity of the fictive scenes are enhanced by the depiction of the brothers as being stuck in time, despite the two narrative threads occurring at least a decade apart. The interrogatory lens of the film coupled with its temporal opacity give the brothers depicted, not so much an air of ‘timelessness,’ but rather a Sisyphean quality, as if the space serves as a purgatory from which they can never depart. The brothers, locked into one existential image, always attired in the aforementioned soutanes, appear to be confined temporally and spatially.

Nora states that ‘the moment of *lieux de memoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears.’³⁵³ Thus, I would suggest that the manifestation of the cinematic Christian Brothers’ school as a *lieu de memoire* in *Our Boys* was a response to the Papal visitation to Ireland in September 1979. During John Paul II’s three-day visit to Ireland, the first in history by a pontiff, he was greeted by 2.7 million people, approximately half of the population of the entire island. The highlight of the fifty hours the pontiff spent in the Republic was the Mass at Phoenix Park to a crowd of one and a quarter million congregants, in the same location that Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri had presided during the Eucharistic Congress of 1932.³⁵⁴ Though the papal visitation did not have the long-term impact of ‘preserving’ Catholicism in Ireland as the hierarchy had hoped, it’s short-term impact was undeniable.³⁵⁵ The visit temporarily revitalized Catholicism in Ireland, particularly amongst lay conservative groups, as evidenced by the passing of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution referendum of

³⁵³ Nora, ‘Between Memory and History,’ 11-12.

³⁵⁴ Daithí Ó Corráin, ‘Why Did Pope John Paul II visit Ireland? The 1979 Papal Visit in Context,’ *British Catholic History* 35, no. 4 (October 2021): 462.

³⁵⁵ Ó Corráin, ‘Why Did Pope John Paul II Visit Ireland,’ 464.

1983, which gave the right to life to the unborn, as well as the failure of the Tenth Amendment referendum in 1986 which was an attempt to legalize divorce.³⁵⁶ Thus, *Our Boys*, which began production the same year as the papal visitation, can be seen as a response to a seemingly rejuvenated post-papal Catholic Ireland.

The film's presentation of the Irish Christian Brothers' school as a *lieu de memoire* serves to bring to the fore those memories of the recent past that had grown dim in the light of the Pope John Paul II's visit. In the final scenes of the film, Brother Gilmartin is shown walking alone through the dilapidated interior space of the school, as the camera follows him as he walks down the empty corridor. Brother Gilmartin proceeds to stop, turn, and look directly into the camera, as the non-diegetic sound of a clock can be heard gently ticking. The next shot is of Gilmartin on his knees in his bedroom praying the rosary in Irish, he pauses upon hearing a window being broken somewhere in the building. The scene then cuts to a shot of an empty classroom and a creaking door is heard off-camera, before the echoing voice of a brother is heard yelling at students, followed by the sound of the boys signing an Irish hymn, as the memories continue to 'secrete' from the school. A rock is then thrown through a window and the camera then cuts to a close-up of the break in the windowpane.

These final cinematic images of the dilapidated and vandalized Irish Christian Brothers' school align with what Nora terms the 'double identity' of the *lieu de memoire*, that is, its metamorphosis from the space's original purpose to its signification upon its re-emergence within the collective memory.³⁵⁷ The Irish Christian Brothers' school of the final scenes is physically absorbing the consequences of the abuse that transpired within its walls. Both the neglect and vandalizing of the space speak to the reaction to the

³⁵⁶ Ó Corráin, 'Why Did Pope John Paul II Visit Ireland,' 483.

³⁵⁷ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 20.

communal memories it evokes. The Irish Christian Brothers' school of the post-Independence era and the abuse it represents are in some sense to remain in the past, yet, in order to ensure the past is not repeated, the memories must continue to emerge from the site.

Our Boys: Survivor Discourse and Societal Indictment

On another level, the personal stories of Black, Moore and McMahan also afford *Our Boys* a position of authority as survivor discourse. As Marita Sturken says, 'Because survivors of traumatic historical events are often awarded moral authority, their testimony carries the weight of cultural value. Survivors, we believe, tell us the real story, one wrought from experience.'³⁵⁸ The experiential authority given to Black, as well as former students, Moore and McMahan give a level of authenticity to the film's fictive enactments of clerical abuse.

The film's verisimilitude as survivor's discourse is buttressed by its usage of archival footage. *Our Boys* reappropriates newsreel footage, which serves both as indexical evidence signifying historical 'truth,' while also giving its audience a discernible feeling of the reality of the past.³⁵⁹ This collage of images from the past is in turn interspersed with contemporary talking head interviews. The temporal non-linearity of the film allows a broader scope for its interrogation, moving beyond just the policies and procedures of a particular Christian Brothers' institution at a historical moment, as the abuse melodramas of the early 2000s would do. By destabilizing the temporal, while simultaneously

³⁵⁸ Marita Sturken, 'Reenactment, Fantasy, and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone's Docudramas,' *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 68.

³⁵⁹ Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-6.

reducing the spatial to the interior of the institution, *Our Boys* essentially interrogates the entirety of post-independence twentieth century Ireland's culture of abuse.

The profilmic abuse focuses on a single episode: a violent interaction between Brother Gilmartin and Hugh, a student at the school. During this sequence, the physical assault is visually depicted only briefly, and instead is primarily represented aurally, as the camera cuts away from the beating to shots of other classrooms in the school, revealing the indifference of members of the faculty, both lay and religious. The acute violence that is suggested by Hugh's wails of pain, juxtaposed with the apathy of the adults in the school community, makes for an image that gestures not only to the Christian Brothers' and their history of abuse, but also to cultural attitudes toward corporal punishment in post-independence Ireland.

The sequence can be read as an indictment of the complacency of an Irish society unmoved by the abuse occurring in their own communities. Author, John Banville, citing one of Ireland's most esteemed literary figures, likens post-independence Ireland's societal complicity to the final moments of one of Joyce's short stories: 'that silence which, like the snow in [...] 'The Dead', was general all over Ireland, in those days. Never tell, never acknowledge, that was the unspoken watchword. Everyone knew, but no one said.'³⁶⁰ Banville's words resonate when watching the image of a brother ordering a student to close the window to keep out the sounds of Hugh's screams. The camera then cuts to a science laboratory, where a lay teacher (Paul Bennett) is shown quickly shuffling over to close the door, as he tries in vain to keep the boy's cries from being heard by the children in his class.

Though the primary focus of Black's critique is the Catholic Church, no ideology or institution is safe from his lens of suspicion, including the modernizing project as

³⁶⁰ John Banville, 'A Century of Looking the Other Way,' *New York Times*, 22 May 2009.

manifested as capitalist consumerism in the Irish situation. The first scenes of the film are a montage of footage from a St. Patrick's Day parade and show a beauty queen riding on a tractor promoting an agricultural supply firm. A mock-up rocket ship advertising Smithwick's ales is shown followed by a group of hurlers in their kits promoting Roscrea bacon. The next float features a mannequin of a man in a business suit, held up by wires, holding a briefcase, appearing to be flying in the direction of a mock-up of the Statue of Liberty advertising a travel agency. The last float shown is of a man standing in front of a television camera with a giant antenna behind him promoting an electronics store. Martin McLoone says of this montage: 'the footage captures the atmosphere in Ireland as it slowly came out of its long, protectionist period of "dozing on the side-line" to embrace modernisation and liberalisation.'³⁶¹

I would disagree with McLoone's reading and argue that the parade sequence, with its heavy-handed attempt at commingling images of technological progress, economic prosperity, and cultural iconography, along with its relentlessly upbeat musical scoring presents too robust an image of optimism in relation to the tone of the rest of the film. I would suggest that Black's intention is not an earnest embrace of modernity, as McLoone suggests, rather the sheer contrivance fundamental to the spectacle of a parade and the cynicism that pervades the rest of the film gesture toward an ironic critique of the capitalist-driven modernizing project. I would contend that the specific images Black chose to show, with their clumsy attempts at shoehorning cultural iconography and aspirational imagery into one large gaudy advertising moment, is more a tongue in cheek gesture to the Irish situation of the late 1970s and the early 1980s when the film was produced.

³⁶¹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 139.

For approximately a decade between the late 1970s into the latter part of the 1980s, the economic modernizing project in Ireland had stalled out, a situation that was in no small part compounded by poor economic policies put forth by the ruling Fianna Fáil government in 1977.³⁶² A global recession did not help the situation, as unemployment and emigration rates rose significantly. All the while tensions in the North went unabated, with the assassination of Earl Mountbatten in Sligo by the IRA in August 1979 providing one of the most high-profile moments of the Troubles during this time.

Thus, the contrived hyper-exuberance of the parade sequence, with its nod to that epicentre of modern capitalism and nucleus of Irish emigration, the United States, via the image of a ‘dummy,’ with an enormous suitcase in tow, flying toward the ersatz Statue of Liberty, would suggest, not so much a ringing endorsement of the country’s move toward modernity, but rather the same suspicious critique and nihilistic tone that is pervasive throughout the rest of the cinematic text.

Indeed, I would argue that what distinguishes *Our Boys* from other Irish films about clerical abuse which have been produced subsequently is that, in foregrounding the dialectic between tradition and modernity, the film chooses neither. It criticizes the Church, primarily via the cinematic analogue of the Christian Brothers, but in its parsing and highlighting the most explicitly capitalistic displays from footage of a St. Patrick’s Day parade, as well as its brief detour into the council flat, where the film’s primary victim of abuse, Hugh lives with his parents, it condemns the capitalist driven consumerism of the modernizing project. Much like the work of his peer, Bob Quinn which I analyse in Chapter Two, Black’s work juxtaposes images of modernity and

³⁶² McLoone, *Irish Film*, 88.

tradition, and in doing so discloses the problems affixed to both sides, while offering no solutions.

Our Boys: Cultural Nationalism and the God of 'Ontotheology'

The focus of the *Our Boys* centres on clerical abuse, yet little actual cinematic coverage is given to its depiction. Thus, I would argue that the film is equally concerned with both disclosing Irish Catholicism's entrenchment within the cultural nationalist project as well as its grounding in a conception of God that sustained a culture of abuse.

In the fictive component of the film, there are a series of classroom scenes foregrounding the Irish Church's alignment with Gaelic culture and more broadly, with an essentialist understanding of Irish identity, or cultural nationalism.³⁶³ As is discussed elsewhere in this thesis, cultural nationalism took hold in discourses surrounding Irish self-governance in the late nineteenth century. Fundamental to cultural nationalism was an essentialised understanding of Irish identity, central to which were Roman Catholicism and a privileging of Gaelic culture, which as Martin McLoone says, was 'influential in shaping the political and social culture of independent Ireland.'³⁶⁴

The explicit emphasis *Our Boys* gives to the conjoining of Catholicism with Gaelic culture, and by extension cultural nationalism, serves to both disclose the corrosive impact of a post-Independence, hegemonic nativism, while also foregrounding the Church's sovereignty, as embodied in the figure of the Christian Brother. This is evidenced in a montage which takes place at the beginning of the school day, in the first shot a young brother (Ciarán Hinds) is shown leading his pupils in the 'Hail Mary,' said in the Irish language.³⁶⁵ The camera then cuts to Brother Gilmartin leading his class in

³⁶³ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 12.

³⁶⁴ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 11.

³⁶⁵ Hinds is billed in the film's closing credits as Kieran Hinds.

the song, *Beidh Aonach Amárach*, an Irish lullaby, whose title translates into English as *There's a Fair Tomorrow*. This is then followed by an intercutting of scenes featuring an older and younger brother, respectively. Both the older and younger brother are shown at the front of their respective classrooms, though their charges are not shown. The elderly brother, framed by the camera with a crucifix hanging directly behind him, speaks of the celebrated eleventh century Irish High King: 'Now Brian Boru was a fine, handsome man. All the women in Ireland were after him. But he was intent on the high kingship. Now many enemies tried to murder him before he gained the crown and took his rightful place in Tara.' This is followed by a cut to the younger brother, seated in front of a blackboard, featuring a large chalk drawing of Patrick Pearse, above which, is written his name, *Pádraig Mac Piarias*, in Irish. The young brother speaks to his unseen students of the founding of Sinn Féin and Cumann na nGaedheal along with the Volunteers, banging his fist on the desk after each name for emphasis. The elder brother's mythologizing of Boru, with the corpus on the cross overshadowing him, intercut with the image of nationalist martyr and Christian Brother alumnus, Pearse, looking over the younger brother's shoulder, discloses the amalgamation of religion, romanticism, and apocrypha at the heart of the historical narrative to which the students are being indoctrinated.

Irish Catholicism's entanglement with cultural nationalism is affirmed within its own theological principles. Indeed, pre-Vatican II Catholicism, Irish or otherwise, in its triumphalist outlook, rooted in a conception of God, as what Richard Kearney terms, 'a deity of omnipotent causality,' was particularly amenable to a newly independent Irish state.³⁶⁶ The Church's legitimization of the new nation-state can be seen in *Our Boys'* use of newsreel footage from the Eucharistic Congress of 1932.

³⁶⁶ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xi.

David Holmes says of the Eucharistic Congress of 1932 that it was, ‘the apex of Irish history—or, at the very least, the high point of Irish religious history.’³⁶⁷ The Congress was certainly the most significant public event that had taken place since the inception of the Free State a decade earlier, as historian Rory O’Dwyer says, ‘the sheer scale of the event bore striking testimony to the pride in identity, both national and religious, which patently guided the hundreds of thousands of people who participated.’³⁶⁸ The event, held from the 22nd to the 26th of June of 1932, consisted of myriad liturgical events, exhibits and lectures, culminating with the High Mass on the final Sunday, which included a live broadcast by Pope Pius XI from the Vatican, ‘via the most extensive PA system ever used anywhere in the world, with loudspeakers located in the Park, along the city quays and in various city centre locations.’³⁶⁹ In anticipation of the Papal High Mass, John P. Scanlon wrote for the *Sligo Champion*:

But on Sunday [Ireland] will have reached the crowning glory of her life—the recognition of its indebtedness to her of Heaven and the enhancement of that recognition by the whole world. She has been made the centre of that world’s annual homage to the King of Kings—the Supreme Majesty who has never come on earth to land more fair or to hearts more faithful.³⁷⁰

Scanlon’s words gesture not only to the amenability to which religious language and imagery were met within mainstream public discourse, but also how much the conception of a sovereign deity was inscribed into that rhetoric.

The footage from the Eucharistic Congress is shown at approximately the halfway point of the film and begins with images of the arrival of the Papal Legate, Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri. As the ship enters the harbour at Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire), the footage

³⁶⁷ David G. Holmes, ‘The Eucharistic Congress of 1932 and Irish Identity,’ *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua: A Quarterly Record of Irish Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 56.

³⁶⁸ Rory O’Dwyer, ‘On Show to the World: The Eucharistic Congress, 1932,’ *History Ireland* 15, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2007): 42.

³⁶⁹ O’Dwyer, ‘On Show to the World,’ 43-44.

³⁷⁰ John P. Scanlon, ‘Ireland’s Crowning Glory: Her Nativity—Her Crucifixion—Her Conquest,’ *Sligo Champion*, 25 June 1932.

shows six aeroplanes flying in formation in the shape of the cross. The Cardinal is then shown walking along the dock to cheers from the large crowds, while newly elected President of the Executive Council, Éamon de Valera walks a step behind. Crowds are shown along the dock, kneeling, crossing themselves, and beating their breasts as the Papal Legate walks past. This is followed by a shot of various politicians and government officials shown greeting Cardinal Lauri by bowing and kissing his ring. The next scene shows Alfred ‘Alfie’ Byrne, the Lord Mayor of Dublin welcoming the Papal Legate, saying: ‘In your Eminence, we gladly recognize the living image of the Church, which is one because of the supreme authority of the successor of St. Peter.’ The footage is shown to give, what McLoone calls a ‘graphic illustration of how closely intertwined Irish civil authority and the Catholic church authority were in the period after independence.’³⁷¹

I would also like to suggest that the sequence, in its demonstration of the comingling of ecclesial and political pageantry, in turn discloses the shared conception by both religious and civic factions, of a hierarchical authority informed by a theological conception of God as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent sovereign. Kearney, appealing to the thought of Heidegger, refers to this notion as ‘ontotheology’ which he defines as a ‘metaphysical concept of a highest and most general Being abstracted from the lived world.’ Kearney goes on to say that in the Western tradition, ‘ontotheology’ brought forth a ‘moralizing deity of accusation and condemnation.’³⁷² This ontotheological God, constructed primarily through the Greek metaphysical tradition and outside the horizon of biblical revelation, privileges the powerful over the good and the legal over love and mercy.³⁷³

³⁷¹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, 139.

³⁷² Kearney, *Anatheism*, 73.

³⁷³ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 73.

The ethos of the God of ontotheology and its use to justify abuse is illustrated in the cinematic text in a classroom scene, where a brother is shown giving a lecture on sin, suffering, and the sacrament of penance. The brother writes the word, 'gangrene' on the blackboard and likens its effect on the flesh to sin's effect on the person: 'the festering of soul and body.' He goes on to speak of the merits of suffering, saying how the sanctifying effects of suffering should turn 'sorrow into joy...suffering is always grace, boys. Let us never forget it, [suffering] is never merely a punishment of sin.' The camera then immediately cuts to a close-up of Hugh with his head down as the brother keeps speaking. The romanticization of suffering by the cleric juxtaposed with the abused boy's disconsolate reaction brings to light the perversion of theological principles in order to sanction abuse.

The brother continues lecturing about the dangers of sin and punctuates his lesson by speaking of those individuals who are so sinful that, 'the filth of their souls have passed all possibilities of redemption.' This brief scene, with its intercutting between the brother's catechising and close-up reaction shots of the abuse victim, Hugh, illustrates what Willie Walsh, then Bishop of Killaloe, termed the 'defective theology,' that was foundational to Irish Catholicism and served to both inform and justify abuse. Walsh, articulates Kearney's notion of the God of ontotheology, in describing the dominant theology of the time:

God was a God to be feared, a God who would be angered at wrongdoing...And if God is a harsh God, who will punish us for the wrong that we do, then young people who do wrong should be punished. In fact one might even justify that punishment as preventing them from doing more wrong in the future and thus in the longer term saving them from more severe punishment by God.

Our image of God as a loving God was a weak one. He might love us if we are very good but we had to earn that love.³⁷⁴³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ Willie Walsh, 'Reflecting on the Ryan Report,' *The Furrow* 60, no. 11 (Nov. 2009): 582.

³⁷⁵ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 58.

The classroom scenes then clearly articulate not only the ontotheological God which served to justify abuse, but also the means by which the population was indoctrinated, thus demonstrating the means by which abuse was allowed to continue unfettered for decades.

Our Boys and the 'Abusive' Cleric

By the end of the twentieth century, the archetype of the 'abusive cleric' had been firmly entrenched within the televisual and cinematic spheres throughout the West. The 'abusive' cleric is an inversion of the 'social worker' priest archetype discussed in Chapter One. Like the 'social worker' priest found in Hollywood films of the 1930s like *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Curtiz, 1938) and *Boys Town* (Taurog, 1938), the 'abusive' priest works with boys from urban and lower socio-economic backgrounds. While the narrative of the 'social worker' priest is invariably a redemptive one for the boys he encounters, it proves to be a traumatic one for those under the care of the 'abusive' priest.

Though usually employed for dramatic purposes, the 'abusive cleric,' was also utilized for comedic effect. Examples of this include the Hollywood film, *Heaven Help Us* (Michael Dinner, 1985)—ostensibly a teenage sex comedy typical of its era—is set at an all-boys Catholic school run by an unnamed order of brothers in 1950s Brooklyn. The comedy features several scenes involving corporal punishment at the hands of 'abusive' cleric, Brother Constance (Jay Patterson) which serve to unite the student body against clerical authority. Decades later, the 'abusive' cleric was again being played for laughs once more in the Irish comedy series, *The Savage Eye* (RTÉ, 2009-), which featured a recurring bit showing a biretta-wearing cleric in a soutane, kidnapping various children from their unsuspecting parent.

Though, not a comedy, in the traditional sense, Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy*, has a sardonic tone underlying its tragic narrative, due in large part to the film's use of editorial voice-overs by actor Stephen Rea, as the adult version of its juvenile protagonist Francie Brady. As such, there is a level of 'gallows humour,' that pervade the film's scenes depicting clerical abuse, in particular the two which feature the elderly Father Sullivan (Milo O'Shea). In the first of these scenes, he is shown covertly masturbating under his soutane, as the unknowing Francie tells him about his vision of the Blessed Virgin (Sinead O'Connor). Rea's voice-over and O'Shea's performance deflate the tension of the scene and foreground its absurdity.

In the second of the two scenes, the priest dresses Francie in a woman's bonnet while feeding him chocolates and talking about his mother, before the boy physically attacks the elder priest ending his bizarre seduction attempt. In both scenes, O'Shea's doddering portrayal of the priest along with the film's absurdist tendencies and sardonic tone make the 'abusive' cleric feeble and ineffectual.

That the 'abusive' priest archetype is so easily situated within the comic realm, speaks to its inherent disembodiment. The archetype of the 'abusive' priest, because of its inherent 'excarinate' characterization, allows for a generic fluidity that other clerical archetypes such as the 'social worker' priest do not have because of their amenability to embodied characterizations. Like all monstrous figures, the 'abusive' priest can be either utilized as an agent of terror or mirth, contingent upon the circumstances, as the characterization is a disembodied signifier. In the case of the 'abusive' priest, he signifies the institutional Church and the theology inscribed within it, that allowed for and concealed physical and sexual abuse.

Thus, I would argue that the role of Brother Gilmartin in *Our Boys*, though an antecedent of the ‘abusive’ cleric type found in film and television during the Celtic Tiger era, does not serve as a signifier of the Catholic Church and its perversion of a dualistic theology, but instead an embodied subject that was a consequence of it. Brother Gilmartin is not depicted as an ‘image’ of the institutional Church, so much as a victim of a particular sociological and ecclesial context. Fundamental to this point is the diachronic instability of the clerical figure on the Irish cultural horizon. Though *Our Boys* is clearly an indictment of the unbridled abuse of power by the Catholic Church in post-Independence Ireland, it was made over a decade before revelations of sexual abuse came forward, as well as awareness of the pervasiveness of the abuse.

It is, thus, ironic, that as the discourse surrounding clerical abuse in Ireland became more complex during the Celtic Tiger period, commensurately, the depictions of clergy became more simplistic. Conversely, the characterization of Brother Gilmartin, made during a time when esteem for the Church was still relatively elevated in Irish society, was far more multi-faceted than those which would emerge in the decades which followed.

Brother Gilmartin is the protagonist of *Our Boys*, as both threads of the film’s fictive narratives rest upon his character. He is the abusive perpetrator who is confronted by Hugh’s father, and it is from his point of view that we witness the closing of the institution. The first two scenes in which Brother Gilmartin appears visually convey the characters’ sense of isolation and entrapment within the world of the Christian Brothers’ school. In the first of these scenes, he is shown silently serving tea in the refectory to his fellow brothers. The group of brothers are seated at table as they talk and laugh with one another, oblivious to Gilmartin’s presence within the space. Throughout the scene he

appears unable or unwilling to engage in the social interactions and the good-natured ribbing going on between his confreres.

This scene is followed by a cut to a long shot of him silently walking down the school's dark, corridor—a recurring motif in the film which I discuss earlier in this chapter—making his way toward the camera, a solitary figure in the darkness. He stops walking to turn the corridor lights on, which reveals that the camera is positioned behind a barred window, distancing the audience from the events they are observing, while simultaneously visually depicting Brother Gilmartin's incarceration within the cinematic world he inhabits. The brother's turning on the light can also be read as a refutation to the scriptural images of 'light' as a signifier of hope and renewal, but instead, discloses the grim reality of institutional containment.³⁷⁶

These scenes establish Brother Gilmartin as being both physically and psychologically isolated and imprisoned; the Christian Brothers' school serving as a locus of confinement for both student and cleric alike. As with other clerical representations in Irish film during the 1980s, such as *Lamb* (Colin Gregg, 1985) and *Budawanny* (Bob Quinn, 1987), the 'incarnate,' that is 'image made flesh,' characterization of the cleric, is contingent on his incapacity to live the life of a vowed celibate which manifests in explicitly anti-social behaviour. Thus, *Lamb*'s protagonist, Brother Sebastian (Liam Neeson) leaves the Christian Brothers' school but in doing so, also kidnaps and ultimately murders one of his students, Owen Kane (Hugh O'Connor). As I discuss in Chapter Two of this thesis, *Budawanny*'s incarnate priest winds up impregnating his housekeeper Marian (Margaret Fegan) and attempts to live as man and wife with her. All three films in their depictions of

³⁷⁶ The Gospel of John presents the most explicit correlation between light and hope/renewal, most notably in Jn 1:5; 3:20-21 (NRSV). Jesus also declares himself, 'the light of the world,' in Jn 8:12 (NRSV).

the incarnate cleric demonstrate the seeming futility of living as a vowed celibate in a modernizing Ireland.

I would like to suggest that *Our Boys* depiction of Brother Gilmartin as the abusive cleric is given a psychological and socio-historical context that allows for a reading of his abuse of Hugh as, in part, a perversion of an embodied desire for ‘touch.’ Kearney says that a desire for ‘touch and proximity overrides even the most basic needs.’³⁷⁷ Kearney goes on to say that tactile communication is absolutely vital to our physical and mental well-being.³⁷⁸ Brother Gilmartin, a vowed celibate, is presented as both socially and physically isolated because of his confinement within the physical space of the Christian Brothers’ School. I would argue that *Our Boys* representation of Brother Gilmartin, buttressed by the strong performance of Mick Lally, is implicitly attributing the corporal punishment meted out by the brothers to their vowed and semi-cloistered existence. Brother Gilmartin, the primary focus of the film’s fictive narrative is shown to be both perpetrator and victim of a theological system that vilifies the body.

Kearney delineates between types of physical contact through what he refers to as ‘the carnal wisdom of tactility,’ which he refers to as ‘tact.’³⁷⁹ Kearney qualifies ‘touch’ as being necessarily that exchange which is reciprocal and respectful, and it is through ‘tact’ through which it is delineated.³⁸⁰

The depiction of Brother Gilmartin as an embodied figure perverted by a theological system, wherein the body is denigrated, echoes Kearney’s notion of an era of excarnation, wherein there is an obsession ‘about the body in evermore disembodied ways.’³⁸¹ This is

³⁷⁷ Richard Kearney, *Touch: Rediscovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 3.

³⁷⁸ Kearney, *Touch*, 3.

³⁷⁹ Kearney, *Touch*, 9.

³⁸⁰ Kearney, *Touch*, 11.

³⁸¹ Kearney, *Touch*, 2.

supported in the talking head interview which immediately follows the scene of Gilmartin abusing Hugh, when Damian Moore says of his experience at a Christian Brothers' school: '[The Christian Brothers] used to say, "No bodily contact." And we used to get beaten up when we wrestled...that there was something really wrong with it. That we were dirty.' Moore also speaks of being told as an eight-year-old to keep his hands out of his pocket because the brothers were afraid, he would 'try to do something dirty.' Brother Gilmartin then, is both a propagator of excarnate theological system but also its victim.

The excarnate ethos that pervades the world of the Christian Brothers' school is illustrated in a scene late in the film, where Brother Gilmartin is with the lay teacher and another brother at the school's interior entrance, as boys are shown entering the school. Brother Gilmartin is in the background at the side of the frame next to a statue of the Virgin Mary, while the lay teacher and other brother converse in the foreground unaware of his presence. The lay teacher and the other brother are shown chatting amiably with casual, relaxed postures and dispositions, which is held in relief next to the background image of Brother Gilmartin standing still, seemingly immovable next to the statue. As the bell rings for the school day to begin, the lay teacher and brother exit from the frame, leaving Brother Gilmartin alone facing forward in the frame next to the Virgin Mary, in profile, with her hands clasped in prayer. This image of the vowed celibate standing statue-like next to a statue can be read as a visual editorial on the life of the vowed religious. The image is a commentary not only on the fallaciousness of the celibate clergy, but the theological dualism that manifests in the denigration of the corporeal in the image of the living, embodied cleric attempting to emulate the inanimate statue of the Virgin Mary.

In one of the final scenes of the film, Brother Gilmartin is once more shown, facing the camera, statue-like, this time at the exterior of the school's entrance. Beside him in the

frame is a sign that says, 'School Closed.' This image of Brother Gilmartin speaks to the situation of the middle-aged, Irish cleric during the mid-twentieth century, who, did not share proximity to the War of Independence and its coalescence with the Church's hegemonic influence, as did the previous generation of clergy. This lack of proximity to the War of Independence and its attendant concerns precluded Brother Gilmartin's generation of clergy from the same definitive understanding of their identity and position in the burgeoning Irish state. Thus, priests and religious of Brother Gilmartin's generation would have been vocationally formed to perpetuate the nativist triumphalism of their predecessors, only to find themselves in the midst of a modernising Irish society and Church. The advent of television, economic development, and ecclesial reform culminating in Vatican II, brought with it a lessening of priests and religious' public stature and influence with the consequence that those clerics who emerged after the era of Independence found themselves in a civil and ecclesial situation far removed from the one in which they began their formation.³⁸²

The film juxtaposes Brother Gilmartin and the oldest brother in the community, who is not named. Early in the film, the elderly brother is shown seated in a wheelchair, next to a blazing hearth, soaking his feet, while Gilmartin is shown seated at a table grading assignments. As the elder brother bemoans the changes in the school, in the background Gilmartin is shown occasionally looking up from his work in disgust at his confrere. In a scene later in the film, the old brother is in his bed being attended to by a doctor, who upon his departure refers to the infirm cleric as an 'old patriot.' After the doctor's departure the elder brother says to one of his confreres at his bedside, 'The town is full of sham nationalists. Nationality and religion are spiritual sources nearly equal to one another.' He goes on to say, 'I never thought to find the world would lose respect for us.'

³⁸² Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 254.

The image of the elder cleric from the Independence era on his deathbed corresponds with the image of Gilmartin standing outside of the institution next to the sign saying, ‘School Closed.’ The clerical figure of the older generation does not have to experience the consequences of a changing Irish society, while the younger clerical figure does. The film’s sensitivity to the ‘lost generation’ of clergy speaks to its post-Modern sensibilities in its refusal to be bound by ideological convictions, while clearly an anti-Catholic endeavour, *Our Boys* proffers the possibility that those who wounded were wounded themselves.

Section II *Song for a Raggy Boy*: The ‘Excarinate’ Cinematic Cleric and the Abuse Melodrama in the Celtic Tiger

The Celtic Tiger: Revelations of Sexual Abuse and the Rapidly Changing Discourse Surrounding the Catholic Church

In its treatment of systemic abuse occurring at a Christian Brothers’ institution during the mid-twentieth century, *Song for a Raggy Boy* is a direct descendent of *Our Boys*, discussed in the first section of this chapter. What distinguishes *Song for a Raggy Boy* from its cinematic predecessor is its depiction of clerical sexual abuse, a result of its release during the Celtic Tiger era, when sexual abuse and the Catholic Church had become intertwined in popular discourse. The cinematic depiction of clerical sexual abuse points to a rapid and jarring cultural shift in Ireland that would have been unthinkable just a decade before, when the earlier film had been released.

As mentioned earlier, *Our Boys*, with its depictions of the physical abuse of boys at an urban Christian Brothers secondary school, was not broadcast by RTÉ for a decade after its initial release on the film festival circuit in 1981. Another film released in the 1980s set at Christian Brothers’ institution is *Lamb* (Colin Gregg, 1985), which I mention

briefly earlier in this chapter. *Lamb*, stars Liam Neeson, as Michael Lamb, a Christian Brother working at an all-boys remand institution in the West of Ireland. The film focuses on Lamb's struggles with his own vocation, as well as his relationship with Owen Kane (Hugh O'Connor) a ward of the institution who suffers from epilepsy. *Lamb* received generally favourable reviews upon its release, however, the film's graphic depictions of physical abuse seems to have had little impact on the public. *Lamb*'s failure to make an impression in Ireland could be due to its limited resources in terms of distribution and promotion; or it could be due to the fact that, though the film is an Irish story starring Irish actors, it was shot primarily in England and produced and directed by British subjects in the midst of 'The Troubles', allowing for a subjective distancing from the material by an Irish audience.³⁸³

A more likely reason for *Lamb*'s failure to make an impression in the Republic, was that the film's depiction of corporal punishment of children was in no way revelatory to an Irish audience of the 1980s, as Barton notes, the physical abuse of children, either in the classroom or in the domestic sphere, was not only 'common knowledge but also common practice.'³⁸⁴ This then raises the question: if *Lamb*'s depiction of the systemic physical abuse of children at an institution run by the Church was neither revelatory nor shocking to an Irish audience in the mid-1980s, why then did RTÉ withhold *Our Boys*, produced only four years previous from public viewing for over a decade? I would contend that it had less to do with concern that the content of *Our Boys* would provoke scandal with the public at large, but rather points to the Irish media's deference to the Church at the time. This deference and its resultant collusion in cultivating and

³⁸³ Maeve Kennedy, 'Lambs to the Slaughter' *Irish Times*, 28 May 1985.

³⁸⁴ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 119.

maintaining a pristine public image, was normative within Irish culture since the State's inception.

It could also be argued that the medium of television itself, situated within the domestic space, was considered problematic in a way that the cinema was not. The domestic space, locus of the family unit, was perhaps too closely intertwined with the Church's interests to be deemed appropriate for a televisual account of clerical abuse. Indeed, the domestic space was perhaps the entity to which the Church was most closely affixed outside of the ecclesial area, and to which the parish priest had fixed an entrenched presence through the mother.

In the appendix to *Moral Monopoly*, Inglis demonstrates the rapid shift in public discourse regarding the Catholic Church between the 1980s to the 1990s, with a comprehensive comparison of headlines from the years 1987 and 1996 respectively in the *Irish Times*.³⁸⁵ Though, the number of headlines in 1987 were approximately the same as those in 1996, the content of the leaders changed significantly.³⁸⁶ Inglis notes, that in 1987 'there were no scandals concerning the personal sexual behaviour of priest and religious', while in 1996, 'there were 34 different stories—one in six of the total—concerning the sexuality, celibacy, and misconduct of clergy and religious.'³⁸⁷

While Inglis acknowledges that the *Irish Times* is traditionally an Anglo-Protestant newspaper, and that the Irish media had already been pushing a secular, liberal agenda for decades, he argues that despite this, the lack of negative headlines regarding the Church in 1987 speaks to the cultural hegemony that it once enjoyed and quickly lost. Inglis says of the dramatic transformation that occurred within less than a decade, 'suddenly the

³⁸⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 291-305.

³⁸⁶ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 291-305.

³⁸⁷ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 216.

Church has lost its sacredness and has become another interest group in civil society which is open to the same inspection as any other.’³⁸⁸

Celtic Tiger Cinematic Depictions of the ‘Abusive’ Cleric: *The Magdalene Sisters*

As stated earlier in this chapter, the Celtic Tiger era coalesced with revelations of abuse and brought to the fore a collection of film and televised accounts of abuse at the hands of clergy and religious. *Song for a Raggy Boy* was one of those accounts and followed on the heels of two high-profile Irish films featuring clerical abuse: Neil Jordan’s *The Butcher Boy*, and Peter Mullan’s *The Magdalene Sisters*. Jordan’s film has already been the subject of much critical analysis, notably Martin McLoone’s utilization of *The Butcher Boy*’s protagonist Francie Brady (Eamonn Owens) as a metaphorical stand-in for Ireland as the ‘abused child of history.’³⁸⁹ McLoone’s image dovetails with Ruth Barton’s recognition that, though Celtic Tiger cinema, as it came to be called, defined itself in part by its movement away from the historical narrative, Ireland has become in modern Western Anglophone culture, a ‘stand-in for an all-purpose traumatic space.’³⁹⁰ Thus, both because of Ireland’s historical Catholic identity and its history of suffering and oppression, it became the ideal locus for cinematic accounts of abuse by clergy and religious.

The Magdalene Sisters, like *Song for a Raggy Boy*, is an abuse melodrama, with writer/director Peter Mullan, utilizing the stories of real-life survivors of Ireland’s infamous Magdalene laundries for ‘fallen’ women, from the televised documentary, *Sex in a Cold Climate* (Channel 4, 1998). The presence of the clerical figure in *The*

³⁸⁸ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 217.

³⁸⁹ Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 213-223.

³⁹⁰ Ruth Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 15-16.

Magdalene Sisters is minor, especially in comparison with its depiction of the religious sisters overseeing the institution. With that said, as Martin McLoone has noted, the opening sequence of the film, set at a wedding reception in 1960s Ireland, wonderfully captures the prominence of the cleric in rural Irish society of the time.³⁹¹ The priest (Sean Mackin) is shown on stage at the reception, playing a solo on the bodhrán, while singing the Irish folk hymn, ‘Well Below the Valley.’ As the music continues, the camera moves about the room and we are shown the interaction between Margaret (Ann Marie Duff) and her male cousin, who proceeds to lure her to a room upstairs where he proceeds to rape her. After the rape, we see through a series of ‘whispered asides and significant looks,’ that Margaret will be held responsible and punished for the assault.³⁹² Ultimately, as the whispered communications move from the females at the reception to the males, the priest, the ‘final authority,’ is informed of the situation. The scenes which immediately follow this sequence take place the following morning and show Margaret being escorted out of her home and into a car where the priest awaits, to escort her to the Magdalene laundry.

The opening sequence stands out from the rest of the film, as is presented almost entirely without dialogue, and instead the entire story of Margaret’s rape and its aftermath, is told visually. As Margaret is shown joking around with her cousin and then ultimately being brought upstairs by him, the camera continually returns to the priest, beating on his bodhrán and singing the ‘Well Below the Valley,’ a variation of ‘The Maid and the Palmer,’ a folk song which loosely tells the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well from John’s Gospel (4:4-26 NRSV), though it replaces both figures with

³⁹¹ Martin McLoone, *Film, Media, and Popular Culture in Ireland: Cityscapes, Landscapes, Soundscapes* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), 122-123.

³⁹² McLoone, *Film, Media and Popular Culture in Ireland*, 123.

Mary Magdalene and an unnamed ‘palmer,’ or pilgrim.³⁹³ Another deviation from the scriptural narrative is the addition of the woman having multiple babies buried near the well, providing a sinister layer of meaning to the song.

The camera repeatedly cuts between various close-ups of women and girls at the reception watching the cleric perform with rapt attention, to Margaret and her cousin joking back and forth with each other. The camera then returns to the image of the priest onstage, banging his bodhrán, singing with his eyes closed. The cleric is consumed with his music and oblivious to the community of people gathered around him watching. The priest ends the song with a drum crescendo, as he bangs away, covered in sweat, his eyes closed, one cannot help but draw a parallel between his physical expressions and facial contortions, with that of the moment of climax in the sexual act (Fig. 3.1).

The successive images of a celibate cleric seemingly aping sexual climax onstage, oblivious, as his entire congregation looks on, immediately followed by a young woman being sexually violated, is striking in its wordless editorial. The series of scenes serve as a subversive representation of the relationship between the Irish female, that is, the Irish female who is not a mother, and the priest throughout modern history. The cleric, as the centre of attention, oblivious to his community as they (literally) look to him, while just above a young woman is hidden and ignored while being sexually assaulted.

³⁹³ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882-1898), 228-232, <https://archive.org/details/englishandscotti01chiluoft/page/n245/mode/2up?view=theater>.



Fig. 3.1 The Magdalene Sisters: The priest (Sean Mackin) and his bodhrán.

As Barton points out, the remainder of the narrative discourse of *The Magdalene Sisters* is not nearly as well constructed as the opening sequence, and ultimately the film turns into a prosaic melodrama.³⁹⁴ While the majority of the abuse of the laundry's wards is committed by the female religious overseeing the institution, the film's other clerical figure, Father Fitzroy (Daniel Costello), is also explicitly shown to be a perpetrator of sexual abuse. Father Fitzroy's primary target is Crispina (Eileen Walsh), a young woman with an intellectual disability. After seeing the cleric's abuse of Crispina, Margaret places nettles in the priest's laundry, causing the cleric to tear off his clothing in front of the local community in the midst of an outdoor Corpus Christi ceremony. As the cleric frantically strips off his vestments and trousers, Crispina screams at him repeatedly, 'You are not a man of God!'

The image of the priest running through the Irish countryside, naked and humiliated, is simultaneously cathartic and troubling for the viewer, as Crispina's incessant cries go on

³⁹⁴ Ruth Barton, 'Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,' *English Language and Literature* 63, no. 4 (2017): 652.

much longer than is comfortable. McLoone refers to this sequence as ‘Irish cinema’s most devastating attack on the priest and all that he represents.’³⁹⁵ If nothing else, McLoone’s comment speaks to the primary mode of characterization of the cleric in Irish film during the Celtic Tiger era. As stated earlier, outside of its artistic opening sequence, *The Magdalene Sisters* is a melodrama, and very much holds to the conventions of the form in its focus on plot at the expense of characterization, its binary depictions of good and evil, and by extension heroes and villains. Just as the film’s depiction of the sisters running the institution, Father Fitzroy’s sole purpose in the narrative is to be a villain, and within the context of this narrative that is defined as abusing the wards of the laundry. Thus, the Father Fitzroy character, as a priest, ‘and all that he represents,’ is not an ‘incarnate’ characterization in any way, nor is he intended to be, but instead serves as an analogue for a callous, hegemonic institution, that both allowed and sustained physical and sexual abuse for decades. As Barton has noted, abuse melodramas, in part served as catharsis for survivors, and thus, the concern by both filmmakers and audience for the characterization of a representative of the Church is of negligible concern.³⁹⁶

The Emergence of Sexual Abuse in Public Discourse and the Case of Father Brendan Smyth

During the mid-1990s and into the mid-2000s, commonly referred to as the Celtic Tiger era, sexual abuse took a prominent position within discourses surrounding the Catholic Church, not just in Ireland, but throughout the West. As Barton notes, the sexual abuse of children first entered public discourse in the Republic of Ireland with the Kilkenny incest case in 1993, wherein a father was sentenced to seven years imprisonment after pleading guilty to rape, incest, and the assault of his daughter.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ McLoone, *Film, Media, and Popular Culture in Ireland*, 123.

³⁹⁶ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 121.

³⁹⁷ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 119.

Occurring almost contemporaneously with the Kilkenny case, were two significant incidents involving clergy which would serve as catalysts for the drastic shift in public perception regarding the Catholic Church, sexual impropriety and abuse.

Following on the heels of the case in Kilkenny, came allegations of abuse against Irish priest Brendan Smyth, revelations which as it turned out, would bring down a government. Born John Gerard Smyth in Belfast in 1927, he attended the local Christian Brothers school, before entering the Norbertine Order at Kilnacross Abbey in Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan in 1945, where he took the religious name Brendan. Smyth was sent to Rome for Theology studies, only to be sent home ‘under a cloud’ of suspicion in 1951—the rumours surrounding his early return having to do with ‘some incident with a child’.³⁹⁸

The story of the four decades of Smyth’s unchecked abuse of children and the Church’s concealment of it, serve as a microcosm for the abuse crisis that shook the Catholic Church in the West at the end of the twentieth century. Smyth was repeatedly moved from parish to parish, diocese to diocese, and ultimately from country to country, in an attempt by ecclesial leaders to cover-up his abuse. Smyth was moved to Wales, then Italy, before being transferred to the United States, where he ministered to communities in both North Dakota and Rhode Island.³⁹⁹

Father Bruno Mulvihill, a Norbertine colleague, had from the 1960s onward, attempted to expose Smyth’s abusive behaviour to ecclesial authorities, sending letters to papal nuncios, bishops, and abbots. Mulvihill’s missives were met with either ridicule or no response at all.⁴⁰⁰ Smyth was finally arrested in 1991 in Belfast, after the parents of

³⁹⁸ Gerry Moriarty, ‘Evil Spirit of a Ruined Church,’ *Irish Times*, 20 March 2010.

³⁹⁹ Moriarty, ‘Evil Spirit of a Ruined Church.’

⁴⁰⁰ Patsy McGarry, ‘Priest risked church career to expose paedophile, but concerns dismissed,’ *Irish Times*, 4 May 2012.

four children reported him to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). However, after being released on bail, Smyth fled to the Republic where he stayed at Kilnacross Abbey for the better part of three years.

On the 29th of April 1993, nine warrants for Smyth's arrest were sent by the RUC to the *Garda Síochána*, the next day they were forwarded to the Attorney General, Harry Whelehan's office. In November of 1993, with the extradition papers still unattended to, the RUC contacted the Attorney General's office to inform them that Smyth had returned to the North voluntarily.⁴⁰¹ The following year, immediately following Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds appointment of Whelehan to the position of President of the High Court, the leaders of Fine Gael tabled a motion of no confidence in Reynolds, citing the recent High Court appointment, in particular the seven month delay in Smyth's extradition.⁴⁰² Reynolds initially defended Whelehan before the Dáil, arguing that the Smyth case was unprecedented in light of changes in legislation regarding extradition in 1987, all the while withholding information he had received from new Attorney General, Eoghan Fitzsimons of a case similar to Smyth's occurring in 1992.⁴⁰³ Reynolds' knowledge of the precedent was revealed to Labour Tánaiste, Dick Spring, whereupon Whelehan resigned from his post, while the Taoiseach stepped down, followed soon after by the collapse of the coalition government.⁴⁰⁴

Smyth was convicted of 43 charges of sexual assault against children in Northern Ireland and was sentenced to four years in prison. After serving his prison term in the North, Smyth was immediately extradited to the Republic where he was sentenced to a further 12 years in prison, having pleaded guilty to seventy-four charges of sexual assault.

⁴⁰¹ 'Questions: Oral Answers—RUC Extradition Request,' *Dáil Éireann Debates*. 25 October 1994. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1994-10-25/7/>.

⁴⁰² Ann E Daniel, *Scapegoats for a Profession*, (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 1998) 108-9.

⁴⁰³ Daniel, *Scapegoats for a Profession*, 109-110.

⁴⁰⁴ Harry McGee, 'Coalition in power two years when Smyth row erupted,' *Irish Times*, 15 March 2010.

He was to die of a heart attack in the Curragh prison at seventy years of age, one month into his new sentence in August of 1997.⁴⁰⁵

Similarly, in the ecclesial sphere, Father Kevin Smith, the abbot for twenty-five years of the Norbertine community in Cavan where Smyth was based, resigned from his position in October of 1994, admitting to ‘many errors,’ in reference to his transferring of Smyth across the globe in attempting to conceal his abuse.⁴⁰⁶ In 2010 it was revealed that Cardinal Seán Brady had been a part of a 1975 inquiry into abuse allegations against Smyth made by, then eleven year old, Brendan Boland and another, unnamed boy. Brady swore the boys to secrecy and did not report the allegations to the police.⁴⁰⁷ Brady resigned from his position as Archbishop of Armagh and Catholic Primate of All-Ireland in 2014, though it should be noted that Brady’s submission of his letter of resignation was standard protocol for bishops at seventy-five years old, the age he would turn that year.⁴⁰⁸

In the wake of Smyth’s case, Father Sean Fortune, a priest in the Diocese of Ferns, was accused of multiple accounts of sexually abusing young boys, with the cleric committing suicide before standing trial in 1999.⁴⁰⁹ Monsignor Michael Ledwith, the president of St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, from 1985-1994, was also accused of abusing multiple seminarians, including a minor during his tenure at the National Seminary.⁴¹⁰ These were the most visible cases to emerge during the Celtic Tiger era, but certainly not isolated incidents, and led to such stories being, as Inglis terms it

⁴⁰⁵ Moriarty, ‘Evil Spirit of a Ruined Church.’

⁴⁰⁶ E. Leo McMannus, ‘Fallout from Pedophilia,’ *Commonweal*, 10 March 1995, 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Patsy McGarry, ‘Abuse Issue Cast Cloud Over “Humble Pastor.” Analysis Cardinal Seán Brady’s Loyalty to Institution Cost Him on Abuse Issue,’ *Irish Times*, 9 September 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ Patsy McGarry, ‘Cardinal’s Resignation Accepted by Pope,’ *Irish Times*, 9 September 2014.

⁴⁰⁹ Alison O’Connor, ‘Man Who Loved Spotlight Buckled Under its Glare,’ *Irish Times*, 15 March 1996.

⁴¹⁰ John Cooney, ‘Ledwith Affair to be Bishop of Scandals,’ *Evening Herald*, 8 June 2002.

‘commonplace’ by the mid-1990s.⁴¹¹ With that said, Inglis goes on to say that these revelations

were a radical rupture in what for two hundred years had appeared to have been a seamless, uniform and total commitment by the clergy to the teachings of the Church. It was not so much that the members of the clergy were shown to be guilty of the sins of promiscuity, adultery, fornication, paedophilia, rape, and buggery, but that for centuries they had been castigating these contraventions of the Natural Law not just as intrinsically evil, but as the greatest of sins.’⁴¹²

In terms of media representation, the Smyth case was featured in an episode titled, ‘Suffer Little Children’ on the Ulster Television’s magazine series, *Counterpoint* in October of 1994, with a two-part telefilm, *Brendan Smyth: Betrayal of Trust* (BBC) based on Chris Moore’s 1995 book of the same title, aired in 2011, with Northern Irish actor, Richard Dormer in the titular role. Fortune’s story was told in the televised documentary *Suing the Pope* (BBC), which aired in 2002. In the Republic, Mary Raftery, followed up *States of Fear* (RTÉ, 1999), discussed earlier in the chapter, with an episode of the RTÉ current affairs series, *Prime Time*, titled ‘Cardinal Secrets,’ that aired in 2002. ‘Cardinal Secrets’ exposed the concealing of clerical sex abuse from civil authorities in the Archdiocese of Dublin, by then Archbishop (later Cardinal), Desmond Connell.

Song for a Raggy Boy

Song for a Raggy Boy tells the story of William Franklin (Aidan Quinn), a newly hired lay teacher at the fictional St. Jude’s Reformatory in Cork, run by the Christian Brothers. The film opens with Franklin’s arrival at St. Jude’s in 1939, where Brother Tom (Dudley Sutton) informs him that he is the first lay teacher in the school’s history. The film follows Franklin as he attempts to teach St. Jude’s primarily illiterate student body the fundamentals of reading and writing. He takes his brightest pupil, Liam Mercier (John

⁴¹¹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 216.

⁴¹² Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 217.

Travers), under his wing, all the while fighting against the violently abusive methods of the school's prefect, Brother John (Iain Glen).

Mercier flourishes under Franklin's guidance, however, we see the shadow side of their teacher/pupil bond in the sexually abusive relationship between Brother Mac (Marc Warren) and newly admitted ward, Patrick Delaney (Chris Newman). Franklin's complaints against Brother John's physical abuse of the students are ignored by St. Jude's ineffectual superior, Father Damian (Alan Devlin). Towards the end of the film, Franklin steps in to stop a particularly violent public flogging of two students by Brother John, which invokes the prefect's wrath. The story culminates with Brother John exacting his revenge on Franklin by fatally beating Mercier in the school refectory while Brother Mac looks on. The film concludes with both Brother John and Brother Mac being placed in a car and sent away from St. Jude's, while Franklin, after initially planning to resign from his post, at the last minute decides to stay on at St. Jude's.

Song for a Raggy Boy is director Aisling Walsh's second feature film, having spent the 1990s directing episodic television series after the release of her debut film, *Joyriders* (1989). The film is based on the identically titled 1991 memoir by Irish poet, Patrick Galvin. The memoir offers a brief account of his time at St. Conleth's reformatory in the 1930s in County Offlay. The brothers' excessive use of corporal punishment is one of the dominant themes of Galvin's text, and the book, its own way, provides an indictment of the church, state and society that allowed for, and sustained institutions like St. Conleth's (renamed St. Jude for book and film).⁴¹³ With that said, though Galvin's text is less ambitious in its interrogatory aims than its cinematic counterpart, his lyrical writing style and detailed approach to characterization make for a more complex narrative discourse.

⁴¹³ Rosita Boland, 'Death of writer of "Raggy Boy" trilogy, Patrick Galvin at 83,' *Irish Times*, 11 May 2011.

By contrast Walsh's film uses much more simplistic melodramatic codes to ground its narrative. As Emilie Pine says in her analysis of the film, 'While one can certainly recognize the need to create uncomplicated plot lines and characters, it is regrettable that the film also divests their characters of some of their complexity, at least as Galvin had originally drawn them.'⁴¹⁴

The tonal and thematic variances between film and book are undergirded by their respective narrative approach. Galvin's work uses multiple narrators, never allowing the reader to fully identify with a singular protagonist, but instead forcing them to continually reassemble and reengage with the story from differing points of view. Walsh's film, by contrast, utilizes the conventions of the melodrama, wherein the film's story is told solely from the perspective of Franklin. The film's shifting to a singular point-of-view within the melodramatic framework, in turn constricts its possibilities in terms of narrative discourse and clearly delineates characterizations.

Song for a Raggy Boy integrates the codes of the abuse melodrama with that of the 'teacher-as-redeemer' melodrama—a category of films that reached its cultural apex with Peter Weir's *Dead Poet's Society* (1989), but whose cinematic lineage can be traced at least as far back as MGM's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (Sam Wood, 1939). The conventions of the 'teacher-as redeemer' melodrama necessitate that Franklin character's point of view be privileged in a way it was not in Galvin's book. That Walsh and co-screenwriter Kevin Byron Murphy should take this approach is hardly surprising from a commercial perspective given that 1990s mainstream Hollywood had been amenable to the 'teacher-as-redeemer' melodrama, as evidence by the success of such films as *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995) and *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Stephen Herek, 1995). Undoubtedly, the

⁴¹⁴ Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 35.

change in narrative structure was also influenced in the casting of Aidan Quinn, as Franklin. Quinn, the American son of Irish immigrants, was a well-established film actor for nearly two decades by the time he became attached to *Song for a Raggy Boy*. Though, never quite attaining the status of matinee idol that his good looks and early roles in films such as *Reckless* (James Foley, 1984) and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985) promised, Quinn had carved out an impressive cinematic resumé for himself portraying secondary male leads to stars such as Robert DeNiro, Johnny Depp, and Brad Pitt in such high-profile films as *The Mission* (Roland Jaffe, 1986), *Benny & Joon* (Jeremiah S. Chechik, 1993), and *Legends of the Fall* (Edward Zwick, 1993). This propensity for his being cast as secondary males in large-budget projects transferred over to Irish film, as well, where he played Harry Boland to Liam Neeson's titular hero in Neil Jordan's historical epic, *Michael Collins*. Quinn's public visibility, if not on the level of some of his co-stars, was still enough to warrant funding for smaller, independent projects including *Song for a Raggy Boy*. Director Walsh acknowledged that it was Quinn's attachment to the project that ensured its £5 million budget.⁴¹⁵ Thus, Quinn's participation in the project, undoubtedly influenced the shifting in narrative focus solely to Franklin's perspective. Quinn's celebrity also brings with it a commensurate level of good will, which though not on the level of Spencer Tracy or Bing Crosby during their turns as cinematic priest, allows his character to serve as an analogue for the 'social worker' priest that steered the social reform narratives which emerged out of Hollywood preceding and during the Second World War. Indeed, the Franklin character is very much in alignment with the heroic clerics essayed by Tracy and Crosby, both his work, specifically with boys, and his celibate existence within the homosocial carcerated space outside of mainstream society. Thus, the cinematic Irish priest of 1930s and 40s America, is replaced in the Irish

⁴¹⁵ Richard Mowe, 'Raggy Boy Comes Home,' *Irish Examiner*, 06 September 2003.

context within modern cinematic narratives representing said era, by a Marxist, celibate male. A similar substitution of the Irish cleric of the 1930s is shown in Ken Loach's, *Jimmy's Hall* (2014), which I address in Chapter Four of this thesis.

As I addressed in my analysis of *Our Boys* earlier in this chapter, *Song for a Raggy Boy* as an adaption of Galvin's memoir of his experience of abuse at St. Conleth's should give a level of authority and authenticity to the film as survivor discourse. As Barton says of the abuse melodrama, 'mainstream cinema most commonly addresses issues of cultural trauma via narratives of personal trauma.'⁴¹⁶ However, the cinematic adaption of Galvin's text is problematic starting with its shifting the narrative entirely to Franklin's perspective. This decision is questionable in no small part because Galvin's experience at St. Conleth's was as a ward and victim of abuse. Galvin had written a screenplay for *Song for a Raggy Boy*, which Walsh and Murphy claim to have utilized when creating the final script, however the author was displeased with the alterations made from his book, in particular the addition of sexual abuse and the murdering of the Mercier character.⁴¹⁷ Galvin's wife, Mary Johnson, speaking on his behalf, said of the cinematic additions: 'Paddy's book isn't about sexual abuse [...] it's about fascism. His focus was on redemption through education—that was what he saw as the drama of it. And you can see it in his original script.'⁴¹⁸

The film's authenticity—in particular the epilogue in intertitles at the film's conclusion—is also undermined by the screenwriter's unfamiliarity with ecclesial practices and rhetoric. Early in the film there is a scene occurring right after Brother Mac and Franklin have chaperoned a group of boys out to a nearby field to tend to the

⁴¹⁶ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 121.

⁴¹⁷ Jan Battles, 'Real "Raggy Boy" is Owed Money,' *Sunday Times*, 19 October 2003.

⁴¹⁸ After a stroke in 2003, Galvin had his wife speak for him publicly. Arminta Wallace, 'Reprise for a Raggy Boy,' *Irish Times*, 31 July 2009.

landscaping of an area surrounding an enormous crucifix. In a long shot we see Franklin and Brother Mac leading the boys up a country path back to St. Jude's. Brother Mac turns to scold the boys in a sharp voice and then turns to Franklin and softly tells him that he joined the congregation at the same age as many of the boys because his family could not afford an education for him. Brother Mac goes on to say that he came to St. Jude's two years after he was ordained. While this statement affirms my statement in Chapter One of this thesis, that in cinematic or televised depictions of Catholic religious males, little or no distinction is made between priests—who do receive the sacrament of holy orders and are thus, ordained—and religious brothers, who are not and thus, are not considered to be 'clergy,' despite their taking the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.⁴¹⁹ This oversight on the part of the screenwriters is problematic in this instance only in that it calls into question the facticity of the epilogue which states that Brother Mac was moved to a parish in the United States where he still lives today. The likelihood of this outcome is dubious in that congregations made up predominantly of religious brothers do not historically oversee the running of churches, as brothers are not ordained ministers and thus, cannot provide the sacramental ministry which is the fundamental focus of parish work. More likely, the epilogue's transferring of the paedophile Brother Mac to the United States (and the murderous Brother John to the African missions) is a bit of artistic license on the filmmakers' part and is perhaps a reference to cases such as Brendan Smyth's, Sean Fortune, Archbishop Connell, and subsequent revelations about other paedophile priests who had been relocated by their superiors instead of being removed from ministry and reported to civil authorities. Indeed, *Raggy Boy* would have been in production around the same time as revelations of a massive sex abuse coverup in the

⁴¹⁹ Certain religious congregations take a fourth vow, such as the Order of St. Benedict, who take a vow of stability, in deference to the rootedness of their monastic life.

Archdiocese of Boston were revealed by the *Boston Globe*. With that said, David Rooney's review of the film in *Variety*, specifically mentions this particular epilogue note, and writes, 'audiences likely will squirm to read in an end-title caption relaying the characters' outcomes that the same priest transferred to a U.S. parish where he still lives.'⁴²⁰

While it could be argued that the film's fictional additions and technical inaccuracies problematizes its discursive authority, the film's depiction of abuse as it occurred at St. Conleth's—the institution where Galvin was a ward—are accurately depicted and illustrate methods of discipline particular to the institution. Indeed, an entire chapter—of 120 pages in length—is dedicated to St. Conleth's in the Ryan Report, where it is referred to as 'Daingean,' in reference to the town in County Offaly where it was located.⁴²¹ The Report says of the reformatory: 'More than the other institutions, Daingean had a system of administering corporal punishment in a formal, almost ritualised way.'⁴²² It should be noted that testimony in the investigation was given by former students and supported by that of brothers and priests who worked at Daingean. Daingean was unique in its use of the discipline of 'flogging,' those boys who transgressed. Though, officially, flogging consisted of making a boy kneel on the floor, removing his shirt, and then slapping his back with a strap '5 or 6 times.' However, the accounts of the victims remember being lashed on other parts of the body, including one who remembers having his trousers removed and being lashed on their bare bottom.⁴²³ The Ryan Report concluded that, 'flogging was administered in Daingean in a cruel, sadistic and excessive manner designed to maximise the terror of all the boys.'⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ David Rooney, 'Song for a Raggy Boy: Review,' *Variety*, 2 February 2003, 14.

⁴²¹ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15. <http://childabusecommission.ie/?p=613>

⁴²² Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 76.

⁴²³ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch..15, 77, 91.

⁴²⁴ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 119.

The Prefect in the early 1940s, the time when *Song for a Raggy Boy* is set, is referred to in the Report by the pseudonym ‘Brother Jaime.’ ‘Brother Jaime’ was noted for both the ferocity and arbitrariness of the floggings which he gave which is consistent with the film’s depiction of Brother John, his cinematic counterpart.⁴²⁵ The investigative committee of the Report were shown the Prefect’s ‘strap’ which he used to ‘flog’ the students, and they noted that, ‘it was about three feet long, with a narrower section at one end for use as a handle. It was half an inch thick and about two inches wide [...] and when administered with force by an adult on a child, it caused extreme pain.’⁴²⁶

There is an extended and graphic depiction of ‘flogging’ in *Song for a Raggy Boy* after a pair of St. Jude’s inmates who are biological brothers, Gerard (Andrew Simpson) and Sean Peters (Michael Sloan) are placed by Brother John in the middle of the schoolyard, where they are stripped, made to kneel, and then flogged in front of the rest of the school community. Brother John would again use the strap in the film’s climactic scene where he ‘flogs’ Mercier to death.

The sexual abuse depicted in the film is also consistent with the Report’s findings. The Investigation gives an extensive account of a ‘Brother Ramon,’ who would serve six years imprisonment for sexually assaulting boys at a school in Wales in the 1980s and 1990s, but who had also served at Daingean for nearly twenty years before being transferred in the early 1970s. ‘Brother Ramon’ was identified by multiple former students as having sexually assaulted them.⁴²⁷ Witnesses attested to sexual assault by other brothers in the community, as well as lay faculty, however the extent of the abuse is difficult to gauge, because as The Ryan Report points out, ‘the absence of a proper

⁴²⁵ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 91-97.

⁴²⁶ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 89.

⁴²⁷ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 267-282.

system of receiving and handling complaints.’ The Report also states that, ‘the system that was put in place tended to suppress complaints rather than to reveal abuse or even to bring about investigations.’⁴²⁸

With that said, the question arises as to whether or not the historical accuracy of the cinematic text is in turn what inhibits it. As Elizabeth Cullingford says of the play-turned-film, *Doubt* (John Patrick Shanley, 2008), which she says, is:

an imaginative drama, with its absence of forensic evidence or victim testimony, freedom to embrace contradictions, and dynamically fluctuating engagement with different audiences, may be genetically better-suited than documentary to perform the ambiguities of this religious and sexual catastrophe.⁴²⁹

Following Cullingford’s lead, I would argue that *Song for a Raggy Boy*’s desire that both its attempt to be survivor’s discourse while simultaneously being a showcase for its leading man, ultimately prevent complexity at the level of narrative discourse. Walsh’s desire to authentically replicate not just Galvin’s experience of abuse at Daingean, but those of other abuse survivors as well, in part led to clearly delineated notions of good and evil and heroes and villains. This morally straightforward approach to the story was in turn buttressed by the need to prominently foreground Aidan Quinn, whose attachment to the project assured its completion. Thus, the Franklin character is given a backstory of his time fighting in the Spanish Civil War, and much like Father Flanagan in *Boys Town*, is haunted by events from his past and hopes that his work with indigent boys will serve as a corrective to his past failures. By contrast the clerics in the film are given minimal if any backstory and no psychological insight is given as to the reasons for their abuse.

Clerical Representation in *Song for a Raggy Boy*

⁴²⁸ Ryan, *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, Vol. I, Ch. 15, 318.

⁴²⁹ Elizabeth Cullingford, ‘Evil, Sin, or Doubt: The Dramas of Clerical Child Abuse,’ *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (May 2010): 246-247.

Following on my comparison of the Franklin character and Father Flanagan from *Boys Town*, what is clear in analysing the ‘abusive’ clerical figure, is that he is an inversion of the ‘social worker’ priest archetype which is analysed in Chapter One of this thesis. Both the ‘abusive’ priest and the ‘social worker’ priest archetypes emerged out of dramatic necessity within the context of their socio-historical situation. The stories of benevolent clergy aiding indigent children during the Depression were inverted half a century later to highlight narratives of malevolent priests abusing children in Church-run schools and institutions. Unlike his Hollywood antecedent, the ‘abusive’ cleric’s cinematic visibility is limited because his characterizations are ‘excarinate,’ serving primarily as an ‘image’ of the institutional Church and not as subjective entity in his own right.

Song for a Raggy Boy provides two distinctive depictions of the excarnate ‘abusive’ cleric, demonstrating the pathologies particular to their modes of abuse. Fundamental to the depiction of both Brother John and Brother Mac is their acts of violence against the corporeal. It is in their attempts to annihilate the flesh through the acts of physical and sexual abuse that they affirm and maintain authority. The objectification of the suffering male body as a means of seizing authority represented in *Song for a Raggy Boy* is an inversion of its traditional cinematic representation. Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides and Rocío Carrasco-Carrasco state that, ‘the portrayal of suffering male bodies confronting violence and pain has been frequently understood in Hollywood cinema as an enjoyable reassertion of male power’⁴³⁰ However, in *Song for a Raggy Boy*, the locus of power is found in the excarnate priest and his attempts to obliterate the male body. As images of the wounded flesh of the wards of St. Jude’s are on display throughout the film, the bodies of the ‘abusive’ clerics are never disclosed, hidden under long, black soutanes.

⁴³⁰ Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides and Rocío Carrasco-Carrasco, ‘Painful Embodiment in Aisling Walsh’s *Song for a Raggy Boy* and Pedro Almodóvar’s *Bad Education*,’ *Journal of Film and Video* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 15.

Even the mutual exchange of touch between Brother John and his victims is withheld as he utilizes the intermediary device of the strap in his assault upon the flesh.

The violence perpetuated against the flesh is the primary means of asserting clerical authority which is congruent with the ‘hatred’ for the flesh inherent to the dualistic theology inscribed in the Irish Catholicism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I would suggest that the violence inflicted upon the wards of St. Jude’s is an extension of the subjective violence of clerical celibacy. As Carl Olson contends that celibacy is not only an ascetic practice, but ‘also a scripted form of violence.’⁴³¹ Olson argues that, ‘by practicing celibacy, a person works against the natural inclinations of the human body and its drives, and he or she thereby perpetuates violence on his or herself.’⁴³² Thus, the violence against the body of the boys of St. Jude’s is an extension of the violence against the body inherent in religious, ascetical practices that attempt to deny corporality.

Brother John is perhaps the definitive representation of the excarnate clerical figure. The characterization of the cleric’s lack of ‘carnality’ manifests in his pathological obsession with sustaining power through the conquering of the flesh via corporal punishment. His lack of ‘feeling,’ both tactile and emotional is evidenced in the final scene of the film, wherein Franklin repeatedly physically assaults the cleric, who in turn, maintains a blank visage, with no affective response. Brother John’s excarnate characterization is further illustrated in his lack of a subjective history, as Kearney notes, disembodiment is conjoined with the absence of personal narrative.⁴³³ Brother John, has no backstory within the narrative and exists solely to serve the cinematic text as monstrous antagonist and signifier for the institutional Church.

⁴³¹ Carl Olson, ‘Celibacy and the Human Body: An Introduction,’ in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. C. Olson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

⁴³² Olson, ‘Celibacy and the Human Body,’ 8.

⁴³³ Gonçalo Marcelo, ‘Narrative and Recognition in the Flesh: An Interview with Richard Kearney,’ *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 43, no. 8 (2017): 784.

The character's position as cinematic proxy for the Irish Church is illustrated in the opening sequence of the film, wherein as the visiting bishop (Claus Bue) is prepared to depart the school having performed confirmation duties, he stops and tells Brother John, who is standing at attention in line, and tells him, 'Keep up the good work,' to which the cleric responds, 'I won't let you down, your grace.'

Brother John's excarnate characterization manifests in his incapacity to engage in any form of reciprocal exchange, with both his peers, whom he verbally intimidates, along with the boys, whom he continually attempts to dehumanize. As Kearney states, 'abusive touch is a refusal to acknowledge the other as singular and equal, denying that tact requires two free subjects in relation. Perversions and pathologies of touch involve the reification of the person as a mere object.'⁴³⁴ Conversely, the prefect's attempts at dehumanizing the boys have the effect of further dehumanizing his character for the viewer. In a scene early in the film, upon meeting Franklin for the first time, Brother John says to him, 'the creatures you are going to teach should not be confused with intelligent human beings.' When addressing the boys, he refers to them by numbers, not their given names.

However, it is in the depictions of Brother John's abuse of the boys that provide the most powerful moments in *Song for a Raggy Boy*. As Barton notes of *Song for a Raggy Boy*, 'the scenes of abuse are more memorable than the happy ending.'⁴³⁵ As the narrative progresses, the scenes of abuse become more elaborate and more graphic in their depiction of violence. The parallels between the scenes of abuse and scriptural and artistic accounts of Christ's passion—the events which occur between his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and his death on the cross—are explicit. The punishment at St. Conleth's and

⁴³⁴ Kearney, *Touch*, 12.

⁴³⁵ Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, 123.

other Catholic institutions, would undoubtedly have been informed by the Christian dualistic ascetism which attempted to ‘conquer’ the flesh, and in turn ‘break the will,’ through the imitation of Christ’s suffering in his final living moments. Thus, the abuse scenes continually allude to Christian iconography, including the aforementioned flogging scenes, which mirror the flogging of Jesus in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and John.⁴³⁶ Similar biblical imagery is alluded to when the entirety of the ‘senior’ boys dormitory is made to stand in the schoolyard in the middle of the night, with arms outstretched as if nailed to a cross, stripped down to nothing but their undershorts (See image 3.1).

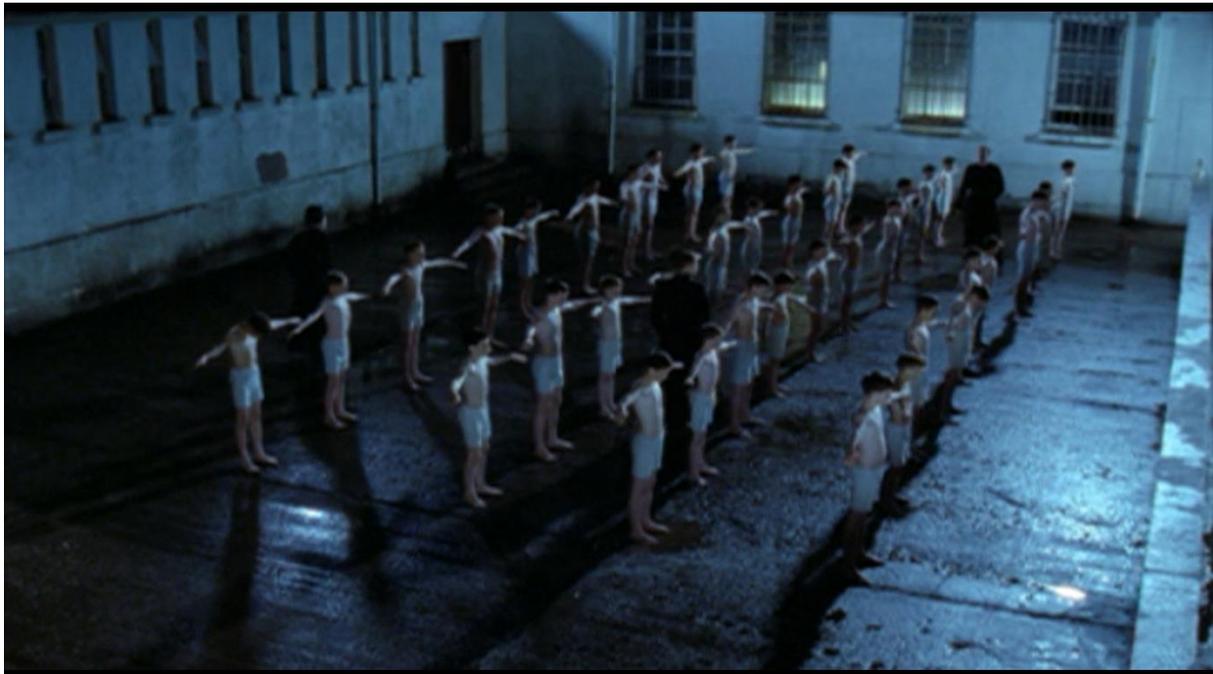


Fig. 3.1 Song for a Raggy Boy (Aisling Walsh, 2003)

Later in the film there is a brief scene of the Delaney character, being punished for wetting the bed, once more, stripped to his undershorts, labouring to carry his mattress on his back by himself in the schoolyard. The image gestures toward the Johannine Gospel

⁴³⁶ Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1 (NSRV).

account of Jesus carrying his cross to Golgotha from Jerusalem and the multiplicity of artistic depictions of the scene throughout the Western artistic canon. The mirroring of the redemptive suffering of the incarnate God, the ‘word made flesh,’ in his Passion, through the irredeemable abuse of the boys of St. Jude’s by the excarnate cleric, Brother John, illustrate the systemic perversion of theological principles that undergirded Irish Catholicism.

With that said, Mercier’s death by flogging can be read as redemptive. Pine notes, that Mercier’s murder is a sacrificial offering that ‘ensures change and mercy for the other boys.’⁴³⁷ Mercier, as a sort of Christ-figure, is particularly relevant, in that he is one of the few boys at the institution who is literate when Franklin first arrives, as Pérez-Vides and Carrasco-Carrasco argue, language and verbal expression are the means by which the cycle of violence at St. Jude’s can be terminated and it emerges through the boys’ discovery of poetry. This is evidenced most explicitly in the film’s final scene, wherein Delaney stops Franklin’s departure from St. Jude’s by reciting *Comrades* (1916), a poem written in the wake of the Easter Rising by Anglo-Irish poet and suffragette Eva Gore-Booth, who was also the sister of the prominent revolutionary, Constance Markievicz.⁴³⁸ The boys, whose wounded corporality has been on display throughout the film, in their discovery of language, become fully realized ‘human beings.’ Their transformation into autonomous subjects is in direct opposition to Brother John’s remarks to Franklin earlier in the film, where he dismissed them as ‘creatures.’ The merging of the body with the word in the figure of the boy, serves to eradicate the dualism of body/soul theology perpetuated by the brothers and the abuse it engenders.

⁴³⁷ Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory*, 33.

⁴³⁸ Pérez-Vides and Carrasco-Carrasco, ‘Painful Embodiment,’ 17-20.

The characterization of Brother Mac is, arguably a more sympathetic one than that of Brother John, due in part to his subsidiary position to the prefect. Unlike, his confrere, Brother Mac does have a semblance of a backstory and is, at times, shown to be friendly with Franklin and nurturing to the students. Indeed, Pine, in her analysis of the film, argues that Walsh took a more sympathetic approach to Brother Mac than to the prefect, which she contends, leads the film's viewers to 'question whether the film is suggesting that sexual abuse is not as objectionable as physical abuse.'⁴³⁹ I would argue that the film's depiction of Brother Mac is not so much a more compassionate image of the sexual abuser, but a delineation in terms of the distinctive pathologies inherent to the differing modes of abuse.

Unlike Brother John, who is given no subjective backstory, Brother Mac, in a scene previously mentioned in this section, tells Franklin that he was a similar age and from a similar economic background as the boys at St. Jude's, when his father, wanting for him 'to learn' had him enter the congregation. This exchange suggests that Brother Mac's vocation was an involuntary one, and also suggests the possibility that having entered the order in his early teens, he might have suffered the same sexual abuse that he now inflicts on the boys of St. Jude's.

However, outside of the brief snippet of dialogue, no other information is disclosed about Brother Mac. In most of his other scenes he is shown silently overseeing the boys doing their chores or 'shadowing' Brother John in his various disciplinary measures. He assists the prefect in his 'night raid' of the boys' dormitory; he is shown cutting the hair of the Peters' brothers before their flogging; and he lures Mercier out of class into the refectory under false pretences leading to the flogging by brother John that culminates in

⁴³⁹ Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory*, 34.

the boy's death. In that scene, we see Brother Mac uncomfortable watching the flogging of Mercier, but he stays in the refectory keeping watch until finally when the boy has been beaten to the point of death he chooses to flee and find Franklin, to whom he says, 'It wasn't me...it wasn't me.' This image of the remorseful cleric blaming another cleric reads less as the subjective remorse of Brother Mac, and instead as an analogue of the contemporary Catholic Church, whose hierarchy, upon the revelations of abuse expressed profound regret while simultaneously shifting blame away from themselves. Brother Mac, like the institutional Church, becomes concerned about Brother John and his abuse only when it becomes apparent that it will be impossible to conceal anymore.

Outside of his brief exchange with Franklin, Brother Mac's only benevolent interactions are brief moments with Delaney early in the film. The scene depicting Brother Mac's assault of Delaney is relatively brief and the two actors are shot from the shoulders up, however, the violent intensity of Brother Mac as he grabs the back of the boy's neck and then forcefully covers his mouth with his hand is consonant with the tone of the more explicit scenes of physical abuse depicted in the film. Later in the film, when Brother Mac confronts Delaney about telling his confessor about the assault, he first caresses the boy's face before grasping him forcefully by the chin (See Fig. 3.2). These sequences demonstrates that though the mode of abuse may differ, the violent intent underneath is the same.



Fig. 3.2 Song for a Raggy Boy: Brother Mac (Marc Warren) confronts Delaney (Chris Newman).

I would argue that the characterization of Brother Mac is neither more complex nor sympathetic than that of Brother John, but rather a reflection of a differing pathological avenue for abuse. Brother Mac's method of abuse necessitates both secrecy and ingratiation to varying degrees, with both his victim and the community at large. This necessitates a less overtly hostile disposition than that of Brother John. In addition to this, with regards to the cinematic discourse, *Song for a Raggy Boy's* representation of sexual abuse is overshadowed by its more elaborate displays of corporal punishment which border on spectacle. As Brother Mac, is like his counterpart, an excarnate characterization, there is no question of complexity, and thus, the depictions of the abuse itself becomes the sole means for garnering audience response.

The other two significant figures within the cinematic text are Brother Tom (Dudley Sutton) and Father Damian (Alan Devlin), both of whom are depicted as benevolent, yet ineffectual figures. Brother Tom is elderly, and serves as Franklin's guide upon his

arrival, not unlike Barry Fitzgerald's Father Fitzgibbon did with Bing Crosby's Father O'Malley in *Going My Way*, which is discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. Like Father Fitzgibbon, Brother Tom is depicted as a relic of another era and is never shown criticizing Brother John. Indeed, the elderly Brother's perspective on the boys is revealed to be as pessimistic as the prefects. At one point in the film, Brother Tom is shown speaking to Franklin about Mercier, and says of the boy's future, 'the only trade he'd ever follow would be that of a master criminal.' Comments like this, along with his complicity in allowing for Brother John's abuse, suggest that perhaps only age and infirmity are preventing the elderly Brother from being abusive himself.

Father Damian is the manager of the institution and though he sympathizes with Franklin's complaints about Brother John, the priest claims he cannot do anything to prevent it, because the prefect has the bishop's support. Though, perhaps presenting as more sympathetic and compassionate than Brother John or Brother Mac, Father Damian's inability or unwillingness to attempt to deter Brother John speaks to the priest's preoccupation with his own security and well-being over that of the boys who are under his protection and care. That both Father Damian and Brother Tom are seemingly benevolent figures, speaks less to their characters capacity to be embodied, and instead points to the fortress mentality of the Catholic Church to sustain abusive practices. In the few scenes featuring Father Damian and Brother Tom where they are shown eating meals with their community, none of the men speak to one another as they eat in silence. This imagery of the clergy gathered as community but unwilling to speak serves as a microcosm of the Church's attitude toward abuse at least since the time of Independence.

Conclusion

The coalescence of the economic boom and revelations of clerical abuse that took place in Ireland during the 1990s, played a significant role in the rapid decline of the Catholic Church's influence within Irish society. This decline manifested in the cinematic and televisual realms with the excarnate characterization of the 'abusive' priest. The 'abusive' priest, an inversion of the 'social worker' priest archetype of the 1930 and 1940s Hollywood, subverted his Irish-American antecedent's relationship with the juvenile boy within the carcerated space, and transformed it into unilateral physical and sexual assault.

That the Christian Brother became the cultural signifier for abuse is due both to myriad public revelations of abuse at the order's institutions and their singular vocational focus on working with young boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Initially released in the early 1980s, *Our Boys* provides a prototype for later depictions of the 'abusive' priest in its account of a Christian Brothers school in pre-Vatican II Dublin. The film's experimental style, intertwining talking head interviews, archival footage, and fictive narrative threads, provides a more robust characterization of the cleric who abuses than its Celtic Tiger predecessors would do. *Our Boys* focus on the interrelatedness of abuse, cultural nationalism, and the onto-theology pervasive in Irish Catholicism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, allowing for a more complex account of the cleric.

The depiction of *Our Boys* primary clerical abuser, Brother Gilmartin, as being as incarcerated within the confines of the Christian Brothers' institution as the boys he ministers and abuses, does not remove his culpability but rather allows for a recognition of a generation or more of Irish clergy who found themselves in a place of vocational

crisis in the wake of the deconstruction of nationalist mythology and a modernizing church. The depiction of Brother Gilmartin does not de-criminalize the abusive cleric, but instead questions the motives of the vocations for generations of young men, who perhaps were not so much interested in the ‘servant leadership’ promulgated by Christ in the Gospel, but instead were attracted to the exclusionary authoritative elite aspect of religion put forth by the Pharisees. This then would seem to argue for clerical abuse, in part, being a manifestation of a thwarted desire for authority from a clergy formed and encouraged by an institution with little interest in Christ’s mission.

The metamorphosis of the cinematic cleric from the incarnate depiction of Brother Gilmartin in *Our Boys* to the excarnate depictions of Brothers John and Mac in *Song for a Raggy Boy* point to his instability. While *Our Boys* presents an abusive clergy that was a consequence of a Church evangelizing a theology rooted in an authoritarian understanding of God, the abuse melodrama of the Celtic Tiger era, presents the cleric as the representation of the institution itself. Brother John and Mac’s hatred of the flesh manifests the institutional Church’s promulgation of a theological dualism privileging the mind. Both Brothers’ attempts to eviscerate the flesh speak to a perversion of the ascetic practices imposed on them as members of the clergy.

With that said, the excarnate characterizations of the priest in the abuse melodrama speak to the genre’s incapability of providing robust characterizations as well as its preoccupation with providing catharsis and closure for abuse survivors. Unlike *Our Boys*, the abuse melodrama makes no attempt to critically analyse the various elements at play which allowed the abuse to continue unabated for decades, nor the societal complicity necessary for its sustainment.

Each of the clerical depictions in this chapter once more draw attention to the problem of the female. In the diachronic tracing of the cinematic Irish priest, the female, unattached to a child, proves to be insoluble to the priest and either does not exist, as in the case of the homosocial worlds of *Our Boys* and *Song for a Raggy Boy*, or must be hidden, ignored, or sexually assaulted as in *The Magdalene Sisters*.

Chapter Four: Cinematic Representations of the Priest After the Celtic Tiger

Introduction

The contingency of the character of the priest in modern Irish film is the primary assertion of this thesis. Though the Irish priest's unstable cinematic identity is not entirely beholden to socio-historical factors, this study has been constructed upon the link between the changeability of the clerical representation against the shifting social, political, and economic landscape of the Republic of Ireland over the latter part of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. As Ruth Barton points out, it would be simplistic to argue that Irish cinema's relationship with society is mimetic, with that said, it can be argued that Irish cinematic output depicts the illusions and projections of the social order.⁴⁴⁰ As societal conditions continually shift, so too do societal fantasies and projections, thus, though the link between the cinematic and the social is not one to one, a link between the two can be made.

The preceding chapters of this thesis analysed the priest in the Irish film since the advent of a modern Irish cinema in the late 1970s through the Celtic Tiger era—a period of astonishing economic growth, which commenced in the early 1990s and lasted until the latter part of the 2000s. This chapter will interrogate clerical representations from the post-Celtic Tiger era which can be traced to approximately 2008 and the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the global fiscal crisis.⁴⁴¹ Yet, the economic collapse is only part of

⁴⁴⁰ Ruth Barton, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 6.

⁴⁴¹ Dan O'Brien, 'Origins of the Great Recession,' *Irish Times*, 12 September 2013.

the story, indeed, by 2014 Ireland was reported to have the fastest growing economy in the European Union.⁴⁴²

As I have done in the previous chapters, I will utilise the work of Irish scholar Richard Kearney, in particular his conceptions of ‘ex-carnation,’ ‘incarnation,’ and ‘anatheism’ to provide the theoretical through line to support my argument regarding the contingency of the cinematic priest. In this chapter I will demonstrate through a close reading of two key cinematic texts in the Irish canon, the ascending—or *anabasis*—trajectory of the priest as he transfigures out of the ‘ex-carnate’ representation of the Celtic Tiger era and into the embodied, or ‘ana-carnate’, that is ‘incarnate again,’ characterization that manifested in the wake of the economic collapse. These incarnate depictions diverge from their cinematic ‘incarnate’ ancestors which are analysed in Chapters One and Two in that their embodiment is, in part, a consequence of their own fallibility. Thus, their cinematic ‘flesh,’ as it were, is in no small part a consequence of their own experiences of moral frailty and personal trauma; this is particularly the case for the ‘wounded healer’ archetype which I explore at length in the second section of this chapter.

The two cinematic texts analysed in this chapter, *Jimmy’s Hall* (Ken Loach, 2014) and *Calvary* (John Michael McDonagh, 2014) were chosen because they depict Irish clergy at two distinctive periods in the relatively brief history of the Irish state. As I mention in Chapter Two of this thesis, the changing role of the cleric in Irish society was the result not only of modernisation, but also came out of ecclesial developments born out of the democratizing aspects of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The reforms of the Council were most visible in terms of the celebration of the Mass, including the transition in the language of the liturgy from Latin to the vernacular, as well as the turning of the

⁴⁴² Jon Sindreau, ‘At 4.8%, Ireland economy grows at EU’s Fastest Pace in 2014,’ *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irelands-economy-grew-4-8-in-2014-1426165657>

priest from *ad orientem*, that is ‘toward the east’ while facing the altar with his back away from the congregation, to *versus populum*, that is, ‘facing the people.’ These changes from the Roman hierarchy were in concert with other developments throughout the world, such as the Liberation Theology movement emerging out of Latin America with its Marxist undertones and emphasis on social justice, which led to a more democratized conception of clerical identity. Thus, even though both films analysed in this chapter were released in the same year, their priestly depictions are situated in two distinctively different historical and social contexts that necessitate discrete interrogation.

With that said, both films were produced against the same societal horizon, that is, in the wake of the economic collapse in 2008. Similarly relevant was the release of multiple, comprehensive reports on clerical abuse by the Irish government, the most prominent of which, the Ryan Report, is addressed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Both the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the release of the various documents on clerical abuse, provide the key components of the hermeneutical lens through which these texts are analysed. As Ruth Barton says, ‘In Ireland, as elsewhere, the economic crisis also created a widespread distrust of authority, particularly of bankers and politicians. What was distinctive about the Irish situation was that this coincided with the final collapse of the authority of the Catholic Church.’⁴⁴³

Thus, it could be argued that the innumerable revelations of institutional corruption, born out of the economic collapse, along with the ecclesial scandals, created a societal environment amenable to the collection of positive clerical depictions that emerged in film and television since the end of the Celtic Tiger era. This echoes Barton’s claim, which said revelations of corruption represented ‘a desire to retrieve some vestige of

⁴⁴³ Ruth Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ *Journal of English Language and Literature* 63, no. 4 (2017): 653.

authority from the wreckage of the social and institutional collapse of the period,' which manifested in the 'good' priest, who served as the 'benevolent authority figure.'⁴⁴⁴

Building on Barton's claim, I would put forth that a multiplicity of complex clerical depictions, Irish and otherwise, such as Paul Schrader's film about a struggling Protestant minister (Ethan Hawke) in *First Reformed* (2017), have come forth in film and television since the since the time of the global financial crisis in the late 2000s, and speak to a cinematic and televisual anatheistic turn, wherein traditional faith-based systems are re-evaluated outside of the constraints of theistic dogma.

I would like to suggest that the depictions of the ex-carnate priest as villainous abuser during the Celtic Tiger era, as examined in Chapter Three of this thesis, served a purgative role for Irish filmmakers and audiences, a catharsis, that as Kearney says, 'liberates [the subject] [...] into a space from which she or he may freely choose—after the poetic suspension of primary belief and the magic has faded—to believe or not believe.' Kearney goes on to say, 'In short it is only after we have put all religious "truth claims" in brackets [...] that we have the option, *après coup* of returning to those truth claims and assessing them anew [...] we find ourselves at liberty to decide for or against an assent to the sacred.'⁴⁴⁵ Thus, the priest and/or other traditional religious authority figure has become the primary discursive template for an anatheistic reassessment of the transcendent in the cinematic and televisual landscape of the early twenty-first century.

Both films in their attempts to depict an 'incarnate' priest, expose the inherent difficulties of such a project, due in no small part to the problematic discourses affixed to traditional authority figures. The historical Irish priest cannot be entirely detached from the hegemonic authority which the Church held for the better part of the twentieth

⁴⁴⁴ Barton, 'Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,' 654.

⁴⁴⁵ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2010), 10-11.

century, and it is only when he does disentangle himself from power that he is capable of being fully human. Depictions of the modern priest necessitate a return to rigid and regressive notions of gender roles for the cleric to reclaim his place as moral exemplar.

Section One: Post-Celtic Tiger Embodied Characterizations of the Priest in the Historical Film: Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall*

Jimmy's Hall (Ken Loach, 2014)

The film opens upon Jimmy Gralton's (Barry Ward) return to County Leitrim to assist his elderly mother (Aileen Henry) with the family farm after the recent death of his brother. Not long after his arrival, Jimmy reconnects with his former girlfriend, Oonagh (Simone Kirby), who is now married with children, though it is apparent that they both still harbour feelings for one another. Members of the local community badger Jimmy, both young and old, to reopen the dancehall which he had helped to found before leaving Ireland to go to the United States ten years before.

A collection of flashback scenes provide the explanation for Jimmy's departure the previous decade and includes a raid on the Pearse-Connolly dancehall by the Free State army. These scenes also introduce Jimmy's primary antagonists in the narrative: parish priest, Father Sheridan (Jim Norton) and local resident, Dennis O'Keefe (Brian F. O'Byrne).

The dancehall is reopened, and its multi-functionality is demonstrated in a series of short scenes showing it serve as a gymnasium, an art studio, and a schoolroom, where subjects such as the Irish language and literature are taught. The hall's reopening is marked by a public dance to which all the community is invited. On the night of the dance, in an exterior shot outside of the hall, Father Sheridan is shown, accompanied by

his curate, Father Seamus (Andrew Scott) and some women from the parish. The parish priest is shown scolding and taking the names of those people going up the road to the hall.

The scenes of the dance—which feature lengthy sequences of community members dancing to traditional Irish music, as well as contemporary American Jazz—are intercut with scenes of Father Sheridan preaching during the following morning’s Mass. The priest is shown standing at the pulpit deriding the hall and its proprietors, and then culminates with him naming all the parishioners who attended the dance.

The consequences of the clergy’s public condemnation of the hall are then shown and include O’Keefe’s beating of his teenage daughter Marie (Aisling Franciosi) for being named at the altar for having attended the dance. We also see an impromptu gathering of the hall’s board after the brutally beaten Marie arrives. The hall members recognize the suffocating pressure the clergy is putting forth for the hall’s closure which manifests in the hall’s art teacher, Tess’s (Denise Gough) resignation after Sheridan threatens a boycott of her family’s shop.

Jimmy then goes to the presbytery and attempts to reach out to Father Sheridan. The two men go back and forth about Jimmy’s communist sympathies and then Jimmy asks the parish priest to join the hall’s board. Father Sheridan responds to Jimmy’s offer by saying that he will only join the board if the title deeds to the hall are handed over to ‘Holy Mother Church.’

This is then followed by a scene of gunshots being fired through the hall’s windows during a children’s dance recital. Jimmy once more confronts Father Sheridan, this time while he is presiding within the confessional box. Jimmy, speaking to the cleric through the screen of the confessional, compares the cleric to Jesus’s biblical antagonists, the Pharisees, and accuses the priest of inciting violence against the hall and its members.

The scene then immediately cuts to the interior of the presbytery where the maid tells Father Seamus, the young priest, that she is concerned about Father Sheridan's obsession with Gralton. The curate goes to check on the elder priest and finds him in his bedroom, seated on his bed in his robe and pyjamas, with a bottle of whiskey, listening to *Weeping Willow Blues* (Paul Carter, 1924) on the phonograph.

The hall is set on fire in the middle of the night and burns to the ground. Father Seamus and Father Sheridan are then shown having drinks at O'Keefe's estate, where the young priest takes the Blueshirt commander and his companions to task for the hall's destruction,

Officers are then shown arriving at the Gralton farm with an order from the government for Jimmy's deportation. Jimmy's mother distracts the guards, while he escapes out the back of the house and into the Leitrim countryside. As Jimmy evades the authorities, members of the hall are brutally harassed by officers attempting to discover his whereabouts. Jimmy and Oonagh bid each other farewell before he is finally captured and brought into custody by the guards. The film concludes with Father Sheridan along with O'Keefe, and several landowners watching as Gralton is escorted in handcuffs to the truck that will take him to the ship which will send him to the United States. As O'Keefe and his companions jeer at Gralton as he is placed into the bed of the truck, Sheridan shouts at the men, 'Please, please! Show the man some respect. He has more courage and decency than all of you put together.'

James Gralton and Ken Loach: *Jimmy's Hall's* Historical and Cinematic Context

Jimmy's Hall is based on the true story of Irish socialist, James 'Jimmy' Gralton's failed attempt to re-establish a dance hall in Efferagh, County Leitrim in 1932, leading to his deportation to the United States the following year. Gralton's banishment makes

him the sole native-born subject to have been deported by an indigenous Irish government.

The real-life Gralton originally emigrated to the United States in 1907, returning to Ireland for the first time in 1921. At that time, he helped to establish the Pearse-Connolly dancehall, while also recruiting for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and assisting in land seizures and resettlements in the wake of the War of Independence and the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.⁴⁴⁶ However, it was his work in the founding of the dancehall that raised the ire of the Church, as Luke Gibbons says:

The unremitting hostility which Gralton met from the Catholic church arose not just from his personal views or even his uncompromising attitude towards land agitation, but rather from the fact that through the establishment of a dance hall [...] he posed an *institutional* [emphasis in original] challenge to the church's determination to secure its position as the sole focal point for communal organisation in the locality.⁴⁴⁷

The Pearse-Connolly hall was always more than just a space for terpsichorean activities, it was also the site of Republican Courts, running in opposition to the British judicial system during the period between the cease-fire and the Civil War.⁴⁴⁸ Gralton fled Ireland on the eve of the Civil War, driven out, according to *Jimmy's Hall's* historical advisor, Donal Ó Drisceoil, by 'pro-Treaty Free Staters, who would soon take power in a partitioned Ireland.'⁴⁴⁹ Jimmy remained in the United States, primarily in New York City, for the next decade where he continued to dabble in communist politics and the burgeoning jazz scene of the roaring twenties. Gralton returned to Ireland in March of 1932, when the film's story commences, to assist his parents with the family farm after the death of his brother.⁴⁵⁰ Gralton's return to Ireland coincided with the end of Cumann

⁴⁴⁶ Luke Gibbons, 'Labour and Local History: The Case of Jim Gralton,' *Saothar* 14 (1989): 88.

⁴⁴⁷ Gibbons, 'The Case of Jim Gralton,' 88.

⁴⁴⁸ Paul Laverty, 'Introduction,' in *Jimmy's Hall, Production Notes*, ed. Laverty (2014), n.p.

⁴⁴⁹ Donal Ó Drisceoil, 'Days of Brave Music: A Note on the Historical Context,' in *Jimmy's Hall, Production Notes*, ed. P. Laverty (2014), n.p.

⁴⁵⁰ Ó Drisceoil, 'Days of Brave Music.'

na nGaedheal government and the rise of Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil party, which briefly gave hope to Irish progressives of a movement away from ecclesial influence. However, by the summer any such hopes were irrevocably dashed with the 31st International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin's Phoenix Park, which according to Ó Drisceoil, 'The Catholicisation of the [Irish] state was crowned', with over a million Irish Catholics in attendance.⁴⁵¹

During the scene in the film where Father Sheridan is castigating his parishioners for attending the dance, he pointedly expresses concern over what he calls, the "Los Angelesation" of our culture.' Jimmy's Hall screenwriter, Paul Lavery appropriated the phrase from a paper written by Ireland's first film censor, James Montgomery titled, 'The Menace of Los Angelesation' written on the heels of the passing of the Censorship of Films Act in 1923.⁴⁵² In the document, Montgomery held that the real threat to the burgeoning Irish state, was not Anglicization, from the country's now centuries-long English coloniser, but instead Hollywood which 'was waging a fight with national cultures everywhere.'⁴⁵³ Film scholar Kevin Rockett contends that Montgomery and those affiliated with the cultural nationalist project, most significantly the Catholic Hierarchy, turned their attack toward Hollywood in the post-independence era, in the hopes of unifying divergent social groups within the country against a common external enemy.⁴⁵⁴ Rockett says, that just as antipathy toward the English had provided an extrinsic scapegoat for all Ireland's problems before the War of Independence, so too, it was hoped that Hollywood could serve as yet another foreign scapegoat in the midst of an

⁴⁵¹ Ó Drisceoil, 'Days of Brave Music.'

⁴⁵² James Montgomery, 'The Menace of Hollywood,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 31, no. 124 (Dec. 1942): 420.

⁴⁵³ Montgomery, 'The Menace of Hollywood,' 420.

⁴⁵⁴ Kevin Rockett, 'Aspects of the Los Angelesation of Ireland,' *Irish Communication Review* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1991): 19-20.

‘economically distressed society, civil war and post-independence disillusionment.’⁴⁵⁵ As Rockett says, ‘In this way, as in the pre-independence period, internal homogeneity could perhaps be re-established and internal contradictions papered over.’⁴⁵⁶

The real-life Gralton’s communism is barely addressed in the cinematic text. Father Sheridan in his meeting with Jimmy in the presbytery brings up Stalin’s regime and its murdering of thousands of Christians, the gulags, and the *Holodomor* famine that was occurring contemporaneously in Soviet Ukraine. Jimmy sidesteps this issue by arguing that it’s a ‘long debate to be had’ and insists on bringing the conversation back to the hall. This is as close as the Gralton character ever comes to addressing the ‘communist problem.’ What makes this problematic is that by never articulating Jimmy’s communist beliefs the film fails to address the anti-clerical movement that was aligned with it.

Sheridan’s concerns with regards to communism in general and Stalinism is, baseless, as Father Seamus states in an earlier scene, ‘there can only be 150 or 200 communists in the entire country’; which is supported by academic, Peadar Kirby’s observation that no leftist collective was substantive enough to warrant the title of ‘social movement’ in post-independent Ireland.⁴⁵⁷

Still it would be naïve to think that the Catholic clergy’s concern was entirely unfounded, as historian Todd H. Weir notes, ‘if measured by acts of violence, anticlericalism peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, when thousands of Catholic priests and believers were imprisoned or executed and hundreds of churches razed in Mexico, Spain and Russia’.⁴⁵⁸ And though, Kirby might argue that there were no substantive leftist

⁴⁵⁵ Rockett, ‘Aspects of the Los Angelesation of Ireland,’ 20.

⁴⁵⁶ Rockett, ‘Aspects of the Los Angelesation of Ireland,’ 20.

⁴⁵⁷ Peadar Kirby, ‘Civil Society, Social Movements and the Irish State,’ *Irish Journal of Sociology* 18, no. 2 (2010): 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Todd H. Weir, ‘A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century? Anti-Catholicism and Anti-Bolshevism between Moscow, Berlin, and the Vatican 1922 to 1933,’ *Journal of Religious History* 39, no. 2 (June 2015): 281.

collectives, ‘hundreds’ of soviets sprouted up throughout Ireland, most notably in Monaghan and Limerick, in the years preceding and directly following the War of Independence and the Civil War.⁴⁵⁹ In 1934, two years after the events of *Jimmy’s Hall* took place, the Irish Republican Congress (IRC), a splinter group of the IRA put forth their own socialist manifesto in Athlone, arguing that a united Ireland could only be achieved through the over-throw of capitalism.⁴⁶⁰

Anti-clerical movements were not necessarily all emerging from communist factions, however, for Catholic leaders of the time, as historian Emma Fattorini says, ‘anti-clericalism of heterodox origins was put down entirely to a sort of meta-historical force of communism’.⁴⁶¹ Ireland was one of numerous small states that had garnered some measure of autonomy following the First World War, and in many of them with a significant Catholic population, the communist party was making significant inroads.

With that said, the Russian Revolution was not the inciting episode of the antagonism between Christianity and Communism, indeed even before Lenin and his comrades had established the Bolshevik sect of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903, the Vatican had already made a multiplicity of ant-communist statements.⁴⁶²

Jimmy’s Hall serves as a follow-up to Loach’s previous Irish-set film, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), which focuses on two fictional brothers in County Cork during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War. The film’s screenplay is written by frequent Loach collaborator, and fellow Briton, Paul Laverty, and is, as he states in the film’s press kit, ‘freely inspired’ by the life of Galton. Thus, outside of a few historical characters and documented public events, such as the hall being burned to the ground and

⁴⁵⁹ Urte Laukaityte, ‘The First Soviet in Ireland’ *History Today*, 09 January 2021, 24.

⁴⁶⁰ Richard English, ‘Socialism and Republican Schism: The Emergence of the Republican Congress in 1934,’ *Irish Historical Studies* 27, no. 105 (May 1990): 54-55.

⁴⁶¹ Emma Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini, and the Vatican; Pope Pius XI and the Speech That Was Never Made*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 101.

⁴⁶² Weir, ‘A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century,’ 284.

Jimmy's arrest and deportation, which are used as narrative markers, the film's content is primarily fictional.⁴⁶³

The fictionalisation of much of Galton's story is particularly relevant both in terms of buttressing the narrative by creating the character of Oonagh as a love interest for Galton, and more importantly for this study, the invention of the two clerical figures, Father Sheridan, and Father Seamus. As I will discuss later in this section, Laverty's construction of two fully en fleshed clerical figures goes against the grain of not only the Celtic Tiger era depiction of 'excarnate' priests, but also the received accounts of the historical priests involved in the Galton affair.⁴⁶⁴ Of significance for this study, is that Laverty, of Irish heritage and born in Scotland, spent six years in the Roman Catholic seminary, two of which were spent at the Jesuit run, Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.⁴⁶⁵ Thus, it could be argued that his understanding of the intricacies of Roman Catholic theology and the life of its clergy, allow for a level of authenticity and perhaps sensitivity in the film's clerical representations.

Narrative Heterogeneity in *Jimmy's Hall*

Director Ken Loach found in Jimmy Galton's story a template for utilising multiple modes of narrative procedures to address the film's audience. Thus, he utilizes a heterogeneric narrative structure, wherein he draws on multiple modes of artistic genres as a means of telling the Galton story. As *Jimmy's Hall's* story is centred around a

⁴⁶³ Laverty, 'Introduction.'

⁴⁶⁴ Ruth Barton writes that accounts of the real-life priests of the Galton affair, Fathers Cosgrave and O'Dowd were far less sympathetic than their cinematic counterparts. Ruth Barton, '*Jimmy's Hall*, Irish Cinema and the Telling of History' *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* 1, no. 1 (2016): 101.

⁴⁶⁵ Barry Didcock, 'He Witnessed War in Nicaragua, Studied Philosophy in Rome, and Now Lives in Madrid: Is Screenwriter Paul Laverty Scotland's Greatest Export?' *The Herald*, 01/07/2006, https://www.heraldscotland.com/default_content/12431873.witnessed-war-nicaragua-studied-philosophy-rome-now-lives-madrid-screenwriter-paul-laverty-scotlands-greatest-export-barry-didcock-meets-award-winning-screen-writer-wind-shakes-barley/?ref=erec.

dancehall, music and dance are foregrounded throughout the film. The sequences of music and dance shown within the hall throughout the film, serve to signify it, as Barton says, as a ‘utopian space.’⁴⁶⁶ This is particularly notable in the sequence of scenes of the dance at the hall’s reopening, wherein traditional Irish music and dance is seamlessly interspersed with modern American jazz, and in doing so, both brings together the people of the community, while simultaneously aligning them—the impoverished denizens of rural Ireland, who have been subjected to centuries of oppression by both coloniser and Church—with the impoverished black community of the United States, themselves subject to centuries of oppression by their own fellow Americans. That this series of scenes, which are without dialogue and solely consist of members of the community dancing, is intercut with scenes of Father Sheridan’s condemnatory sermon to a mute and passive congregation accentuates the hall’s role in the film as what Barton terms ‘an alternative to reality.’⁴⁶⁷ The juxtaposition of the community members’ physical expression of concord and harmony through dance, with the isolated figure of the static priest orating behind a pulpit at a silenced and paralyzed congregation also serves to underline the ‘ex-carnate’ quality of Sheridan.

Later in the film Jimmy and Oonagh are shown entering the empty hall at night. Oonagh then orders Jimmy to lock the door of the hall and proceeds to change into the dress Jimmy brought to her from New York. The two then proceed to dance, though the scene is lightly underscored, there is no music in the diegesis, as the two convey to one another and the audience, non-verbally, through dance, their love for one another and their desire for an alternative to the reality of Oonagh’s marriage and family with someone else and Jimmy’s peripatetic existence.

⁴⁶⁶ Barton, ‘*Jimmy’s Hall*, Irish Cinema and the Telling of History,’ 105.

⁴⁶⁷ Barton, ‘*Jimmy’s Hall*, Irish Cinema and the Telling of History,’ 105.

Loach's heterogenous approach to the narrative structure is again demonstrated in a scene at the local cinema where we see Jimmy, Oonagh and their companions from the hall watching a newsreel. In this scene, Loach uses both archival footage and music as a means of communicating the Church-state alliance as it stood in 1932. As I mention in my analysis of *Our Boys* in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the use of newsreel footage serves as indexical evidence signifying historical 'truth' and gives the audience a perceptible feeling of the reality of the past.⁴⁶⁸ As in *Our Boys*, the newsreel footage shown is that of the arrival of Papal Legate, Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri, in Dún Laoghaire Harbour for the 1932 Eucharistic Congress. The archival footage includes images of airplanes flying in formation in the shape of a cross over the Dublin sky, along with footage of Cardinal Lauri being accompanied by the new head of government, Éamon de Valera (Fig. 4.1). The image of the newly elected de Valera walking deferentially behind the Vatican's representative communicates to its audience both within and outside of the diegesis, that the Church's influence over the Irish government will continue unabated under the new Fianna Fáil government.

⁴⁶⁸ Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-6.

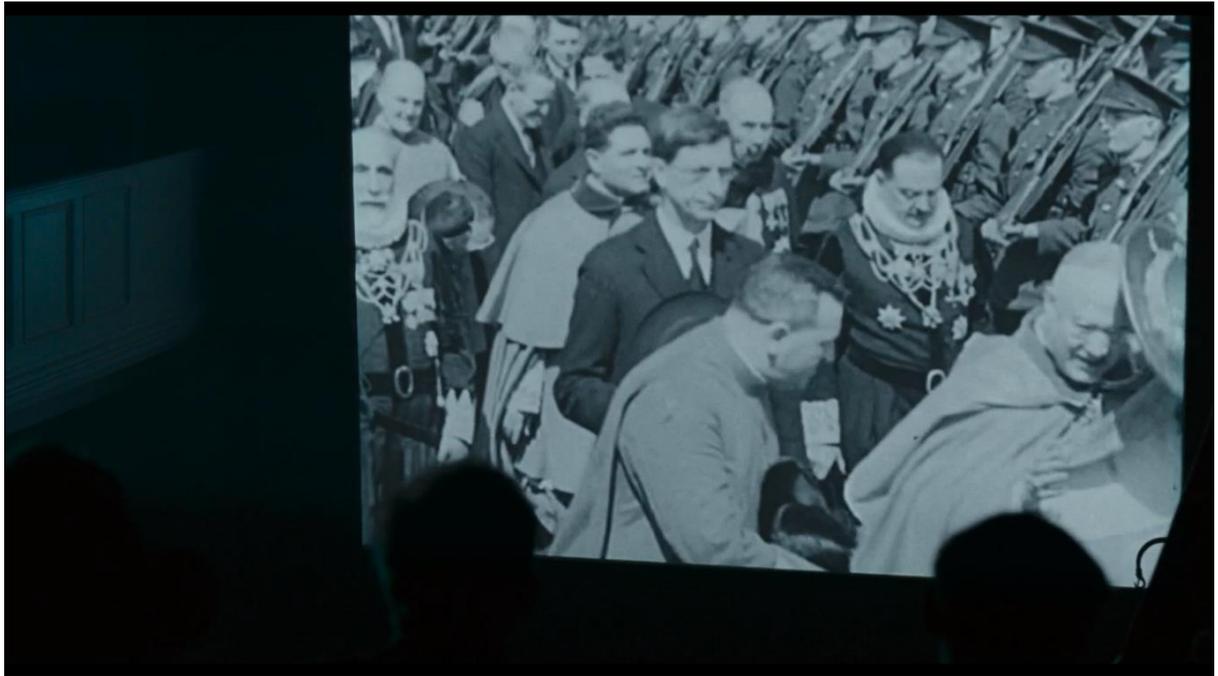


Fig. 4.1 Jimmy's Hall. Cardinal Lauri followed by Éamon de Valera.

Unlike in *Our Boys*, the newsreel footage is placed within the historical context of the narrative as the camera cuts to Jimmy, Oonagh and their friends from the hall watching the newsreel at a local cinema. As the newsreel ends, O'Keefe, and a group of his Blueshirt companions are shown leaving the cinema. 'Blueshirts' was the informal name for the Army Comrades Association, the paramilitary organization established in part, to protect, members of Cumann na nGaedheal, the party which had formed the Free State government that had recently lost power in the general election of February 1932.⁴⁶⁹ As they walk out of the cinema, the Blueshirts begin verbally harassing Jimmy and his friends, culminating with them singing the hymn, *Faith of Our Fathers* (1849):

Faith of our Fathers! living still
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword:
Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy
Whene'er we hear that glorious word.

⁴⁶⁹ Mel Farrell, 'From Cumann na nGaedheal to Fine Gael: The Foundation of the United Ireland Party in September 1933,' *Éire-Ireland* 49, no. 3/4, (Fall/Winter 2014): 146.

Faith of our Fathers! Holy Faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

The militant and triumphalist lyrics of the hymn were written by Frederick W. Faber, an Anglican convert to Roman Catholicism, who wrote the text to commemorate the Catholic martyrs of the English Reformation during the reign of Henry VIII.⁴⁷⁰ The image of the right-wing, paramilitary Blueshirts singing the lyrics to a hymn commemorating Catholic martyrs who died at the hands of an English monarch communicates both the entangled relationship between Church and state, as well as the palpable undercurrent of danger and violence abetting the church's ever increasing authority.

Another example of Loach's narrative heterogeneity is in the scene where Jimmy goes to the presbytery to invite Father Sheridan to join the Hall's board of trustees. The priest refuses the seat and speaks of 'a country supremely united in faith, love, and respect for Christ's representative on earth,' and brings Jimmy over to show him Sir John Lavery's portrait, *The Blessing of the Colours* (Figure 4.2), painted in 1922 and featuring a member of the Irish Free State army, clutching an Irish tricolour, on bended knee with hands clasped together in prayer. Above the soldier stands a Bishop with a crozier in his left hand, while raising his right hand and giving a blessing. An altar boy stands at his left holding the Roman Pontifical (*Pontificale Romanum*).⁴⁷¹ As Macdara Ó Drisceoil, a legal scholar, writing on the Church's influence on the early Irish judicial system says of the portrait, 'The message is clear: the Irish nation kneels facing the Catholic Church in docile piety and devotion. The synthesis between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the

⁴⁷⁰ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories: The Inspiring True Stories Behind 101 Favourite Hymns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982), 71-72.

⁴⁷¹ The Roman Pontifical is the text used by Bishops for various rites, including blessings.

Catholic Church are viewed as interchangeable in Lavery's painting.'⁴⁷² Indeed, in 1932, with the resounding success of the Eucharistic Congress, and an incredibly Church-friendly Fianna Fáil government, as evidenced by the newsreel footage of Cardinal Lauri's arrival in Dublin, the Church-state dyad was very much entrenched in the newly

⁴⁷² Macdara Ó Drisceoil, 'Catholicism and the Judiciary in Ireland, 1922-1960,' *Irish Judicial Studies Journal* 4, no.1 (2020): 1.

independent Ireland.



Fig. 4.2 The Blessing of the Colours. John Lavery (1922) Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.

Father Sheridan's Transformation from Excarnate to Incarnate Priest

Loach's use of heterogeneous procedures within the narrative structure is particularly effective as it presents Father Sheridan. Despite the film's use of traditional melodramatic codes in many of its characterizations—as well as contemporary Western cinema's reliance on one-dimensional, villainous, clerical depictions—he is not represented as a 'flat,' evil character, but rather, as the narrative's most fully developed character. Sheridan is the only character in the film that goes through an interior transformation, and it is through Loach's intertextual devices that the cleric's conversion is manifested to the audience.

The casting of Irish actor Jim Norton as Father Sheridan is an intertextual manoeuvre utilised by Loach to subvert received notions about the villainous priest figure. Norton had portrayed a priest or minister in myriad films and television series by the time of *Jimmy's Hall's* release and had his most culturally high-profile role depicting Bishop Len Brennan on the sitcom, *Father Ted* (Channel 4, 1995-1998). The widely popular series about three Irish priests banished to a remote island off the Westcoast of Ireland, remains one of the most visible cultural representations of Irish clergy over the past half-century.

The character of Brennan, a humourless, lecherous autocrat who is revealed to have a mistress and child in the United States, is loosely based on Galway's Bishop Eamonn Casey. Casey, it was revealed by the media in 1992—just three years before *Father Ted's* debut—had a child with an American, Annie Murphy, and subsequently resigned from his position and fled the country. Indeed, in one of the series' most humorous moments, Father Jack (Frank Kelly) pilfers a videotape from Brennan's bag, the contents of which reveal the bishop, fully decked out in his vestments, along with his American companion and their young child, frolicking on the beach.

Father Ted's Irish creators, Graham Linehan and Arthur Matthews at least partially based the Brennan character on Casey, whose story is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three of this project. *Father Ted* proved to have a transnational Anglophone appeal, winning multiple awards, including two British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards for Best Comedy Series (1996, 1999), and continues in reruns on Channel 4 in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland as of this writing. Thus, a sizeable portion of *Jimmy's Hall's* audience would be familiar with Norton's comedic depiction of the hypocritical, tyrant, Bishop Brennan. The casting of Norton as Father Sheridan then, excavates the recent past of the 1990s and the, now seemingly tame scandal of Bishop Casey and Annie Murphy, along with the subsequent satirizing of it.

The line between comedy and tragedy which separates Norton's portrayals of Bishop Brennan and Father Sheridan is a thin one. Both characters are in the tradition of the humourless, clerical autocrat found throughout Western television and film from the late twentieth century onward. Because of this clear link between the two characterizations, I would argue that the residue from the humorous buffoon, Bishop Brennan helps to neutralize Father Sheridan's character for the audience and intentionally undermines the lurking menace that could otherwise be perceived from the parish priest. Thus, the casting of an actor already well-known for his role in a much-beloved television series of recent memory in the role of a malignant figure, allows for an easier acceptance of his transformation into a fully embodied subject by the film's conclusion.

In the scene after Jimmy has excoriated Father Sheridan in the confessional in which Father Seamus finds the elder priest upstairs in his bedroom listening to Bessie Smith sing 'Weeping Willow Blues' on the phonograph, Loach foregrounds the heterogeneity of the music as it is held in tension with the visual image of the cleric. Loach juxtaposes the close-up shot of the face of the elderly, white, celibate, middle-class, Irish priest with the

sound of the voice of the alcoholic, sexually adventuress, black woman born into poverty in the racially segregated American South.⁴⁷³ In the cinematic moment the visual and aural are held in opposition, the lyrics of the song, though ostensibly about a woman mourning the loss of her lover, also has explicit biblical allusions, using the images of going ‘down to the river’ and ‘up on the mountain’, and in doing so, links the carnal with the divine.

Father Sheridan seated in profile in his bathrobe and pyjamas, sipping on whisky and staring into space, says to his curate about Smith’s vocals, ‘What’s wrong with that? You know that’s the voice of a black woman? Quite remarkable.’ He then turns the conversation to Galton and says of him, ‘he had the nerve to leave these [Jazz] records outside on the porch. And he had the guts to face me in the confessional. Do you know what he said? He said, “You have more hate in your heart than love,” what do you make of that?’ As he says this he looks once more into the distance off-camera and nods his head, silently affirming Galton’s reproach, as Smith’s laments about the lover who left her, can still be heard.

I would contend that the juxtaposition of Sheridan’s physical presence with Smith’s voice singing the spiritually erotic ‘Weeping Willow Blues’ serve as the epiphanic moment for the cleric. In the elder priest’s reckoning and embrace of an American blues song that intermixes the religious and the sexual, sung by an impoverished woman of colour, Sheridan has an anatheistic turn, wherein he recognizes the divine, not within the traditional theological confines of an omniscient demi-urge; but rather in the place of unknowing manifested in an openness to the Stranger, what Kearney calls an ‘attitude of holy insecurity.’⁴⁷⁴ As Kearney says:

⁴⁷³ Gwen Thompkins, ‘Forebearers: Bessie Smith: The Empress of the Blues,’ *NPR Music*, <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/05/575422226/forebears-bessie-smith-the-empress-of-the-blues>.

⁴⁷⁴ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 7.

We find [the anatheist wager] in various moments of creative ‘not knowing’ that mark a break with ingrained habits of thought and open up novel possibilities of meaning. For without the suspension of received assumptions we cannot be open to the birth of the new. Without the abandonment of accredited certainties, we remain inattentive to the advent of the strange; we ignore those moments of sacred enfleshment when the future erupts through the continuum of time.⁴⁷⁵

The scene in Father Sheridan’s bedroom is the culmination of journey of ‘embodied’ development within the narrative which manifests an interior transformation. Father Sheridan begins the film as an ‘ex-carnate’ clerical type which is exemplified in his oral condemnation of the hall and its denizens from the pulpit; however, as the narrative unfolds, the priest is shown to become incarnate, the ‘word becomes flesh.’ His transformation is epitomized in the scene in his bedroom as he silently sits listening to the voice of the Other. This ‘journey’ of embodiment comes through his encounters with the Stranger, particularly Gralton, as well as through the guidance of his ‘doctor-teacher,’ Father Seamus.

In his account of the embodied subject within the Western tradition, Kearney posits that Jesus’ tangibility, that is, his humanity was ‘apprenticed’, through the process of both ‘touching’ and being ‘touched’ by others.⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, I would argue that through the course of Jimmy’s Hall’s narrative, Father Sheridan moves from the ‘image’ of the despotic, abusive cleric as signifier for the institutional Church and becomes ‘flesh,’ through his interactions with Gralton and the mentorship of Father Seamus. With that said, incarnation for Father Sheridan, as well as for seemingly all modern cinematic and televisual representation of the Irish priest always comes with a corresponding loss of authority.

⁴⁷⁵ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 7.

⁴⁷⁶ Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 75.

Space and Authority in *Jimmy's Hall*

The battle for authority between Sheridan and Jimmy Gralton manifests in a literal battle for the dancehall. Contested space is a trope of Irish literature and film, which typically manifests in battles over land. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards distinguish between space and place, appealing to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's framework, wherein space is abstract and unfamiliar, and transforms into place through a development in familiarity, and attendant to which comes a consequent assignation of value⁴⁷⁷

Thus, for Jimmy and by extension the community the hall serves as something more than just a space. Barton contends that it serves as a utopian place for the community and coalesces with the temporal to become 'a sort of time out of time' reminding them of their hopes of an alternative reality outside of the actuality of Ireland a decade after independence.⁴⁷⁸ Barton appeals to Pierre Nora's notion of the *lieu de mémoire*, in arguing for the hall as a site outside of the realm of historicity that embodies memory or memories. The hall in some sense operates outside of the narrative arc, and in showing its multiplicity of uses, along with its function as a locus for music and dance of all types, serves as an escape from the constraints of everyday reality.

I would argue that Barton's view of the hall, as an idyll, existing outside the confines of reality, is supported within the cinematic text by Father Sheridan's refusal to place himself within the physical space of the hall. He is shown at one point outside of the hall protesting and harassing those going to the dance inside and at another point is seen standing in the hall's antechamber refusing to cross the threshold into the interior of space. Father Sheridan's refusal to place himself within the physical space of the hall, coupled with the fact that though he does not want Gralton to use the hall, though he

⁴⁷⁷ Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35.

⁴⁷⁸ Barton, '*Jimmy's Hall*, Irish Cinema and the Telling of History,' 105.

himself has no actual interest in utilizing it either—as evidenced by its having remained unused for the decade that Gralton was in exile—speak to the parameters placed upon the hall’s interior within the narrative discourse. The interior of the hall is a ‘sacred’ idyllic space to the community, that necessitates an exclusion of those figures—namely—Sheridan and the Blueshirts—who would ‘contaminate’ it by their imposition of the reality of church/state oppression.

Father Sheridan’s authority within the cinematic text is very much contingent on his spatial placement. The first scene in which he appears is in Jimmy’s mother, Alice’s kitchen. That Father Sheridan’s introduction to the audience is located within the maternal domestic space is fitting considering the historical significance of the priest/mother relationship in modern Irish history. Tom Inglis analyses this dyad in *Moral Monopoly*, where he posits that from the late 19th century onward, the priest and the mother formed a mutually beneficial alliance. This alliance manifested in the bestowing of moral authority onto the mother in the domestic realm by the priest, who was the moral authority of the community. The mother, in turn, provided sons for vocations to the priesthood and the cycle continued for generations.⁴⁷⁹ The primary ritual by which this mother/priest alliance was cemented was in the home visit. Until recently, regular home visits by the parish priest were a fundamental part of life for a sizeable portion of Catholics in Ireland. As Inglis contends, the visits acted, both as a way for the Church to maintain its stranglehold on religion in the Republic, while also serving as a means of supervising the attitudes and behaviours of the local community.⁴⁸⁰

Sheridan’s first appearance onscreen within the context of a home visit—holding court in a domestic space—visually articulates the locus of his authority. The cottage kitchen

⁴⁷⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1998), 48-49.

⁴⁸⁰ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 48.

was the setting for myriad Irish theatrical productions in the first half of the 20th century and as such, as Morash and Richards point out, came to be viewed as the ‘metonymic representation of the nation.’⁴⁸¹ The power dynamic between Father Sheridan and Alice is reinforced by their placement within the composition of the frame, as the traditional centre/periphery paradigm is used to visually depict their relative social status. Father Sheridan is shot in the centre, in medium close-up, seated at table, all the while the fragments of the elderly Mrs. Gralton’s torso flash in and out of the periphery of the frame as she moves about serving tea. The priest’s fixed presence, monopolizing the frame, reinforced by his poised command, underlines his authority and superior social position.

As the scene continues, Father Sheridan inquires after Jimmy, asking Alice if she thinks her son will be contented living in a small, rural community, having been living in New York City for the past decade, while also mentioning he has access to employment opportunities for Jimmy in London. Alice’s facial expression and vocal tone clearly indicate her indignance at what the priest is implying, while at the same time gesture to her own cultural subordination.

In another, later scene Father Sheridan is once more situated in mother’s kitchen, this time Mossie’s (Francis Magee) wife, Angela’s (Diane Parkes) kitchen. Sheridan is once again seated at table, while Mossie is relegated to sitting against the wall on the far side of the room, as Angela obsequiously serves the priest tea. The priest says he can get Mossie a job and tells the couple that he can assist in getting their daughter, currently living in Scotland, back home to live with them.

Conversely when Sheridan is situated outside within nature, his authority is attenuated. This is evidenced in the scene occurring right before the first dance at the re-opened hall,

⁴⁸¹ Morash and Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre*, 21.

as Sheridan is seen standing at the side of the road with Father Seamus and two female parishioners, verbally scolding those going to the dance, and who in turn respond with derision and indifference. This loss of power within the context of the outdoor space, is indicated performatively by the excessive physical movement used by Norton as Father Sheridan, who repeatedly paces back and forth, waving his arms, a sharp contrast to the subdued, minimal physicality he presents when situated within his loci of power, i.e., the domestic space, the church, and the presbytery.

The spatial contingency of Sheridan's authority is underlined in the series of scenes, wherein he is shown preaching in the church on the Sunday following the dance. It is in the church space, behind the pulpit where his authority is most potent. The scenes of Father Sheridan behind the pulpit are intercut with footage of the parishioners dancing at the hall the night before. The film juxtaposes the free movement and euphoria of jazz dancing in the hall with the rigid, immobile containment of many of the very same people within the church space. Father Sheridan is seen behind the pulpit, the ultimate position of his authority, where he proceeds to castigate his congregation for their 'fascination for the materialist, the pagan, the Anglo-Saxon and most recently the "Los Angelesation" of our culture' as well as jazz, 'rhythms from darkest Africa that inflame the passions.' He concludes his oration with the ultimatum: 'is it Christ or is it Gralton.'

Father Sheridan proceeds to exert his authority in enacting what amounts to a blacklist, reciting the names of those who attended the dance in front of the entire congregation. It is in this public act of naming at the pulpit, an act that was intrinsic to the priest's moral authority in post-independence Ireland, that Father Sheridan's power is made explicitly manifest. The impact of his public condemnation is demonstrated in the scenes which immediately follow, where we see Marie, O'Keefe's teenage daughter and a regular denizen of the hall—one, who in the previous scene had laughingly dismissed

Father Sheridan at the side of the road—being brutally beaten in the family barn by her father for ‘humiliating the family name.’

The disclosure of Father Sheridan’s authority within the community through the act of public shaming from the pulpit and its consequent reverberations in the community at large, are a result of what Inglis refers to as the ‘cultural capital’ that the laity acquired within the community, based upon their relative proximity to the Church. In the predominantly Catholic country, religious capital was almost synonymous with cultural capital, therefore, the more a person was able to elevate the public visibility of their religious adherence and affiliation with the Church, the more legitimised they were within their community.⁴⁸² As Inglis points out the various forms of capital at play within a particular society, be they symbolic, political, cultural or economic can be traded upon one for another; as such, particularly in the Irish situation, religious and cultural capital could be traded on for political or economic capital.⁴⁸³ Hence, the consequences of Father Sheridan’s ‘naming names’ from the pulpit reached far beyond the confines of the physical church.

The scene depicting O’Keefe’s beating of Marie for ‘humiliating the family name,’ demonstrates the indirect and ‘unofficial’ authority Father Sheridan has over the community and the potential consequences both socially and economically, that his public condemnation at the pulpit brought with it. Toward the film’s end, we see the ultimate display of Sheridan’s power when the Pearse-Connolly Hall is burned down by an anonymous arsonist.

In one of the flashback sequences early in the film, Jimmy leads the community in a face-off over a dispute between a tenant and landowner. Father Sheridan is seen standing

⁴⁸² Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 69-71.

⁴⁸³ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 65-66.

in front of the estate with O’Keefe in opposition to Jimmy and his cohort. At one point O’Keefe and his men draw guns, while Jimmy’s comrades do the same, leaving only he and Sheridan unarmed, demonstrating their power in having others willingly resorting to violence at their behest. Father Sheridan standing calm and still, tells O’Keefe and his faction, ‘Bide your time. There’s a time and a place. Do as I say, now.’ O’Keefe et al. dutifully follow his direction. The poised impenetrability of Sheridan is in direct contrast to Jimmy’s telling his companions to put away their guns just a few moments later; wherein he must repeat himself multiple times, turn and engage with the men behind him and physically push down the arm of one of the armed men. The distinction is clear, Father Sheridan’s authority is unquestioned and traditionally hierarchical, Jimmy’s is contingent and communal. With that said, the interaction between Father Sheridan and his men not only demonstrates the type of authority he has, but also the stealth menace which underlies it.

Space: The Presbytery

The presbytery is a space distinctive to clergy, an in-between space, wherein the parish priest and his curate reside, but also where they perform administrative functions. The presbytery serves as both a public and private space, which is decidedly atypical in Western culture, as Conn Holohan says, the ‘public/private spatial dichotomy is clearly a foundational opposition in Western society and culture and is implicated in everything from the regulation of sexuality to the very understanding of a public sphere upon which our political systems are based.’⁴⁸⁴ The presbytery—as a space that is both public and

⁴⁸⁴ Conn Holohan, ‘Between a Rock and No Place: Ursula Meier’s *Home* (2008)’ in *Spatiality and Symbolic Expression: On the Links Between Place and Culture*, ed. Bill Richardson (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 181.

private at once, while also being neither—is the ideal analogous space for the priest with his unstable ontology, oscillating between the public and domestic realms.

Thus, it is fitting that the presbytery serves as the space wherein the character of Father Sheridan, through his encounters with both Gralton and Father Seamus, becomes ‘incarnate.’ As Kearney says, the movement from image to flesh, the ‘incarnational moment’ is in fact, a process and the presbytery is the locus for its unfolding.⁴⁸⁵ Through the course of multiple interactions with Father Seamus in the presbytery, the cinematic priest transforms from institutional signifier to embodied subject. In an early scene he is shown having tea with Father Seamus, it is notable that his jacket is removed, with his arms exposed showing the white cotton shirt worn beneath the clerical vest, visibly disclosing the constructed, ‘costumed’ clerical image. In his exchange with Father Seamus, he articulates his ambivalence, not just about Gralton, but about the modern socialist movement and in doing so tacitly critiques the Catholic Church and himself. Father Sheridan says of Gralton, ‘You can’t buy him off. He’s not greedy, he’s not selfish.’ He likens communism to Christianity, quoting Marx’s ‘From each according to his need to each according to their ability’ and likening it to the Scriptural, ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ and then compares Marx and the *Communist Manifesto* to Christ and the Bible, when he says, unexpectedly, ‘One man, one book, changed the world: Karl Marx.’ He likens union organizers to the early Christian martyrs and then proceeds to talk about the appeal of communism to the poor and disenfranchised. Throughout the scene Father Seamus wryly soothes and challenges the elder priest, demonstrating that within the confines of the presbytery, the two clerics enjoy a relationship of equality and mutual respect. Outside of the presbytery, Father Sheridan is Seamus’ superior, as evidenced by the younger priests’ begrudging accompaniment of his elder to protest outside the hall

⁴⁸⁵ Kearney, *Touch*, 75.

during the dance. Within the presbytery, however, the curate not only questions Father Sheridan but also guides him. As they face each other across table, there is no hierarchy, but rather reciprocity, each man in their own way assisting the other in becoming more fully human.

Father Seamus: The 'Other' Priest

The depiction of the film's other cleric, Father Seamus speaks to a phenomenon that can be seen in other Irish films, that is, of a cleric, a generation removed from the War of Independence, the consequence of which is the absence of the single-minded purpose which the nationalist project had given to previous generations. This can also be seen in the case of Brother Gilmartin in *Our Boys* which I discuss in Chapter Three, as well as the character of Father Berry as portrayed by Martin Sheen in *Stella Days*. The depiction of the post-Independence priest manifests in the case of Brother Gilmartin in bewilderment and mis-directed rage at the rapidly changing cultural climate of the Ireland of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

For both Father Seamus and Father Barry, the disconnection with the previous generation manifests in a calm, rational scepticism about the Church's role in the nationalist project as it coincides with its ever-increasing cultural hegemony. In both cases, the calm scepticism evolves into an externalized outrage at the injustices being perpetrated by the Church and its affiliates.

Father Seamus is depicted by Irish actor Andrew Scott, who would gain a significant level of media attention for his depiction of 'The Priest'—better known in online discourse as, the 'Hot Priest'—who has a failed romantic dalliance with the titular protagonist on the hit television series *Fleabag* (BBC, 2016-2019). Father Seamus, though a minor character in the narrative, surpasses the traditional one-dimensionality of

a secondary clerical character, surprisingly manifesting as a fully realized embodied subject. Indeed, Scott himself says of his priestly alter-ego: '[Father Seamus] is an example of a more modern, benign and accessible Catholic Church, a representative of the new church that would have been emerging at that time.'⁴⁸⁶ I would disagree with Scott's assessment on a macro-level, certainly, there were priests who emerged a generation after the era of Independence, who would be 'benign' and more 'accessible,' but generally, there is very little to indicate that the Church and its clergy during the middle of the twentieth century in Ireland were at all interested in any of the characteristics Scott articulates.

Though, Father Seamus, can clearly not be read as 'normative,' for his time, there were certainly priests with integrity and a concern for the poor and marginalized. As the film progresses Father Seamus is shown moving from antagonising his superior to becoming what Kearney terms the 'healer-educator' of Father Sheridan.⁴⁸⁷ In their early interactions, Father Seamus gently but deliberately challenges Father Sheridan's concerns about Galton as they share meals in the presbytery. He is a gentle, but firm interlocutor for the elder priest, as he gently defuses his paranoia about the titular hero while guiding him toward a more compassionate perspective. Father Seamus transforms Father Sheridan, but in his exchanges with his superior, he also garners clarity with regards to his own priestly identity and in doing so manifests his own embodied subjectivity. Kearney building on the thought of French Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, terms this reciprocity, of the simultaneity of 'touching' and being 'touched,' the 'double sensation.'⁴⁸⁸ Thus, Father Seamus is not only capable of 'touching' but is also tangible himself.

⁴⁸⁶ Paul Lavery, 'Interview with Andrew Scott,' *Jimmy's Hall, Production Notes*, ed. Lavery (2014), n.p.

⁴⁸⁷ Kearney, *Touch*, 77.

⁴⁸⁸ Kearney, *Touch*, 74.

It is toward the end of the film in the scene at O'Keefe's estate, right after the burning of the hall where Father Seamus is shown usurping Sheridan's position as the community's moral arbiter, at least symbolically. Unlike his predecessor, his chastisement of his parishioners does not occur within the public space of the pulpit, but in the private domestic realm, in the parlour of O'Keefe's estate. In the scene, Seamus takes the landowners to task for the hall's destruction, which he calls, 'a disaster for the community.' When O'Keefe mentions the prevailing discourse among local priests about choosing between Christ and Gralton, Seamus responds, 'I suspect if Christ were here today, there'd be several members of this parish who'd have him crucified.' This is the most explicit inference in the film to Gralton as a Christ figure, though it is suggested throughout the film, particularly in the final sequence where Gralton is taken away to the jeers and mockery of the Blueshirts and landowners.

When O'Keefe then mentions the uniting of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast during the Relief Riots which were happening contemporaneously, he quips, 'That's the Reds for you.' Seamus responds, 'No, that's poverty'! It should be noted that throughout this scene, Father Sheridan is present, but does not say a word, he sits silently on the sofa, having become 'enfleshed,' he has lost all authority and is rendered mute, chastened by his own curate.

The Displacement of the 'Mayor' Priest

In Chapter One of this thesis, I put forward the cinematic archetype of the 'mayor' priest. The type was exemplified in the figure of Father O'Malley as portrayed by Bing Crosby in *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944). Within the context of wartime America, the Irish-American 'mayor' priest served not only as moral authority within his cinematic community, but also as a unifying figure and a model of assimilation for his immigrant

parishioners. As I also write in Chapter One, the figure of the ‘mayor’ priest was then repurposed in the character of Father Lonergan (Ward Bond) in *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952), wherein he served once more as moral authority and unifying figure but also became emblematic of tradition and an insular conception of Irish identity.

As Jimmy re-enters the community at the beginning of the film, he undermines Father Sheridan’s position as ‘mayor priest.’ Fundamental to the ‘mayor priest’ archetype, as evidenced in *Going My Way* and *The Quiet Man*, is the erasure of the significance of the ‘priestly’ component, as it relates to the ecclesial space and cultic practices, i.e., sacramental, and liturgical rites, and the foregrounding of the priest’s visibility in the public space as it pertains to unifying the parish and remedying its members’ real-life problems. It is not the ecclesial space, which is infrequently if at all represented in films such as *Going My Way* or *The Quiet Man*, but public spaces, especially the outdoors, where the ‘mayor’ priest’s authority is both exercised and affirmed. This ‘mayoral’ position is one of privileged trust, tacitly granted by the community and due entirely to the priest’s unquestionable moral rectitude, which is demonstrated frequently in informal, tangible one-on-one interactions outside of the church space.

Thus, it is Jimmy who replaces the ‘mayor’ priest, both in his role as unifier, advisor, and authority, but also in his unflappable, chaste ‘star’ persona that hearkens back to Crosby’s Father O’Malley. Unlike Father Sheridan, Jimmy is empowered when located in an outdoor space. He is shown in two different sequences heading a large contingent of community members walking through the rural landscape coming to the aid of those who have been displaced by local landowners. In one of the later scenes of the film he is shown orating before a large group outside the cottage where locals had been evicted by their landlord. He garners the crowd support as he ‘preaches’ about the exploitation of the poor by the upper-classes and ‘to work for need, not for greed. Not to live like a dog, but

to live and to celebrate; and to dance and to sing as free human beings.’ Upon completing his ‘sermon,’ he receives a rousing ovation from his audience. The enthusiastic response Jimmy receives for his preaching from his supporters gathered in a natural milieu is in stark contrast to the fear and rage that Sheridan evoked from his congregants during his sermon the day after the dance, within the cold, sterile confines of the church space.

The character of Jimmy, as played by Barry Ward, inherits the mantle of benevolent community figurehead and moral arbiter, handed down from *The Quiet Man*’s Father Lonergan and *Going My Way*’s Father O’Malley. Jimmy, like his Hollywood priestly descendants, is both the leader and the voice of reason within the cinematic world in which he exists; this is particularly evident in what Graham Fuller refers to as the film’s ‘group summits,’ a trope of Loach’s films, in which ‘...self-organizing working-class people vigorously debate issues essential to their or others welfare.’⁴⁸⁹ In *Jimmy’s Hall* during one of the ‘group summits,’ members of the community react emotionally to Father Sheridan’s threats and name-calling, however, Jimmy calmly insists that they look at the situation from the priest’s perspective.

In another ‘group summit’ scene, members of the Roscommon IRA come to the hall to ask for help assisting a family who has been forcibly evicted from a local estate. One of the IRA men insists that Jimmy and no one else, must be their spokesman, as he has ‘the trust and confidence of the people...it has to be Jimmy.’⁴⁹⁰⁴⁹¹ Jimmy’s calm demeanour and principled uprightness also manifests in his chaste relationship with the married Oonagh; we see their romantic interest with one another in a scene where they dance

⁴⁸⁹ Graham Fuller, ‘The Cut and Thrust: The Power of Political Debate in the Films of Ken Loach,’ *Cineaste* 40, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 30.

⁴⁹⁰ In another example of Loach’s penchant for casting amateur actors, one of the IRA men is played by real-life Sinn Féin politician, Chris MacManus, whose brother, an IRA volunteer, was killed in an ambush in Belleek, Northern Ireland in 1992

⁴⁹¹ ‘Shaped by the Past, Looking to the Future,’ *Sligo Champion*, 18 March 2017

<https://www.independent.ie/regionals/sligochampion/news/shaped-by-the-past-looking-to-the-future-35526773.html>.

together alone in the hall one evening, yet, outside of a few deeply held clinches, the pair never even kiss, let alone consummate their relationship. In many ways, Jimmy's chaste romance with Oonagh mirrors Father O'Malley's relationship with former girlfriend, Genevieve Linden (Risë Stevens) in *Going My Way*. The fully realized pristine virtuousness of the character of Jimmy Gralton as represented in the film, much like his Hollywood predecessors, does not necessitate a psychological journey within the narrative and thus does not allow for much in the way of character complexity.

Barton notes that Loach's inclination for hiring non-professional actors, such as Aileen Henry who portrays Jimmy's mother, and the 'stilted' performances that often result, frequently limit the performative impact of the scenes they are in. Barton says, 'the mapping of the melodramatic mode onto a historical narrative in *Jimmy's Hall* and the imbalance in casting that limits the central male hero's psychological development inhibit its meaning-making potential.'⁴⁹²

While I agree with Barton's main point, I would also argue that Ward's performance is very much a 'star' performance, and by that, I mean that, though Ward is not in and of himself a celebrity, his charismatic style does not allow the character to have any 'unlikable' moments or contradictory desires or motives. This is in part due to the textual characterization, which is beholden to the conventions of the melodrama, but Ward seems either incapable or disinterested in making subtextual performative 'choices' that convey any semblance of interior conflict. I would contend that a more versatile actor capable of making performative choices against the text, such as Cillian Murphy, might have been able to express a more robust interior persona even with the limitations of the character as written. As it stands, Ward's Gralton is incredibly charismatic: likable and low-key, very much in the tradition of Bing Crosby's Father O'Malley, and just as O'Malley was a

⁴⁹² Barton, 'Jimmy's Hall, Irish Cinema and the Telling of History,' 102.

‘singing priest,’ a crooner, the smoothy singing style that came out of the Jazz movement of the 1920s; so then, many of *Jimmy’s Hall’s* reviews laud Ward’s ‘charisma,’ however, it is his refusal to move past this laid-back likability that prohibits any possibility of bringing more depth to the character.⁴⁹³

It is the film’s muting of the real-life Gralton’s communism that limits the potential for interior complexity in his cinematic representation while also undermining any possibility of giving prominence to its ideological position. Loach is widely known for his left-leaning views which are at the foreground of his oeuvre and yet, *Jimmy’s Hall’s* reticence to explicitly articulate Gralton’s political point of view nullifies any strong political stance that the filmmaker might have been hoping to make and instead reads, as more than one reviewer noted, as an Irish variation on the musical *Footloose* (Herbert Ross, 1984), an antiseptic Hollywood blockbuster which also told the story of a young man going up against religious authorities in a small town in the hopes of holding a high school dance.⁴⁹⁴ This, along with the film’s romanticization of the rural West, its traditional approach to sex, and its regressive gendering of the female characters, dilute the ‘tradition versus modernity’ dialectic that is usually at the forefront of historical films about Ireland.

Thus, the film’s fundamental narrative conflict is about leadership of the community, a position which is entirely tied not to political ideals or praxis but to ethical pre-eminence according to the Judeo-Christian model. Since as is frequently the case in films about the rural Irish past, there is no visible civil authority in the constructed world of the cinematic

⁴⁹³ See Fuller, ‘The Cut and Thrust,’ 34; Ryan Gilbey, ‘Sinners and Saints’ *New Statesman*, May 2014; David Sander, ‘Forget Politics, Enjoy a Sumptuous Waltz to the Past,’ *The Evening Standard*, 22 May 2014.

⁴⁹⁴ See Andrew Wyatt, ‘A Wee *Footloose* Revolution in Depression Era Ireland,’ *St Louis Magazine*, 20/08/2016, <https://www.stlmag.com/culture/film/jimmy%E2%80%99s-hall-a-wee-footloose-revolution-in-depression-era-ireland/>; John Hart, ‘*Jimmy’s Hall*: A Compelling *Footloose*-like Fight in Ireland,’ *The Seattle Times*, 06/08/2015, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/movies/jimmys-hall-a-compelling-footloose-like-fight-in-ireland/>.

narrative, authority is derived from moral leadership. I would argue then, that it is because of this constitutive struggle for moral authority between Jimmy and Father Sheridan, that a more complex representation of the priest than is traditionally found in the cinematic clerical villain is necessary. Thus, as the narrative progresses, Father Sheridan makes the journey from ex-carnate villain in the tradition of the clerical depictions of the Celtic Tiger era and before, into an incarnate priest, which climaxes in his final scene where he stands up for Jimmy as he is being mocked and ridiculed by O'Keefe and his companions. Ironically, of course, is that having become fully human, Sheridan has lost his authority as he looks on helplessly as Gralton is taken away to be deported.

Section Two: The Contemporary Irish Cinematic Priest as 'Wounded Healer' in John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary*

Calvary an Overview

Calvary stars Brendan Gleeson as Father James Lavelle, a parish priest in a small village in County Sligo. The film opens on a close-up shot of Father James seated in the confined space of a traditional confessional box. The camera remains fixed on Father James' face throughout the shot as he converses with the voice of a man in the adjoining booth. The voice tells Father James that a priest had sexually abused him every other day for five years starting from the time he was seven years old.⁴⁹⁵ He then proceeds to tell Father James that he is going to murder him because he is a 'good priest,' as he says:

⁴⁹⁵ I refer to the disembodied male voice in the confessional as 'the voice,' because it is not the voice of actor Chris O'Dowd, who portrays the character revealed to be the murderer in the film. McDonagh intentionally used a different actor with a similar voice to O'Dowd's to support the 'whodunnit' element of the film. Marc Mohan, 'Calvary Interview: John Michael McDonagh talks about his new film starring Brendan Gleeson as a Troubled Priest,' *The Oregonian*, 11 August 2014

There's no point in killing a bad priest, but killing a good one? That'd be a shock. They wouldn't know what to make of that. I'm going to kill you, Father. I'm going to kill you, 'cuz you done nothing wrong. I'm going to kill you because you're innocent.

The voice says he will wait until the following Sunday to murder Father James, allowing the priest time to get his affairs in order.

Thus, the first scene of *Calvary* sets the film up as mystery, as the audience must wait until the final scene before Jack Brennan (Chris O'Dowd) is revealed as the man who threatens to—and ultimately does—kill Father James. However, in between the first and last scene, the 'whodunit' aspect of the film is rendered secondary to the stories of the broken lives of a collection of parishioners Father James encounters over the course of the ensuing seven days. Father James is shown counselling Milo (Killian Scott), a troubled young man who is involuntarily celibate and who views his only two life choices to be either suicide or joining the military. The cleric ministers to Teresa (Marie-Josée Croze), a French woman he encounters at the local hospital who is grieving the loss of her husband in a car accident while they were on holiday. Father James is shown mediating between Jack and his wife Veronica (Orla O'Rourke), whose relationship is fused by violence and adultery. He attends to the needs of a reclusive, elderly, American writer (M. Emmet Walsh), who asks that he assist him in committing suicide. All the while the priest's adult daughter, Fiona (Kelly Reilly), visits from London fresh from a suicide attempt. Father James also faces the continual taunts of local doctor, Frank Harte (Aiden Gillen), the hostility of the local publican, Brendan Lynch (Pat Shortt), as well as that of the village police inspector, Stanton (Gary Lydon).

Calvary: Cultural and Historical Context

https://www.oregonlive.com/movies/2014/08/calvary_interview_director_joh.html.

Calvary is the most high-profile film to feature a member of the Catholic clergy as its central protagonist—horror films being a notable exception—since Ulu Grosbard’s neo-noir, *True Confessions* (1981), which starred Robert DeNiro as an ambitious and corruptible Monsignor caught up in the underworld 1940s Los Angeles. In the period between the time of the two films’ releases, a seismic cultural shift in Ireland had occurred with regards to the Catholic Church, which can be attributed not only to the revelations of abuse, but also to the exorbitant rise and commensurate fall of the economy over the course of a little over a decade.

Out of the astonishing economic upsurge—colloquially known as the Celtic Tiger—that began in the 1990s, also came the first significant wave of immigration which served to alter the ethnic complexion of the Republic. Adding to this amalgamation of circumstances was the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 which brought an end to the ‘Troubles’ in the North and with it, as Barton notes, ‘a decline in the national question as another of the defining aspects of Irish life.’⁴⁹⁶ The consequence of all of this was not just an acceleration in the decline of the Church’s influence, but also in its replacement of the British coloniser as the provenance of the Republic’s trauma in the collective consciousness.⁴⁹⁷

The Catholic Church became a target of derision in popular media, which frequently manifested in the representation of the priest as paedophile.⁴⁹⁸ As discussed extensively in Chapter 3 of this thesis, by the time of *Calvary*’s release a collection of film and television programmes, most notably, *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997); *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002); *Song for a Raggy Boy* (Aisling Walsh, 2003);

⁴⁹⁶ Barton, *Irish Film in the Twenty-first Century*, 5.

⁴⁹⁷ Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 642.

⁴⁹⁸ Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 650-54.

Deliver Us from Evil (Amy J. Berg, 2006), as well as, *States of Fear* (RTÉ, 1999), had been produced over the previous two decades depicting various narratives of abuse at the hands of clergy and religious women. As Barton has noted, by the beginning of the 2000s Catholicism and abuse—both physical and sexual—had become inextricably entwined in the Irish cultural imagination.⁴⁹⁹

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I analyse films which are direct accounts of historical abuse, as well as present a comprehensive socio-cultural analysis. *Calvary* would be categorized properly as a ‘post-abuse’ film, in that its subject matter is not a narrative account of an abuse incident or incidents, but rather it addresses the repercussions of abuse at the personal, communal, and cultural levels. The film also takes place in the wake of the economic collapse in 2008 and interspersed throughout the narrative are implicit and explicit references to its effect on the community.

Father James as ‘Wounded Healer’

Father James is representative of the metamorphosis of the Irish priest in cinematic and televisual depictions that came about in the post-Celtic Tiger era that coalesced with the disclosure of systematic abuse occurring in Catholic institutions, with the Ryan Report and several other investigative documents published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The priest is now represented as a more interiorly complex and by extension, more ‘incarnate’ clerical figure. Other examples of this type of ‘incarnate’ priest include Martin Sheen’s Father Berry in *Stella Days* (Thaddeus O’Sullivan, 2011),

⁴⁹⁹ Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 643.

Sean Bean's Father Kerrigan in the television series *Broken* (BBC, 2017) Andrew Scott's 'Priest' in the television series *Fleabag* (BBC, 2016-2019), and Lalor Roddy's Father Thomas in the Irish horror film, *The Devil's Doorway* (Aislinn Clarke, 2018).

Father James along with his cinematic and televisual counterparts, manifests a 're-embodied' Irish priest on the screen, or what Kearney calls 'ana-carnate.' Father James is very much a modern adaptation of the 'mayor' priest put forth in films such as *Going My Way* and *The Quiet Man*, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Where he differs from his antecedents is his community's continual rejection of his attempts at unifying and reconciling.,

Father James demonstrates his 'flesh' cinematically, primarily through his embodying of the 'wounded healer' figure. The 'wounded healer' is a literary archetype, whose lineage can be traced in the Western tradition back to Greek mythology. The 'wounded healer's' ministry is signified through, what Kearney refers to as, 'carnal catharsis,' or the ability to heal another born out of an embodied experience of woundedness.⁵⁰⁰ Kearney cites Odysseus and Oedipus as examples of 'wounded healers' in the Greek canon, but he is primarily interested in the myth of Chiron, a centaur, who was struck in the leg by an arrow, and though, unable to heal himself, was able to heal the wounds of others, a gift he taught to his student, Asclepius.⁵⁰¹ Thus, for Asclepius—regarded as one of the patrons of Greek medicine--- the power to heal emerged from a horizontal, tactile wisdom, in direct opposition to Hippocrates—the other 'patron' of Western medicine—who promulgated a healing methodology of vertical, 'optocentric supervision.'⁵⁰² As Kearney notes, Hippocrates 'heroic' modality of 'outmanoeuvring and overcoming illness' has taken

⁵⁰⁰ Kearney, *Touch*, 62.

⁵⁰¹ Kearney, *Touch*, 62-5.

⁵⁰² Kearney, *Touch*, 66.

precedence in Western medicine and argues that the empathic Asclepian method should be more fully integrated into it as it, ‘accepts that even when the doctor cannot completely control mortal suffering, one can choose to be with the patient’s pain, to hold the dying one’s grief, to sit with them and take their hand.’⁵⁰³

Moving from the Greeks, Kearney then argues that it is Christ who is the definitive ‘wounded healer’ in the Western tradition, with his crucified corpus serving as a ‘paradigm’ for this type.⁵⁰⁴ Kearney points out that despite Platonic dualism’s pervasive influence on Christian theology, scriptural testimony helped to sustain the significance of the Incarnation. Kearney holds that through multiple examples in the Pauline epistles and the healing stories from in the Gospels, the Incarnation maintained its importance in Christianity, while also emphasising Jesus’s corporality and his status as the ‘wounded healer’ par excellence.⁵⁰⁵

The ‘wounded healer’ archetype has become the template by which the contemporary cinematic and televised cleric can be ‘fully human’ once more. Robert Saler notes in his analysis of *Calvary*, ‘any time a given clergyperson is introduced as a pious individual, contemporary scepticism has trained viewers to expect that one of two things will happen: the pastor will either turn out to be corrupt and hypocritical (sexually lascivious, secretly unbelieving, financially malfeasant), or will be side-lined as irrelevant to the real “human” action of the film.’⁵⁰⁶ Depictions of the Irish priest as ‘wounded healer’ arose in response to both of the priestly characterizations that Seiler mentions, and the archetype is very much a democratized, theologically horizontal concept, in that, in his ‘woundedness’ he is like ‘everybody else.’ His embodied humanity manifests cinematically in the

⁵⁰³ Kearney, *Touch*, 69.

⁵⁰⁴ Kearney, *Touch*, 73.

⁵⁰⁵ Kearney, *Touch*, 73.

⁵⁰⁶ Robert C. Saler, ‘*Calvary* and the Church Broken for the World,’ *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 57, no. 2. (June 2018): 142.

paradox of his moral uprightness and benevolence, though he has also suffered trauma, which has left a wound that is not fully healed, as Kearney says, ‘the wounded healer is one who contains his or her own pain while remaining present to the other in theirs.’⁵⁰⁷

The ‘wounded healer’ Irish priest of contemporary film and television is like the ‘incarnate’ priests of Hollywood’s Golden Age discussed in Chapter One, in his self-sacrificial nature and concern for the Other, yet what distinguishes him from his predecessors is not only his own historical trauma, but that the resultant wounds serve as the source and summit of his compassion for the Other.

Father James’ experience of trauma is in perpetuity, his wounds are not simply relegated to the past, or even to the present, but are unremitting and imminent. He moves through the film’s narrative from a place of woundedness, all the while anticipating his demise at the hands of the disembodied voice from the confessional. His experience of trauma from the past is articulated in his exchanges with his daughter, as it is revealed that his wife died young, after a prolonged illness, whereupon he entered the seminary and was ordained a priest. That he chose the life of celibacy after the death of his wife is not addressed in the film, yet it tacitly speaks to the trauma of losing his conjugal partner but also to his fidelity to their marital bond.

Yet, as the film progresses the film reveals him to be continually wounded anew, beginning in the film’s first scene with the death threat in the confessional. Kearney points out that ‘touch’ is a phenomenon that encompasses all the senses; thus, James is ‘touched’ in the hearing of the threat from the disembodied voice. Kearney notes, ‘Even if we presume to see without being seen or to hear without being heard [...] deep down our

⁵⁰⁷Kearney, *Touch*, 69.

eyes and ears are touched by what they see and hear.’⁵⁰⁸ This aural wounding continues throughout the narrative as members of the community continually deride him. Towards the film’s end, he is physically wounded by Brendan in a fight at the pub, the figure of the priest with the bleeding face and hands, attending to his wounds in the bathroom mirror at the end of the film, proves to be the film’s paradigmatic moment in its uniting of the corporeal with the spiritual. Father James’ flesh now matches his spirit (Image 4.3).



(Figure 4.3) *Calvary*: Father James (Brendan Gleeson)

In discussing *Calvary*, the film’s director, John Michael McDonagh frequently mentions his cinematic influences such as, Ingmar Bergman’s *Winter Light* (1963), Luis Bunuel’s *Viridiana* (1961) and *Tristana* (1970) and the entirety of the corpus of Robert Bresson, most especially the French director’s entry into the cinematic ‘wounded healer’ pantheon, *Journal d’un Curé de Campagne* (1951), based on the Georges Bernanos novel

⁵⁰⁸ Richard Kearney, ‘Recovering Embodied Life,’ *Japan Mission Journal* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 220.

of the same name.⁵⁰⁹ Father James is very much a descendent of Bresson's doomed Curé d'Ambricourt (Claude Laydu), who spends the last weeks of his young life ministering to a faithless and broken parish community in northern France. While Bresson's priest is a young man whose 'death sentence' comes from within himself, in the form of stomach cancer, his fruitless interactions with his forsaken community are very much echoed in Father James' exchanges with his own errant flock.

Through voice-overs articulating his diary entries, we see Bresson's curé at the beginning of the film communicating to the audience his moral and theological rigidity. As the film progresses, he articulates his ministerial frustrations, as well as his own concerns about his diminishing faith. *Calvary* does not allow its audience the same interior view of Father James, but instead illustrates his fears, doubts, and frustrations through external behaviours, such as relapsing on alcohol, physical altercations, and verbal tirades. Bresson's diminutive, fragile, reticent, young priest is very much the antithesis of McDonagh's large, burly, boisterous, older cleric. With that said, both share similar journeys to their abrupt ends, both in the sense of how they occur and the open manner as to how their respective deaths may be interpreted.

In the case of the young curé's death, Bresson offers some guidance to interpretation. The young priest dies off-camera; his death is communicated through a voiceover by Dufrety (Bernard Hubrenne), his seminary classmate, who has now left the priesthood and is working as an apothecary. As the ex-cleric speaks, a single cross is the sole onscreen image, as we hear the curé's final words: 'Qu'est-ce que cela faith? Tout est

⁵⁰⁹ Brian Tallerico, 'Calm in the Storm: John Michael McDonagh and Brendan Gleeson on *Calvary*,' Roger Ebert.com, 4 August 2014, <https://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/interview-brendan-gleeson-john-michael-mcdonagh-calvary>.

grâce,' affirming both the restoration of the young priest's faith, and more simply, his recognition of human existence as pure gift.⁵¹⁰

Conversely, the depiction of Father James' demise occurs on-camera and is violently graphic in its presentation. The priest is shown going to the seashore on Sunday morning to meet his would-be killer, who is revealed to be Jack. The two men talk briefly before Jack shoots Father James in the torso. As Jack is about to shoot once more the now kneeling Father James, he says to the priest: 'Say your prayers, Father.' Father James responds, 'I already did,' at which point Jack shoots him in the head, a moment which is shown from multiple angles in slow-motion. Father James' death is followed by a montage of images of the film's primary characters in the wake of his murder, which culminates in a series of close-up shots of Fiona and Jack looking at one another through the plexiglass barrier in a prison visiting room.

I would contend that for the young Curé d'Ambricourt, his discovery of his terminal illness and subsequent death prove to be the 'wound' that 'heals,' not just his crisis of faith, but also the rigidity of his theological perspective, rooted as it is, in traditional 'theism.' This interior transformation is evidenced in the final scenes of the film where he goes to meet with his former seminary colleague, Dufrety and the woman (Yvette Etiévant), he lives with at their flat. He has an encounter with the woman, who cares for him while he lies ill in bed and who tells him that she will not marry his friend in case he someday desires to return to the priesthood. Dufrety then reveals in the final voice-over that the curé asked him for absolution as he lay dying, despite knowing that his friend was no longer a priest. Thus, we see the interior transformation of the curé as he receives the hospitality of those, whom earlier in the film, he condemned. He acknowledges and

⁵¹⁰ English translation: 'What does it matter? Everything is grace.'

affirms the divine within the ‘unorthodox’ relationship between the former priest and female companion and by extension recognizes the capacity of the divine to work outside the constraints of religion.

Conversely, I would argue that Father James’ death proves to be the ‘wound’ that offers up the possibility of healing for the community, in what Kearney refers to as an ‘anatheistic turn,’ that is an openness to the divine. As shown in the final montage of the film’s various characters ‘caught,’ as it were, getting on with their daily lives in the wake of Father James’ murder. Several of the characters are shown in this sequence in either extreme existential pain, such as serial killer Freddy Joyce (Domhnall Gleeson), or what could be read as ‘liminal moments,’ which suggest the possibility of an interior transition, this is notably evident with Dr. Harte, as he is shown disgustingly putting out a cigarette into a human heart. I would argue that Father James’ murder allows for the possibility of an openness by the various community members to the divine, though no longer in the absolutist terms of classical ‘theism’, but as Kearney says, ‘a movement [...] that refuses all absolute talk about the absolute, negative or positive; for it acknowledges that the absolute can never be understood *absolutely* by any single person or religion.’⁵¹¹ The possibility is shown in the images of Fiona and Jack as they look at one another through the plexiglass screen. Fiona’s presence at the prison hearkens back to the scene of her final conversation with her father. She has returned to London and is speaking to her father over the phone, while he stands by the seashore where he will be killed momentarily. Father James says to his daughter, ‘I think there’s too much talk about sins, to be honest, and not enough talk about virtues.’ He goes on to say, ‘I think forgiveness

⁵¹¹ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 16.

has been highly underrated.’ Fiona responds, ‘I forgive you. Do you forgive me?’ Father James responds, ‘Always.’

Father James and the Problem of Masculinity

In its depiction of Father James as ‘wounded healer,’ *Calvary* evokes an image of the priest, which from a gender perspective is problematic due to its regressive iconography. Thus, in the film’s articulation of the ‘wounded healer’ priest, it tacitly re-affirms traditional notions of masculinity, while diminishing and negating more heterodox conceptions of ‘maleness.’ Indeed, it could be argued that *Calvary*’s treatment of Irish ‘maleness’ is very much a response to what film scholar Debbie Ging refers to as the ‘Irish Lad Wave’ films which emerged during the Celtic Tiger era.⁵¹² The ‘Lad Wave’ was a collection of films with a multiplicity of trans-national influences that focus primarily on the socially marginalized male. Though in conception these masculine figures were usually represented in a lower socio-economic bracket, these films created as Ging says, ‘a set of contemporary concerns that were as much about middle-class male identity as they were about working class men.’⁵¹³ Ging contends that Lad Wave films ‘present male social exclusion as a consequence of modernity, as a form of male disaffection to which similarly disaffected (male) viewers can relate.’⁵¹⁴ The Post-Celtic Tiger film, *Calvary* provides a multiplicity of socially excluded disaffected male figures, yet they are presented as buffoons or ‘feminised’ and it is only priest and his traditional ‘masculinity’ which the film affirms.

In its affirming of the Father James character as a ‘good priest’—indeed, ‘the voice’ articulates in the opening scene that his ‘goodness’ is the very reason he is going to

⁵¹² Debbie Ging, *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 155.

⁵¹³ Ging, *Men and Masculinities*, 155.

⁵¹⁴ Ging, *Men and Masculinities*, 170.

murder him—*Calvary* resurrects outmoded concepts of clergy and masculinity. The film's representation of a 'good priest,' is born out of a clericalist theology which delineated the superiority of the priest over the laity, and which, within the Irish historical context, played a significant role, if not necessarily in promulgating abuse, then certainly in the widespread cover-up of it and the silencing of its victims. This understanding of the clergy as superior to the laity, was in the Irish context linked to a specific type of masculinity that rose out of the nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century.

As nationalist movements developed throughout Europe during the nineteenth century, they were frequently accompanied by a specific understanding of 'maleness,' as George Mosse notes in *The Image of Man*, 'the ideal of masculinity was invoked [...] as a symbol of personal and national regeneration.' For the colonized Irish at the turn of the twentieth century, the interweaving of masculinity and nationalism was even more complex: the Irish male found himself in a 'double-bind,' as it were; for were he to act out against his English colonizer, he would be deemed as unable to control the 'savage nature' he had been assigned by his oppressor. However, were he to utilize his self-restraint and self-discipline and submit to his colonizer, as Joseph Valente puts it, his reaction or lack thereof, would 'likely be read as a testament to his colonial emasculation. He could hardly lay a viable claim to self-mastery in lawfully abiding to the mastery of an alien power.'⁵¹⁵

Valente posits that Charles Stewart Parnell was seen as the antidote to the 'double-bind' of being either too simian or effeminate, by virtue of his 'characteristic posture of autonomy and dignity.'⁵¹⁶ As Valente says:

[Parnell] embodied an analogy between personal self-government, the defining virtue of achieved manliness, and collective self-government, the aim of Irish nationalism, an analogy that functioned to enthrone Parnell as the exemplary

⁵¹⁵ Joseph Valente, 'The Manliness of Parnell,' *Éire-Ireland* 41, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 73.

⁵¹⁶ Valente, 'The Manliness of Parnell,' 91.

figure in every sense, of the movement he headed. He seemed to possess something akin to the Home Rule of the soul.⁵¹⁷

Valente holds that Parnell's affair with Kitty O'Shea and the resultant vicious debates emanating from it—what he terms a 'public emasculation'—dealt a huge blow to the Irish people's self-perception, as he says, 'Nothing could have ratified the stereotype of the fractious, undisciplined Irish more graphically than the political donnybrook surrounding Parnell's fall.'⁵¹⁸

It seems inevitable then, that the rapidly burgeoning and increasingly nationalistic Catholic Church would fill the void left by Parnell and attempt to put forth the definitive archetype of Irish manliness. The Church initially attempted to do this through the example of the saints. The reasoning behind which was that the saint could be safely held up as role models for emulation—the primary means of moral and ideological pedagogy of the Church—without concern with regards to a public moral lapse, because as Joseph Nugent notes, they were already 'safely dead.'⁵¹⁹ The institutional Church, through organizations such as the League of St. Columba—an organization of seminarians and clerics—attempted to promulgate exemplars of the 'authentic Irishman' from an array of saints of the nation's past. Medieval saints, such as St. Columba (Irish: Colmcill) were resurrected by the Church for ecclesial, cultural and political purposes.⁵²⁰ The direct correlation between manliness and nationalism that had arisen in the nineteenth century necessitated a shift in emphasis for the Church in the hagiology it produced, moving away from the traditional saintly archetype of the submissive ascetic, toward narratives of

⁵¹⁷ Valente, 'The Manliness of Parnell,' 93.

⁵¹⁸ Valente, 'The Manliness of Parnell,' 111-115.

⁵¹⁹ Joseph Nugent, 'The Sword and the Prayerbook: Ideals of Authentic Irish Manliness,' *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 595.

⁵²⁰ Nugent, 'The Sword and the Prayerbook,' 587-88.

saints who were ‘supremely self-disciplined, idealistic, and self-sacrificing, intrepid explorers and natural leaders of men.’⁵²¹

Colmcill, whose mythology depicts him as both a priest and warrior, was ideally suited to serve as the standard bearer of the masculine Irish saint. His substantial presence in nationalist historical narratives speak to his place ‘as both emblem and exemplar of an assertive Irish manliness.’⁵²² It was the warrior priest’s capacity to restrain his ‘animal spirit’ or *θυμός* (trans. thumos), that was foregrounded in the new narratives emerging about Colmcill at the end of the nineteenth century. Nugent says of the heroic saint, ‘By mastering his nature yet remaining boldly masculine, Colmcill displayed precisely that gentlemanly equilibrium of which latter-day compatriots were patently devoid.’⁵²³

The Church’s promulgation of myriad tracts of the lives of ‘manly’ saints like Colmcill, dovetailed with the establishment of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and its focus on an embodied masculinity, providing a robust Irish Catholic response to the English Protestant notion of ‘Muscular Christianity’ developed by Anglican clergyman Charles Kingsley in the mid-nineteenth century. ‘Muscular Catholicism,’ as it is termed by Patrick McDevitt, shared with its British counterpart an emphasis on morality, codification, and competition, while distinguishing itself from its Protestant corelative, in its emphasis on Irish culture, anti-colonialism and Catholic communalism.⁵²⁴

As it happened, the masculine saint, as typified by Colmcill, proved insufficient as the masculine ideal, in part because of the linking of Catholicism and homoeroticism in late nineteenth century fiction, which coincided with Oscar Wilde’s trial in 1895, making the

⁵²¹ Nugent, ‘The Sword and the Prayerbook,’ 591-92.

⁵²² Nugent, ‘The Sword and the Prayerbook,’ 602.

⁵²³ Nugent, ‘The Sword and the Prayerbook,’ 602.

⁵²⁴ Patrick F. McDevitt, ‘Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity, and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884-1916,’ *Gender and History* 9, no. 2 (Aug. 1997): 264-65

Irish people particularly sensitive to suggestions associating them with ‘transgressive sexual behaviour.’ That inherently homosocial institution, the monastery—where Colmcill resided—was most vulnerable to critique on this front; this, along with a corresponding secular movement promoting Cúchulainn, the Celtic warrior god, whose image was more in line with the violently militant ideology of revolutionary factions like the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) ensured that Colmcill and his saintly peers would not prove to be sustainable masculine role models.⁵²⁵

With that said, Cuchulainn’s tenure as masculine exemplar lasted only as long as the struggle for independence; and the church would have the last word, for a time, at least, as the archetype of manliness in the new Irish state manifested in the saint’s immanent proxy: the priest. As Nugent says:

the values that Colmcill was chosen and shaped to embody were reinscribed in the clergyman [...] a man of honour devoted to God and country, self-disciplined, self-sacrificing, amiable and “human-heartedly tender”—became the quintessence of the Irish priest in popular representation. That model was proffered to Ireland’s Catholic youth from their earliest age as all they might admire and aspire to be⁵²⁶.

Andrew J. Auge contends in his analysis of the clerical subjects in the work of Irish poet, Paul Durcan, that well into the 1960s the ‘normative notion of Irish masculinity was grounded [...] in the figure of the celibate Catholic cleric.’⁵²⁷ Auge posits that this masculine archetype was a particularly Irish version of ‘the prevailing notion of masculinity established in Western modernity,’ categorized under the sub-heading of manliness.⁵²⁸ Manliness, though ontologically fastened to the category of masculinity, is internally distinctive in its position as the ‘ideal form’ of masculinity; as Valente says,

⁵²⁵ Nugent, ‘The Sword and the Prayerbook,’ 605-606.

⁵²⁶ Nugent, ‘The Sword and the Prayerbook,’ 608.

⁵²⁷ Andrew J. Auge, *A Chastened Communion: Modern Irish Poetry and Catholicism*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013) 169.

⁵²⁸ Auge, *A Chastened Communion*, 170.

‘manliness paradoxically represented both the consummation of the masculine condition, its perfection if you will, and a sublimation of the masculine condition into a higher form.’⁵²⁹ Thus, masculinity was understood to be the possession and implementation of those ‘animal spirits’ as manifested in the traits of assertiveness, tenacity and fortitude. However, it was manliness which served to convert those masculine traits into the spiritual virtues of ‘integrity, self-possession, and self-control.’⁵³⁰ These virtues in particular isolate Father James, from all but all but one other character in the film, a foreigner, Teresa, a French woman, who has lost her husband in an automobile accident while holidaying in Ireland. The rest of the community repeatedly demonstrate a scarcity in at least one, if not all the aforementioned virtues. Even Father James’ fellow clerics are lacking, as evidenced by Father Leary’s (David Wilmot) obsequious pandering with local wealthy blue-blood Michael Fitzgerald (Dylan Moran) and who is also told by Father James late in the film: ‘You have no integrity. That’s the worst thing I can say about anybody.’

French tourist L. Paul-Dubois wrote of the Irish priest in *Contemporary Ireland* (1908):

As one meets him in the small towns of the West with his high hat and sombre garb, his great sturdy frame and ruddy face leaves a striking image in the mind [...] He seems to be a king in his kingdom [...] He is in truth the father of his people and no doubt, an authoritative enough father.⁵³¹

The representation of Father James, inverts, but does not dismiss Dubois’ image; indeed, I would contend that the film grieves its disintegration, while simultaneously refusing to exonerate the Institutional Church. Father James, as the sole image of traditional masculine authority is imbued with an ideological agenda. His character’s

⁵²⁹ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 68.

⁵³⁰ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 68.

⁵³¹ L. Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd, 1908), 494

lineage comes directly out of the ‘Muscular Catholic’ tradition, which like its Protestant counterpart, was much more than an identity construction, but rather, ‘an ethical norm, a mandate designed to transcend the uses and pleasures of physical hardihood in pursuit of the higher virtues of patience, obedience, forbearance, modesty, and respect for others.’⁵³² Thus, though there is a multiplicity of masculinities on offer in *Calvary*, I would suggest that it is in the characters of Jack and Father Leary, and specifically in their expression of their respective masculinities, that Father James’s manliness and its ideological significance are most clearly elucidated.

Though, I agree with Barton’s contestation that the Catholic Church has replaced the British coloniser, cinematically as the ‘locus of oppression’ in the Irish context, I would argue that masculinity in the Irish context is still cinematically entwined with nationalism and thus there remains a postcolonial remnant which warrants interrogation from that perspective.⁵³³ As such, I would like to suggest that Jack and Father Leary can be read as analogues to the aforementioned notion of the subaltern ‘double bind’ which created an irresolvable quandary for the colonial Irish, wherein the enacting of either the animality or rational self-restraint ‘forfeited or belied the other’ and it is when juxtaposed with these deficiencies that Father James ‘manliness’ is most clearly elucidated.⁵³⁴

Jack, the simplistic rural male, a butcher who spends his free time at the pub, refuses to engage intimately with and abuses his wife, Veronica—whose ongoing extramarital affair with Simon (Isaach de Bankolé) from the Ivory Coast, is common knowledge within the small Sligo community. Jack is very much the image of savage animality, the manifestation of one of the two sides of the inextricable dilemma of Irish masculinity,

⁵³² Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 66.

⁵³³ Baron ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 642.

⁵³⁴ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 73.

which Valente terms the ‘bestializing discourse of simianization.’⁵³⁵ To further layer this savage iconography, there are several lines of dialogue which would seem to reveal a lacking in Jack’s intelligence. Two exchanges with Father James, one occurring in the beginning of the film and the other in the climactic scene seem to demonstrate, if nothing else, educational deficiencies. In the first exchange, Jack, speaking of his wife, says, ‘I think she’s bi-polar or lactose intolerant. One of the two,’ which is clearly written by McDonagh for laughs, however, much like many of the comments Father Leary makes in his exchanges with Father James, the line cannot be disentangled from the character and cannot help but delegitimize Jack’s intelligence.

Jack is continually connected with violent imagery and rhetoric throughout the film. Though we hear ‘his’ disembodied voice in the film’s opening scene, his first physical appearance in the film is a close-up shot of his hand slamming a cleaver into a piece of raw meat. The rest of the scene takes place in a meat locker with enormous animal carcasses hanging from the rack (See Figure 4.4). The stark visual image of Jack, with blood stains on his shirt, situated in his daily work environment, where he slaughters, dismembers, and is surrounded by dead animals, underlines his own animality, that which is also constitutive to an account of manliness, yet contingent on its repression for its fulfilment. Valente says, ‘every paradigm of the manly begins with a primal, male-identified element of animal vitality that helps to fuel the exercise of sublimating discipline that it so badly requires.’⁵³⁶ Jack’s unrestrained barbarism, his lack of self-control, visually signified in this early scene, is fully actualized in his murdering of Father James and subsequent imprisonment, as he is not able to ‘restrain’ himself, and as such, must have restraint imposed upon him by external forces, in this case, the state.

⁵³⁵ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 73.

⁵³⁶ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 69.



(Figure 4.4) *Calvary*: Jack (Chris O’Dowd)

Father Leary then, manifests the opposing discourse of the double bind: emasculation.⁵³⁷ In their first scene together, Father James and Father Leary are in the presbytery kitchen, with the former seated in a chair reading the newspaper, while the latter stands at the counter preparing tea for them both. The physical positioning and the verbal exchange between the two are heavily layered with traditional gender signifiers, with Father James assuming the masculine role and Leary taking on the feminine stance. The gendered distinctions between the two clerics is visually represented in their physicality, with the large, fixed frame of the seated Father James juxtaposed with the slender, languid, physique of Father Leary, who calls to mind the clerical antagonists of Irish priest-author, Canon Sheehan’s early twentieth century novels, such as *Luke Delmege*, where he writes of ‘the limp, unmuscular, artificial cleric, who, with all the

⁵³⁷ Valente, ‘The Manliness of Parnell,’ 73.

insignia of Christ and the Cross, is perpetually aping the manners and customs of the world, and in dress and manner and conversation is forever shifting and changing and shifting, like a mime on the stage.’⁵³⁸

The physical means by which the two men engage within the space also demarcates them along gendered lines; Father James sits still in his chair, caught up in his reading, speaking minimally, only to correct his curate. His lack of physical movement and the paucity of his verbal contributions signify his status as ‘man of the house.’ Father Leary, by contrast, fusses about the tearoom, talking incessantly, while skirting the boundaries of the confessional seal, as he speaks of Veronica’s affairs. He also reveals his provincial bigotry in referring to Simon as Ugandan. When Father James corrects him, Leary responds that he thought it was the Ivory Coast or ‘Guyana or one of those African countries.’ When Father James tells him that Guyana is in South America and not Africa, Leary disagrees and chuckles, ‘I was always pretty good at the old geography.’

This sequence, characteristic of all the interactions between the two, plays on one level, like a darker, clerical version of a George Burns and Gracie Allen sketch from mid-twentieth century radio; as we watch Father James in the traditional masculine comedic type of the ‘straight man,’ characterized by rationality, intellectual authority, and verbal restraint. This is juxtaposed with Leary’s fluttering, intellectually shallow, and garrulous, feminine clown. This is the first appearance of Father Leary in the narrative, and it establishes the dynamic between the two men, who are the only two residents of the presbytery. Father James, as parish priest, is presented as not only Leary’s professional superior, but his intellectual and moral superior, as well. This superiority is

⁵³⁸ Canon Sheehan, *Luke Delmege* (New York: Longman’s Green and Co., 1901) 66

communicated by Father James' verbal restraint which is juxtaposed with Leary's verboseness.

The opening scene sets the tone not only for the remaining interactions between Father James and Father Leary, but also tacitly 'Others' Father Leary, as, if Father James is a 'good priest,' then clearly Father Leary, his feminine, intellectually inferior, antithesis, must then not be a 'good priest.' Father Leary fits very much into the traditional narrative type of the 'second priest,' which I address in Chapter One of this thesis. The 'second' priest's presence within the narrative is usually minor, lacking depth in characterization and is used as a narrative device to be in opposition to the 'primary' clerical character. The antagonism between the two priests usually manifests in theological opposition, with the 'second' priest invariably being the more theologically and by extension, ideologically conservative. I would argue that *Calvary* utilizes this established type in order define what a 'bad priest' is, but also to assist in prescribing appropriate and inappropriate masculinities.

Though, Father James is constantly bombarded with taunts and insults related to the Church, the insults are usually not personal, and it is Father Leary who is continually situated as an outsider within the community. In a scene at the pub, in one of the film's few joy-filled moments, the whole collection of characters in the film—including Father James—is shown dancing and having a rollicking time, while Father Leary is shown seated by himself observing the festivities from a table in the back of the pub.

At one point in the film, Father James, and his daughter Fiona (Kelly Reilly) have a quick, awkward exchange with Father Leary, who meets them at the fishing pond, on his way to run an errand. Upon the younger priest's departure, Fiona turns to her father and wryly asks—seemingly for Catholics everywhere— 'That's the future of the priesthood?'

In a scene at the pub later in the film, Father Leary counsels Inspector Stanton (Gary Lydon), ‘Calm down, you don’t know what you’re talking about.’ To which, Stanton proceeds to grab Leary by the throat and throw him into a table, whereupon, he turns to Father James and says, ‘He’s had that coming a long time. You know that yourself.’ In both scenes, Fiona and Stanton’s response to Father Leary is disproportionate to his behaviour. In the first instance, he does nothing more than greet Fiona and Father James, who whips back the line on his fishing rod, nearly hitting the younger cleric with it. Seeing the hostile response his greeting receives, Father Leary proceeds to gesture toward the post office and departs. Fiona does not engage with him at any point, and judging from the context, this is also her first interaction with him, which makes her questioning of his vocation a bit abrupt were the audience not already cued to dislike the character because of Father James’ treatment toward him in preceding scenes. Similarly, the physical assault that Stanton inflicts upon Leary seems out of proportion to his actions, though again, the audience has already been directed to make an outsider of Leary, just as the community has, and accepts at face value Stanton’s justification that ‘he had it coming.’

Indeed, it is not until late in the film when we see Leary obsequiously pandering to the village’s Celtic Tiger arriviste, Michael Fitzgerald—to garner a donation for the building of a new church—that the entirety of his moral complexion is revealed. Fitzgerald insults Leary to his face, and the curate, so focused on attaining a financial contribution, does not defend himself. When Fitzgerald brings up the Church and the abuse crisis, Leary minimizes them as being ‘forty or fifty years ago’ and contends that the allegations were nothing more than ‘raking up old ground.’ Throughout the scene, Father James is seated quietly at his desk attending to some paperwork while observing the exchange between the two men. When Fitzgerald offers to donate €20,000, James finally speaks up,

challenging the villager to raise his price, receiving a €100,000 donation. Through his quiet observation, a well-chosen word or two, and restrained, but palpable hostility, Father James not only ‘makes the sale,’ but surpasses expectations. He demonstrates his moral and ontological superiority over Father Leary by his performance of manliness as he exhibits both a virile capacity for violence as well as the self-possession to contain that violence. The manly performance of Father James follows on the heels of the ‘feminized’ Leary and his performance of ‘emasculatation’ through fawning and humiliation at the hands of Fitzgerald—which amounts to a verbal castration.

Towards the end of the film when Father James returns to the presbytery drunk and bloody from a fight with Brendan, the publican, he is met by Father Leary in pyjamas, cradling a hot water bottle. The visual imagery of the two: Father James in his black soutane, intoxicated, with his hair in disarray, his face and hands bloodied, juxtaposed with Father Leary, in bright orange night clothes, holding a large blue water bottle—that relic of a bygone era: signifier of illness and involuntary celibacy, as evidenced by Gay Talese’s comment on Henry Kissinger, that men like ‘him didn’t go to bed with anything, except maybe a hot water bottle’ (See Figure 4.5).⁵³⁹

⁵³⁹ Chantel Tattoli, ‘Letter of Recommendation: Hot Water Bottles,’ *The New York Times Magazine*, 19 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-hot-water-bottles.html>.



(Figure 4.5) *Calvary*: Father Leary (David Wilmot)

The sequence of scenes serves as the culmination of those that preceded between the two, as Father James, momentarily released from his self-restraint after relapsing on alcohol, berates Father Leary—cradling his hot water bottle, looking, and acting the part of the maiden aunt from Victorian fiction-- questioning his vocation, ‘Why are you a (expletive) priest? You should be an accountant at a (expletive) insurance firm!’ Once again Father Leary’s vocational choice is questioned and this time by the film’s primary moral voice.

The exchange continues the following morning, when Father James awakens and looks out his bedroom window to see Father Leary, luggage in tow, ready to depart from the presbytery in a taxi. When Father James asks him if he is leaving because of their row the previous evening, Father Leary replies that he is leaving for many reasons, and most especially because he has been having doubts. Father James apologizes for insulting him, and when Leary responds that he hadn’t realized that James hated him so much, the elder

cleric replies that he doesn't hate him, 'It's just you have no integrity. That's the worst I can say about anybody.' Father Leary is non-plussed and departs in the taxi.

The depiction of Father Leary is problematic, in part, because, though it is never explicitly stated, it is implied that he is a closeted homosexual. Though, it could be argued that inferring sexual preference based on behaviours traditionally categorized as feminine is conjecture, I would contend that the film's fundamentally regressive gender ideology make this characterization decidedly likely. Supporting this supposition is that in the sole scene in which Father Leary is seen socially engaging without Father James visibly present, the younger cleric is seen speaking with a good-looking young man at the pub suggesting that he is physically attracted to him.

As stated earlier, in his scenes with Father James, Father Leary is continually situated in a clear, traditional heteronormative, relational dynamic, wherein within the context of their shared household and workspace, he is very much gendered in the traditionally feminine and subservient role. Father Leary is seen preparing tea, while James sits reading the newspaper. He is shown preparing the bread and wine for Father James before Mass and the final sequence wherein Father James returns home inebriated from the pub to a concerned Leary in pyjamas plays out like myriad husband and wife scenes taken from Irish drama, literature, and film.

It is ironic, perhaps that Father Leary is quite explicitly placed in the 'wife' role in the domestic space of the presbytery, considering the film's treatment of its two female Irish characters. Veronica, Jack's wife is depicted as the town's 'fallen woman,' she remains with her husband, despite his physical abuse, while having an affair with Simon, a foreigner. Her interactions with Father James are peppered with sexual innuendo and at another point in the film, Father James walks in on her and Doctor Harte in the men's

room of the pub, snorting cocaine. In the aforementioned scene with Father James and Father Leary in the tearoom, the younger priest speaks of the explicit sexual matters which she talks about in the sacrament of confession, 'it's like she tries to drag you down into the muck.' Indeed, throughout the film in her interactions with Father James her constant sexual rhetoric is not depicted as being 'sexual' per se, but antagonistic, a means of revenge on the Church and her husband, who we discover cannot perform sexually because of his childhood abuse. Thus, the depiction of an Irish woman's sex life is not contextualized as a healthy appreciation for the sexual act, but as a form of moral deviance as passive-aggressive retribution.

Fiona, the other Irish female character in the film, is depicted as a victim, which is immediately represented in the showing of the bandages on her wrist, the consequence of a failed suicide attempt. Consistent with the film's traditional gender ideology, the suicide attempt was the result of a man ending a romantic relationship. It is pointed out to Fiona by her father and subsequently by Doctor Harte in the pub that her suicide attempt was done incorrectly, that is she moved the blade horizontally across her wrists instead of vertically. That she could not attempt suicide 'correctly' adds yet another layer onto Fiona's victim persona. As the film goes on it is revealed that Fiona felt abandoned not just by her mother's death but also by her father's subsequent entering the priesthood. That Fiona's life is presented as a continual series of abandonments would have less significance from a gender perspective if she were not one of only two Irish female characters in the film's entirety.

The film's third female character, Teresa fulfils the 'mother' role so entrenched in the Irish tradition. Her recent widowhood allows for the erasure of her character's sexuality, which is in alignment with traditional depictions of the mother figure in Irish culture. That she is foreign, says less about her character's French ethnicity and more about the

film's perception of Irish women. Indeed, Irish culture has gone so far astray that now it is left to the French—who have long ago addressed their issues with the Catholic Church's interference in secular life—to stand-in as the Virgin Mary's surrogate.

Unlike Veronica, Teresa had a loving, fulfilling relationship with her deceased husband. Unlike Fiona, whose suicide attempts and general instability concern her father, Teresa comforts and consoles Father James; their relationship is one of reciprocity and mutual compassion. As Father James answers her questions and listens to her in the hospital chapel after anointing her dying husband, so too does Teresa offer comfort later in the film when they meet at the airport. Teresa serves as a model of resigned faith, a 'wounded healer,' as she returns home to go on with her life having just experienced immeasurable trauma. Father James, who had gone to the airport with the thought of fleeing to Dublin to escape his murderer, finds in the French women's courageous faith, the inspiration to remain in his parish, with those he ministers to, despite having been forsaken.

That Father James finds strength and consolation in the French woman, says less about her character and her country of origin than it does about the film's conception of Irish women. Through Father James' relationship with Teresa could be read as analogous to the Scriptural parable about the Good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, wherein a man assumed to be Jewish, is attacked by thieves and left for dead at the side of the road. Helpless and dying he is passed by, by both a Jewish Priest and a Levite, before being assisted and cared for by a Samaritan, a non-Jew and thus, the Other.⁵⁴⁰ While there is merit in this analogy especially as it correlates to an understanding of the 'wounded healer,' it is problematic in its dismissal of the Irish woman. By making the female

⁵⁴⁰ Lk 10: 25-37 (NRSV)

spiritual voice in the film, Other and removing her, literally, from the Irish situation, the film does not acknowledge the possibility of an Irish female spiritual voice—let alone giving said voice a body—while at the same time reducing Irish woman to either being sexually pathological or professional victim.

Calvary's 'Excarnate' Clergy

The traces of the Celtic Tiger era's villainous clerical portraits are evident in the film's two remaining featured clerical figures. Indeed, it would seem that in order to 'incarnate' Father James, while at the same time acknowledge the reality of the Irish church and its history of abuse at all levels of society for the preceding century, cinematic space must be made for if not necessarily overtly abusive clergy, certainly those who are avaricious, out of touch, and frivolous. Thus, *Calvary's* two other clerical characterizations are 'excarnate,' aligned as they are with the institutional church and an obsolete theism. Throughout the film through rhetorical and visual signifiers, the film's two other religious figures: Father Leary and Bishop Montgomery (David McSavage) can both be read as coming from the traditional Catholic theological position of sovereign theism. This metaphysical conception of God—in spite of its message of 'incarnation' (word made flesh)—has been dominated by the 'optocentric' tradition of Western Philosophy, wherein 'sight came to dominate the hierarchy of the senses and was esteemed the chosen ally of theoretical knowledge.'⁵⁴¹ Thus, thought, image and word garnered primacy and were elevated to the realm of sacred within the Christian tradition, while the flesh and the senses were rendered profane. This mind/body dualism can be seen most clearly

⁵⁴¹ Kearney, *Touch*, 36.

manifested in the Christianity and particularly Catholicism's historically problematic relationship with sex and sexuality.⁵⁴²

Both of Father James' scenes with the bishop give evidence of the latter's disembodied optocentrism. In both scenes Father James is seeking guidance from his superior and in both instances, the bishop can only appeal to rote recitation of doctrine. The first of the two scenes occurs within the prelate's lavish office, where Father James and the Bishop are shot seated at opposing ends of the frame on either side of a desk. The men are overseen by the stern countenances of previous bishops whose portraits surround them on every side as the two men discuss 'the voice's' threat to murder James. The bishop's questions to Father James are doctrinal, he concludes his query by stating, 'the inviability of the sacramental seal does not apply.' Father James responds, 'Are you saying I should go to the police?' The bishop responds, 'I'm not saying anything, James.' The bishop's rote recitation of ecclesial doctrine, his further inability to offer any contextual insight or guidance to a life-threatening situation one of his priests is undergoing, let alone compassion or comfort signify the character's excarnate optocentrism. He is not a fully realized character, but instead an 'image' of the moral and pastoral limitations of the Church hierarchy.

The second scene between the two occurs directly after Father James' church has been burned to the ground. The scene takes place in the garden of the cathedral presbytery, as they walk through the garden, the bishop says, 'We have to ask ourselves,' he says, presumably of the arsonist 'what did this man want? He wants to be loved of course...' as he goes on it becomes apparent that the bishop is not speaking of James' situation. When the bishop finishes, Father James says to him, 'I think you read that in a book, your

⁵⁴² Kearney, *Touch*, 36.

Excellency.’ Indeed, the bishop’s entire monologue came directly from Swedish novelist, Hjalmar Soderberg’s, *Doctor Glas* (1905), which tells the story of the titular doctor’s plan to murder the clergyman husband of the woman he loves. In his two scenes, the only guidance the bishop can offer is recited content from ecclesial documents and early 20th century fiction. The bishop is incapable of offering anything else than someone else’s thoughts.

During the film’s epilogue, which is a collection of brief moments of each of the film’s characters at some point after Father James’ murder, Father Leary is shown in a tracking shot, seated before a wall of books, reading Richard Dawkins’s, *The God Delusion* (2006), the seminal work of the New Atheism movement. The brief shot of the cleric visually suggests, with its image of him reading in front of a wall of books, his alignment with the ‘optocentric’ tradition of Philosophy rooted in dualism, prevalent in the West since Plato, wherein the visual has pre-eminence over the other senses.⁵⁴³ Father Leary’s reading of Dawkins articulates the cleric’s atheistic turn, moving from what Kearney terms a ‘theism of sovereignty’, pervasive in Catholic Theology and born out of the same optocentric Greek philosophy, and holds ‘the belief that God as Sovereign *causa sui*, as immutable Emperor of the world, exercises arbitrary and unlimited power over his creatures.’⁵⁴⁴ With that said, Kearney would also contend that the radical atheism of Dawkins and his companions is equally as constrained as its theistic counterpart in its total rejection of the sacred and transcendent and having a teleology all its own wherein ‘we were ignorant and have now seen the light: all faith was delusion but we have finally reached the “end” of religion and we are free...’⁵⁴⁵ Thus, the film’s final image of the

⁵⁴³ Kearney, *Touch*, 34.

⁵⁴⁴ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 53.

⁵⁴⁵ Richard Kearney, ‘God after God: An Anatheist Attempt to Re-imagine God,’ *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, eds R. Kearney and Jens Zimmerman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 236.

curate, alone, situated in front of a wall of books, fully submerged in optocentric chasm, reading a system of un-belief which is, in its opposition to belief, just as rigid and constricted as that which it is combating. His geographical and ideological relocations are unable to provide the guidance and encounters with the Other necessary to transform him into an embodied subject.

Carnal Hospitality and the Return of the Priest to the Sacraments

As the most high-profile film about a member of the Roman Catholic clergy to be released in recent memory, *Calvary* reinforces many aspects of the traditional iconography of the ‘social worker’ priest, while at the same time recovering facets of the clergy that had been removed in its previous cinematic manifestations, most specifically the cultic element as revealed in the sacramental life. I would contend that the film’s continual placement of Father James in the act of distributing the various sacraments serves in part to give him ‘flesh.’ The seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic tradition: baptism, reconciliation, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, holy orders, and the anointing of the sick are decidedly corporal practices and held very much in opposition to a solely scriptural understanding of faith and church. Each of the seven sacraments involves some act involving the body and the senses, be it being immersed in water, anointed with oil, or laying on of hands. I would like to suggest that the sacramental practices of Father James serve as another means of representing his enfleshment through what Kearney names ‘carnal hospitality.’ For Kearney, ‘carnal hospitality’ is defined as ‘word becomes

touch.⁵⁴⁶ Kearney, once more citing multiple examples from the Western canon says of carnal hospitality:

The miraculous power of touch and taste, of hand and mouth, is a recurring story finding echoes in some of the historic handshakes of our own time, moments of physical encounter which have transformed wounds of hostility into ‘marvels of hospitality’—recall Mandela and De Klerk, Hume, and Paisley, Begin and Sadat, Rabin and Arafat, Gandhi, and Mountbatten. One wages war or wagers one’s arm.⁵⁴⁷

Calvary ensconces itself in the sacramental, the opening scene in the confessional is directly followed by the image of Father James distributing the Eucharist to most of the film’s main characters. The scene is done in close-up shot counter-shot as it moves from Father James offering the host and, per the rite saying, ‘The body of Christ,’ to the counter-close-up of the congregant assenting with the word ‘amen.’ In theological terms this assent not only refers to the Catholic understanding of the real presence, wherein the elements of bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ through transubstantiation in the celebration of the Eucharist, but also the understanding of the community of believers as Christ’s Body, as is stated in Paul’s letter to the Colossian, ‘(Christ) is the head of the body, the Church’.⁵⁴⁸

This sequence presented as it is during the opening credit sequence of the films serves as a prologue, as we see Father James in a series of one-on-one encounters with his parishioners. In these exchanges Father James, in both the assertion and the offering of the body of Christ is the vulnerable host, as Kearney says, the sense of ‘touch’ ‘is what exposes us to risk, to adventure, to novelty and natality—to what is actually happening as we touch and are touched by others.’⁵⁴⁹ There is a similar exchange later in the film when

⁵⁴⁶ Richard Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality: Between Word and Touch,’ *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion* 1, no. 1 (2019): 78.

⁵⁴⁷ Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality,’ 79.

⁵⁴⁸ Col. 1:18 (NRSV)

⁵⁴⁹ Kearney, ‘Double Hospitality,’ 79.

we see Father James performing the rite of the anointing of the sick with Teresa's dying husband at the hospital, once more the priest through the sacrament is touching and being touched both to her husband and Teresa, as evidenced by the scene that follows between the two of them when they speak in the hospital chapel.

Yet it is the film's utilization of the sacrament of reconciliation and more specifically its use of the confessional box as narrative device that clearly foregrounds Father James' embeddedness in the sacramental realm. Indeed, the opening scene takes place within the confines of a traditional confessional box, wherein Father James' would-be murderer exploits the inherent anonymity of the booth to mask his identity. What is most notable for this study about the utilization of the confessional box is its seeming 'incorporeality' in that the bodies of the priest and penitent are separated by the physical structure of the box. Similarly, the partition and screen minimize the visibility of priest and penitent to one another.

Barton notes not just the corporal divide between the two men in the confessional box during the opening scene, but also the physical invisibility of the abuse survivor, the 'voice without a body,' throughout the scene's entirety. Barton posits that it is the scene's physical erasure of the abuse survivor, and his subsequent murdering of Father James is part of a larger trend in cinematic and televisual depictions rooted in a cultural puritanism that refuses to acknowledge the complexity of child sexuality, thereby rendering cinematic depictions of clerical abuse survivors as simplistic and monstrous.⁵⁵⁰

Another aspect of the opening scene is its separation of the disembodied voice, as spoken by one performer and the physical representation of Jack by another performer. I would argue that the separation of the voice/body points to a larger fracturing within the

⁵⁵⁰ Barton, 'Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,' 644-649.

community.⁵⁵¹ Barton contends that the community ‘has entirely lost its moral bearings, though why this should be so is never articulated.’⁵⁵² One possible answer to this is in the mind/body divide in the fracturing of the ‘voice’ of the survivor as portrayed by one performer and the physical depiction of that character by another as representative of the larger fracturing of the community born out of a dualistic Christian tradition. In their interactions with Father James and with one another the community members continually disclose the compartmentalization of the mind and body, separating the corporeal from the ethical and affective, allowing for destructive sexual choices, spousal abuse, drug abuse, arson, and suicide. The mind/body fracturing at play amongst the community members is a consequence of a Christian theology that elevates the spiritual and denigrates the corporeal.

Further along in the film there is another sequence inside the confessional between Father James and his daughter, Fiona, as she attempts to discuss her recent suicide attempt. As father and daughter, the pair fail to reconcile and as the scene finishes, Fiona says to her father, ‘You’ll tell me it’s a mortal sin, I suppose.’ Would I have suffered eternal damnation?’ Father James responds, ‘God is great. The limits of his mercy have not been set.’ I would contend that Father James’ statement about the limitless nature of God’s mercy speak to the film’s and his own theology, thus, Father James’ God is not limited or contained by the physical space of a church or even more restrictively, a confessional box, thus, reconciliation with God, in the guise of the Other can occur in any location, such as in on the shoreline in the shadow of Ben Bulbin, as Fiona does later in the film with her father or in a prison visiting room as she does in the film’s final scene with Jack. I would argue that the confessional box serves as the last remnant of the ‘old

⁵⁵¹ Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 645-646.

⁵⁵² Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 646.

Irish Church,' and more specifically of the 'contained' and restrictive theism on which it was based. Thus, it is no longer the physical space that delineates the divine, but it is in the carnal exchange.

Indeed, *Calvary* carries on where the conclusion of *Jimmy's Hall* had left off, in separating clerical authority from the spatial realm. Father James is an itinerant priest, he is shown throughout the film going from space to space: from the pub to the prison, to the hospital, to the garage, to the various work and domestic spaces of his congregants. The presbytery, as it is represented in *Calvary*, is strictly a domestic space; Father James is never shown engaging with anyone within it except for Father Leary, who as mentioned earlier, is given the 'feminine' role in their quasi-domestic partnership. Thus, the majority of Father James' ministry is contingent upon the hospitality or hostility of the various people he encounters in their 'own' space. It is now the parishioners who set the terms of engagement, not the priest, and who has now been rendered the Other. It is telling that Father James is only met with hospitality by the two foreign born characters: Teresa and The Writer. That he is received with hostility, without exception by the 'native' Irish is not so much an indictment of them but on the Church and society that had failed them.

Conclusion

The sense of disillusionment and insecurity that manifested in Irish society in the wake of the economic collapse, along with its accompanying political scandals, provided new avenues of interrogation for Irish filmmakers as the second decade of the twenty-first century commenced. Questions which had arisen from more traditional spheres of society during the Celtic Tiger era about whether the Irish had 'lost their way' in light of the conspicuous consumption that marked the period, were juxtaposed with anti-

establishment discourses in the years of economic recession. Considering the clerical depictions which prevailed during the late 1990s and early 2000s, that is, ‘ex-carnate’ villains serving as proxy for the institutional Church, it is surprising that the priest would re-emerge, redeemed and re-embodied, what with abuse revelations still coming forth and the publication of the Ryan Reports and similar documents, as the century entered its second decade.

While it could be argued that the ‘incarnate’ clerical figures depicted in *Jimmy’s Hall* and *Calvary* were the product of two directors: one British, one Irish-British, neither indigenous to the Republic and thus, not the output of a ‘native Irish’ vision; other similarly embodied priestly depictions were produced by Irish-born filmmakers, as well, notably Father Berry in Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *Stella Days* (2011).⁵⁵³ The ‘incarnate’ priest that came forth in this period, speaks in part to an underlying societal yearning for trustworthy authority figures and in some sense seems to suggest a nostalgia for the Irish priest found both in the Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s as well as in the cultural mythology of the Irish past.

Having said that, the resurrection of the Irish cleric is also accompanied by problematic discourses of which he cannot be eradicated. In the cases of Father Sheridan and Father James they manifest in restrictive notions of masculinity and ‘maleness,’ along with a conception of clerical authority intertwined with violence and abuse.

If there is a ‘victim’ of the ‘ana-carnation’ of the cinematic priest, it is the Irish woman. The women depicted in *Jimmy’s Hall* are very much consistent with traditional female archetypes of Irish cultural tradition, particularly, the de-sexualized mother figure and Oonagh, who stands in as the ‘heavenly woman’ of the *aisling*, a form of Irish poetry,

⁵⁵³ Ironically, Father Barry is portrayed by American actor, Martin Sheen, a casting which only underlines the inherent transnational element at play in modern filmmaking.

which features a female character who promises deliverance for the Irish people.⁵⁵⁴ Oonagh inspires Jimmy on his socio-political quest with a pure and chaste love that conveniently evades any expression of female sexuality. As is the case for Jimmy and most of the non-clerical characters in the film, there is no complexity or interior growth for the women in the film, instead they serve as devices to propel the primary male figure forward within the narrative.

Calvary's depiction of Father James, while 'redeeming' the Irish cinematic priest by transfiguring him into a 'wounded healer,' defines what a 'good' priest is, in terms of a narrow and regressive masculinity. This affirmation of a type of retrograde 'maleness' dovetails with a negation of the Irish female spiritual voice; indeed, the only feminine spirituality in the film emerges from Teresa, the Frenchwoman, who departs from the town and country, in both cases, leaving it in the spiritual hands of the priest, the traditional symbol of Irish spiritual authority. This leaves *Calvary's* two native Irish female characters as very much 'ex-carnate' characters, as they are presented as antiquated notions of female dependency in relation to men, rooted in a suspicion of women's sexual agency.

Not only must the 'incarnate' cinematic priest of modern Irish film necessarily carry the onus of the historical wreckage of the institutional Church, but his re-embodiment, is dependent upon his capitulation of authority. Thus, in his garnering of cinematic 'flesh,' the priest forfeits his sovereign rights. This exchange of 'power' for 'humanity' is a consequence of the historical abuse of authority by the Irish clergy, but also comes from a democratizing sensibility rooted in the West in the various civil rights movements of the

⁵⁵⁴ Jeffrey Longacre, 'Killing Caithleen: Edna O'Brien's *Country Girls Trilogy* as Anti-Aisling, *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies* 18 (2018): 77.

past seventy years, but also of a ‘confessional’ culture which has been accelerated by technology, in particular the rise of social media.

The license social media gives its adherents to share and record all aspects of their lives in and with the public sphere, has in turn, manifested in modes of leadership which allow for and even invite fallibility at the public level. As such, figures like former United States President Donald Trump are continually allowed to make public ‘mis-steps,’ confess to ‘sins’ from their past, while maintaining and indeed, gaining support in the process. Public leadership no longer necessitates private integrity, past or present, thus, the cinematic and televisual Irish priest, who shoots people, has sex with congregants and abuses women, no longer creates ‘scandal’, to use the Church’s official term, but—and in comparison, to the misdeeds of real-life clergy---they are seen as making them more authentic, more human and perhaps, closer to God.

Though, this thesis does not argue that the cinematic depiction of the Irish cleric is mimetic, it does allow that society influences and informs priestly characterizations. Similarly, film and television in turn reciprocate by assisting in the shaping of perceptions of priestly identity. With that said, the ‘redeemed’ priest of the screen gestures more to the figure’s elasticity and contingency, which is in part, due to the Church’s own abuse of power at a multiplicity of levels, but also signifies the nominal significance of the priestly figure in Western culture at large. The clerical depictions analysed in this chapter demonstrate the ever-shifting ‘currency of meaning’ that the priest continues to carry, in that the signifying heft of the clerical name and title allow for a continual reshaping and transforming in light of an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Conclusion

This analysis of the Irish cinematic priest began with the stable characterization of the cleric put forth by Hollywood during the Depression and inter-War period in the United States and concludes with the unstable characterization of the Irish priest in the twenty-first century amidst a much broader media landscape. The American cinema of the first half of the twentieth century, in part due to its cultural hegemony within the Anglophone sphere, as well for a multiplicity of other reasons that have been discussed at length in this thesis, constructed the template for the cinematic Roman Catholic cleric. As has been the case with other cinematic representations, the native Irish film industry repurposed these diasporic images for their own cultural and ideological ends with the advent of an indigenous cinema in the latter part of the twentieth century. The reimagining of the Hollywood archetype of the cinematic priest in the modern Irish context has proven to be a useful discursive mechanism by which filmmakers have been able to interrogate Ireland and its past. The Catholic Church's influence on all aspects of Irish society over the past two centuries has been well documented by historians, sociologists, and the press. Thus, the use of the priest within cinematic texts about Ireland, past and present, allows for numerous avenues by which to analyse the narrative of the Catholic Church.

This project utilized the thought of Irish philosopher Richard Kearney to provide a model for analysing depictions of the Irish priest. Kearney's notions of the 'excarinate' and 'incarnate' were used to articulate the distinctions in representations of the cleric as they were traced diachronically from Hollywood's Golden Age to the contemporary era. Kearney's account of the 'excarinate' or 'flesh becoming word' provided a helpful analogue for delineating those cinematic clerical characterizations which were used solely as a means of signifying the institutional authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Similarly, Kearney's conception of the 'incarnate' or 'word becoming flesh' served as a means of articulating those clerical characterizations which demonstrated a robust and complex subjectivity. This project also used Kearney's account of 'sovereign theism,' and 'anatheism' to explicate the theology at play within the Irish historical context up until the time of Vatican II.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I presented the archetypes of the 'social worker' and 'mayor' priest that emerged out of Hollywood's Golden Age that represented in equal parts the reality and the aspirations of the urban Catholic situation in the United States. The 'social worker' priest, epitomized by Spencer Tracy's portrayal of real-life, Irish-American priest, Father Edward Flanagan in *Boys Town*, replaced the Protestant female as the redemptive figure for the urban poor within the context of the Depression-era, 'social problem' film. The 'social worker' priest's emergence proved to be the legitimizing cinematic moment for the urban, ethnic Catholic male, particularly those of Irish heritage. In the previous three decades of cinema, the Irish urban male was very much relegated to the sphere of impoverished, criminal violence, and ministered to by the aforementioned Protestant female.

The 'social worker' priest also served to remove the Catholic cleric from cinematic containment within the ecclesial space and was in turn, transferred to the carcerated space. The 'social worker' priest, as characterized by the cinematic Father Flanagan, was liberated from the interior of the church, which spoke to a burgeoning acceptance of Catholics within mainstream American society. However, the priest's relocation was also accompanied by a tacit expectation by that same mainstream WASP community, of his singular responsibility for the regulation and care of the ethnic, urban poor.

The 'social worker' priest's containment within the carcerated space, overseeing the rehabilitation of the urban adolescent boy or ministering to the inveterate male criminal, precluded any semblance of a personal narrative. With that said, as Spencer Tracy's depiction of Father Flanagan demonstrated, the 'social worker' priest's characterization found its 'incarnate' quality in his relationships with the men and boys under his care. The reciprocity in his exchanges with the boys and men to whom he ministered, despite the imbalance in the power dynamic, and the compassion he showed for them, in the face of their treatment by other authority figures, illustrate his embodied characterization.

The 'mayor' priest served as a diachronic successor to the 'social worker' priest within the context of Hollywood cinema during the 1930s and 1940s. The 'mayor' priest was emancipated from the restrictive spatial containment of his cinematic clerical predecessors. The 'mayor' priest as exemplified by Bing Crosby's depiction of Father 'Chuck' O'Malley in *Going My Way* and its sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's* moved freely throughout the urban world in which he was situated. Unlike, his fellow priest, the elderly, immigrant, Father Fitzgibbon, who forfeited his personal agency when emplaced outside of the ecclesial space, Father Chuck moved fluidly between the ecclesial, the urban and the cosmopolitan.

The 'mayor' priest as depicted by Father Chuck is given a personal narrative in part to buttress his embodied characterization, as well as a means of broadening the horizons of his ministerial capacity. Father Chuck is an athlete, a singer, and has a romantic history with another character in the film, Jenny. All of these personal elements allow for an access to the community that the insular, rigid, Father Fitzgibbon cannot approach. Father Chuck stands for a new, more democratized, 'American,' Catholicism, which would be borne out in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The proffering of a personal narrative along with the emancipation from the ecclesial and carcerated space also marks the ‘mayor’ priest as the ‘model immigrant.’ Father Chuck, in his competence, compassion and efficiency in assisting his fellow urban immigrants, demonstrates the ‘correct’ way to assimilate into mainstream American society. Indeed, a key characteristic of the ‘mayor’ priest is his role as unifier within the community, which in the context of the urban world of *Going My Way* means assimilation. By contrast, Father Fitzgibbon, childlike, irresponsible, and rigid, demonstrates difficulty functioning within the American context and it is only in his capitulation to the ‘democratic’ principles espoused by his curate that the parish can flourish.

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the archetypes of ‘social worker’ priest and ‘mayor’ priest continuously emerged and re-emerged in the modern Irish cinematic context. The continual reappearance of the ‘social worker’ and ‘mayor’ priest types, speaks, in part, to the need by indigenous Irish filmmakers to engage with cinematic images of Irishness from the past put forth by foreign cinemas, as well as to the historical legacy of these types of priests in both the American and Irish contexts.

Also illustrated throughout this thesis has been the themes and discourses affixed to the archetypes of the ‘social worker’ and the ‘mayor’ priest, which have similarly recurred within the modern Irish context. What becomes evident however in the geographic migration across the Atlantic, coupled with the diachronic progression to the end of twentieth century and into the twenty-first, has been the alteration in the clerical figure’s stability. The Irish priest of Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s was a stable and stabilizing figure. Both the ‘social worker’ and ‘mayor’ priests of the Depression and the years of the Second World War, were moral exemplars, whose authority was infrequently challenged, and when it was, it was unequivocally reclaimed.

By contrast, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the modern Irish cinematic priest is a contingent figure, beholden to both the diegetic context in which he is located, as well as to the socio-political and cultural horizons up and against which the film he is in, is being produced. Thus, as I illustrated in Chapter Two of this thesis in my close reading of the two clerical focused films of Bob Quinn, *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story*, clerical authority has already been entirely conceded to the excarnate figure, located within the administrative space. Conversely, the incarnate priest of the western island, very much in the model of the 'mayor' priest, Father Lonergan in *The Quiet Man*, is clearly not entrenched within his community, rather standing outside and 'above' it. The priest demonstrates his 'embodied' desire for physical and emotional connection and intimacy by beginning a romantic relationship with Marian, another 'outsider' in the community. Marian's ultimate departure and the sacristan's suicide illustrate the priest's inability to serve as a unifying figure or stabilising influence within the community, as had been seen in previous iterations of the 'mayor' priest.

Quinn's two films' interrogation of mandatory clerical celibacy show the ascetic discipline as being more than just a problem of allowing for priests to partake of the sexual act. Underlying mandatory clerical celibacy within the Irish historical context is a tradition of theological dualism that fundamentally abhors the body and expressions of sexuality. This pervasive theological ethos manifests cinematically in the inherently unequal power dynamic between the priest and Marian in Quinn's films. The priest's characterization as an incarnate figure is constructed in part, through his physical and emotional intimacy with Marian, a recovering intravenous drug user, who has sought him out on the island. The priest, with seemingly no other social outlet on the island, begins a physical relationship with Marian, whom he had originally taken on as a housekeeper. Marian's vulnerability, as a recently recovered addict, a recent suicide attempt, as well as

the priest's employee, demonstrate the priest's abuse of power and the unilaterality of their relationship. The community's rejection of Marian, upon the priest's announcement of his impending fatherhood, eradicates the mythology of the Western Island while underlining its inherent prosaic ethos. This also demonstrates the transactional existence of the priest in the modern Irish context, as he is allowed his pastoral 'place' and moral authority within the community in exchange for his excarnate characterization.

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I traced the diachronic *katabasis* of the priest in modern Irish cinema to its nadir in the figure of the 'abusive' cleric. The 'abusive' priest is an inversion of the 'social worker' priest of 1930s Hollywood, most notably, Spencer Tracy's portrayal of Father Edward Flanagan. The 'abusive' priest, like his Hollywood ancestor, ministers primarily to adolescent boys within carcerated spaces. Where the 'social worker' priest was primarily situated within the 'social problem' narratives of the Depression era, urban, United States, the 'abusive' priest is situated within the 'abuse melodrama' of the Irish rural, past. That the majority of the abuse melodramas are set during the 1930s and 1940s, transforms them into 'alternate' Irish-set narratives running diachronically parallel to their Hollywood 'social problem' predecessors.

As Ruth Barton has argued, the abuse melodrama and the 'abusive cleric' it engendered are, in part, the 'revenge of the people on Church authority and on the grand narrative of organised religion.'⁵⁵⁵ Thus, the simplicity of the melodramatic form and its conventions prove amenable for catharsis, not just for abuse survivors, but an Irish population who had felt under the weight of ecclesial authority at least since the time of Independence. The 'abusive' priest's excarnate characterization serves as institutional signifier and not as embodied subject. The cleric's abusive behaviour emerges out of a

⁵⁵⁵ Ruth Barton, 'Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,' *English Language and Literature* 63, no. 4 (2017): 653.

perversion of an already problematic theology, rooted in Platonic dualism, and undergirded by a conception of God as sovereign authority. Indeed, the onscreen abuse perpetuated by the cleric is an offshoot of the desire for authority and its frustration against the backdrop of a rapidly, modernizing Irish society.

However, as Barton also points out, the demonizing of the ‘cleric’ serves as a means of a societal deflection of culpability.⁵⁵⁶ Both domestic violence, as well as the societal complicity that accompanied clerical abuse, is rarely represented in the cinematic narratives, and instead the excarnate characterizations and closed narrative conventions of the melodrama allow for an unreflective catharsis for the audience.

The robust incarnate priestly characterisations that emerged in the years immediately following the economic collapse in 2008, particularly *Calvary*’s Father James, as portrayed by Brendan Gleeson, yet again, illustrate the instability of the clerical figure. Father James, and similar representations of ‘wounded healers,’ that came about at this time, are in the tradition of the clerical archetypes of Hollywood’s Golden Age, in their fully embodied benevolent compassion.

However, unlike their Irish-American antecedents, their characterizations’ ‘flesh’ is a consequence of their own history of trauma and suffering. Thus, they encounter those they minister to in a place of reciprocity, born out of their own lived experience. These ‘wounded healers,’ however, are not like their predecessors in being beholden to a production code that minimized their personal narratives and thus, are allowed to express their sexuality on-screen to varying degrees.

The incarnate, ‘wounded healer,’ as represented by Father James in *Calvary*, is a repurposing of the ‘mayor priest’ archetype of Hollywood during the 1940s, in his desire

⁵⁵⁶ Barton, ‘Narrating Clerical Sexual Abuse,’ 649-650.

to unify his community. However, unlike his Irish-American cinematic ancestor, Father James has no authoritative weight to rectify his wayward, rural parish. Father James, as ‘wounded healer’ is repeatedly rejected by the community he seeks to heal. Like Father Chuck from *Going My Way*, Father James’ personal narrative informs and broadens his ministerial capacity, yet it is only the ‘outsiders,’ such as Teresa, the French widow, and the American writer, who allow him the reciprocity necessary for healing.

The ‘wounded healer,’ as a characterization of the incarnate priest discloses the continual problems of traditional notions of Irish masculinity inscribed within the priest. Father James is juxtaposed with Father Leary within the narrative discourse, the two clerical figures tacitly representing the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ priest, which manifests primarily in their characters’ gendering. Father Leary is coded as gay and is gendered along traditionally feminine lines in his relationships, particularly with Father James. Father James is representative of traditional notions of Irish manliness, rooted in discourses surrounding nationalism from the Independence era. He is given a sexual past, a requisite trope for the ‘wounded healer’ priest, in an attempt to ‘normalize’ the celibate cleric.

Similarly, *Calvary* yet again discloses the problem of the ‘non-mother’ Irish female for the cinematic priest and the world he inhabits. The two primary female figures in the narrative, excluding Teresa, a French tourist, are Father James’ daughter, Fiona and Veronica, a local woman, whose husband physically abuses her and who is also having an extramarital affair. While Teresa engages in a relationship of reciprocal ‘wounded’ healing with Father James, in the wake of her husband’s death, both the native Irish female characters are simply wounded. This ‘problem’ of the insoluble ‘non-mother’ female character is a recurring theme throughout this thesis and reflects, in part, the institutional Church’s seeming inability to dialogue with female agency outside the parameters of marriage and religious life.

What particularly delineates the Irish cleric from priestly depictions in other national cinemas in the West is that the locus of concern is with questions of authority and not questions of fidelity. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that it is through the clerical authority or lack thereof, of the priest that his characterization is shaped and informed. The cinematic priest of the early years of Irish indigenous cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, featured priestly characterizations of Ireland's past, who in fictive films, such as Quinn's *Budawanny* and *The Bishop's Story* demonstrated a correlation between authority and a *katabasis* into the excarnate, or disembodied characterization. Non-fictive representations of this period, such as Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* both articulate the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland during the time of the film's production, while also demonstrating—through its segment on diocesan priest, Michael Cleary—the Church's awareness of the vulnerability of its heretofore unquestioned hegemonic authority in the wake of both civil and ecclesial modernization.

This reciprocal relationship between authority and clerical characterization continues into the Celtic Tiger era, which sees the priest's authority and disembodied characterization at their most extreme in the abuse melodrama, as I show in Chapter Three's analysis of *Song for a Raggy Boy*. It is only in the depictions of Irish priests in the post-Celtic Tiger era, where questions of faith and spirituality arise, though usually they are in relation to non-Irish subjects. This engagement with the non-Irish is shown in *Calvary*, where Father James' exchanges with the French widow and the American writer allow both the characters and the audience the opportunity to reflect on questions of belief. I would argue a similar situation occurs in the series *Fleabag*, where the hypersexual titular heroine's infatuation with a priest, portrayed by Irish actor Andrew Scott, allows for a reading of the text as an unfinished and unorthodox journey of faith.

Questions of authority also continually arise within the spatial realm of the cinematic text in depictions of the Irish cleric. As was the case for his Hollywood ancestors of the 1930s and 1940s, the modern Irish priest is infrequently located within the ecclesial space. The domestic space of the home and the administrative space of the office prove to be the primary locus of the cleric's authority onscreen. The modern priest's authority is contingent upon his location, as he is repeatedly shown as being powerless in the exterior space of the rural Irish landscape. In the cinema of the post-Celtic Tiger era, the priest is more frequently situated within traditional ecclesial spaces, such as the church, however, those areas have in turn, been depleted of their significance.

This thesis' focus on the clerical figure's representation in film fills a noticeable gap in Irish film scholarship in its focus on the Catholic Church and its influence on modern Irish culture and society. As I stated in the introduction, though, other scholars have addressed the religious question in terms of modern Irish cinema in their work, this thesis provides with its acute examination of the Catholic priest, an intentional focus on the most visible representative of the Church, and an expansive evaluation of the Catholic Church's influence on Irish culture and society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This project's diachronic analysis provides a supplement to previous investigations into the Irish cinema of the twentieth century with regards to cultural representations of Catholicism, while also serving as a jumping off point for new and continuing discourses surrounding religion, authority and Ireland's past. Moving beyond the specifically Irish cinematic context, this study would also prove to be helpful in an analysis of cultural productions within those contexts wherein the division between state and religion are ambiguous.

As I mentioned in this thesis' introduction, due to concerns regarding the project's scope, I did not include analysis of films set in Northern Ireland. However, because of this project's focus on religion's influence on Irish society, the next phase in my research will turn to depictions of clergy in those films set in Northern Ireland, both during the Troubles and following it. This inclusion also necessitates an expansion of analysis into an evaluation of depictions of Protestant clergy, as well.

Another area for further study is the depiction of the female in direct relationship to the Catholic Church, both the unmarried, non-mother adult woman and the female religious. In this thesis, I analysed Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters*, though my critical lens was aimed primarily at the depictions of clergy and not at the substantial representations of the unmarried adult woman and the female religious in the cinematic text. The film's narrative, based on real-life accounts of former wards of Magdalene asylums, provides a redemptive, if simplistic representation of the single adult woman/unwed mother, however, the film's depictions of nuns were generally as that of disembodied signifier adjacent to the 'abusive' priest archetype in terms of their characterizations. With that said, where I argue that the 'excarinate' priest of the abuse melodrama serves as a signifier for the institutional Church, such a reading of the female religious proves to be a much more tenuous proposition, as the nun's situation and history within the Catholic Church cannot allow for their cinematic analogues to be viewed as emblematic of a patriarchal institution. Still more intriguing is the emergence of the female religious as the villainous antagonist in the supernatural horror film over the course of the past decade, most notably *The Nun* (Corin Hardy, 2018), a part of *The Conjuring* franchise of films, and from an Irish perspective *The Devil's Doorway* (Aislinn Clarke, 2018).

The non-fictional films analysed in this project: the documentary *Rocky Road to Dublin* and the docu-drama, *Our Boys* were used to disclose the reciprocal nature of the relationship between media production and society. As I stated earlier, the relationship between cinematic representations and their real-life counterpart is not a mimetic one, however, there is a dialogical exchange occurring between the cinematic image and its real-life counterpart. Thus, recent documentaries about priests outside of the Irish national context, such as the film, *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* (Alex Gibney, 2012) and the series *The Keepers* (Netflix, 2017), provide yet another avenue for further investigation in my research.

This project concludes its diachronic study with *Calvary* and *Jimmy's Hall*, both of which were released in 2014. Since that time, the continually expanding media landscape has continued to provide numerous fictive clerical depictions, both within and outside of the Irish context that invite deeper analysis. Two of the most important recent clerical representations in terms of this study came from television: the 'sexy' priest as portrayed by Andrew Scott in *Fleabag* (BBC, 2016-2019) and Father Michael Kerrigan as portrayed by Sean Bean in *Broken* (BBC, 2017).

Scott's turn as the 'sexy' priest provides perhaps the first representations of an unchaste cleric whose lack of sexual continence neither consumes the entirety of the narrative nor overcomes the priest's position as a benevolent authority within it. Jimmy McGovern's *Broken* builds on *Calvary*'s narrative, by turning its 'wounded healer' priest, Father Kerrigan (Sean Bean), into the victim of clerical sexual abuse who must then come to terms with his past in order to save his vocation.

Outside of the Irish context, one of the most visible representations of the priest in recent years, was Mark Wahlberg's turn as the titular hero in the film, *Father Stu*

(Rosalind Ross, 2022), a film, which in some ways hearkens back to the Hollywood priest film of old, as it was developed and funded by the explicitly Catholic movie star, Wahlberg, based on the story of real-life boxer turned priest, Stuart Long. The film follows the conventions of the melodramatic biopic and its regressive notions of masculinity are consistent with those of the modern Irish clerical film.

As with the female religious figure, the priest has proven to be a prominent figure in the modern supernatural horror film. Beginning with *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and continuing almost unabated since then, the Catholic cleric has established his own position within the context of the ‘exorcism’ film, a horror subgenre, that seems to reemerge every few years, most recently with *The Pope’s Exorcist* (Julius Avery, 2023), starring Russell Crowe.

The impetus to expand my research outside of the depictions of Roman Catholic clergy is made particularly amenable by Paul Schrader’s *First Reformed* (2017), starring Ethan Hawke as Ernst Toller, a Protestant minister, who serves a dying congregation in upstate New York, all the while battling his own personal demons. Toller is very much in the tradition of Father James’ wounded healer figure and his role as Protestant pastor to a dwindling religious population very much echoes *Calvary*’s image of Catholic Ireland.

Ultimately, this study provides a robust contribution to earlier accounts of Irish National Cinema and its engagement with religious discourses, particularly Catholicism and questions regarding the relationship between the Church and the Irish state. This study also provides a typology for examining various mediated representations of the cleric within the Christian tradition. Outside of the Irish context, it provides a jumping off point for a deeper investigation into representations of religious figures in the contemporary media landscape and the construction of those characterizations.

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