TEACHING

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Film

Part I
Series Preface

The series Teaching Contemporary Literature, edited by Susanne Peters, Klaus Stierstorfer and Laurenz Volkmann, presents readings of major works of contemporary literature in English for schools and universities. At the same time, all contributions remain accessible in style and approach to a wider, interested readership. All those seeking an introduction to or further inspiration on specific texts and their authors, as well as those in need of a comprehensive, substantial survey of writings in English, will find the various perspectives on individual texts offered by specialists in the respective fields as informative and stimulating, always geared to engendering further readings and discussions. Obviously, the choice of some dozens of texts for each genre from a vast amount of available material is not only highly selective but also inevitably reflects the contributors’ and editors’ individual tastes and preferences. It is because of the involvement of our tastes and preferences that the choices of texts published in this series do not attempt to represent a fixed canon. The contributions are always arranged in alphabetical order. However, all volumes feature a special introductory section, “How to use this book”. Here, optional tables of content provide suggestions for structuring and arranging the films and their readings according to selective themes, principles or interests, always in the hope of captivating teachers’ and students’ curiosity to find their own arrangements and cross-referencing.

Introduction

Neil Jordan is probably the best-known contemporary Irish filmmaker, and one of the most significant directors to come out of the British Isles since the 1980s. He has managed to combine credentials as an independent cinematic auteur (as screenwriter as well as director) with making high-budget films in Hollywood and achieving large-scale commercial success. His career spans thirty years and about twenty films to date, alternating between smaller-scale British and Irish features and big-budget Hollywood productions. Incidentally, this illustrates a key characteristic of filmmaking in the British Isles since the beginning of the twentieth century: the constant presence of Hollywood and the American film industry, both as a threat and competitor and as an opportunity and potential market; intensified, of course, by the shared language. Jordan’s films have often been controversially discussed, for their cinematic as well as their (Irish) cultural and political ingredients. They lend themselves, therefore, to use in the classroom for teaching both English-language film in general and Irish culture, history and politics in particular. The Crying Game occupies an important position within Jordan’s oeuvre, being a relatively low-budget, British-produced feature that became his first great commercial success in the US, grossing over $60 million, thus facilitating his subsequent career. More importantly for our purposes, it exemplifies several central strands in the work of this director, including his interest in precarious or in-between states and identities (be they political, sexual or gendered), an emphasis on performance and Jordan’s trademark use of actors’ skills (including his “pet actor” Stephen Rea in the leading role), a complex narrative structure involving unexpected twists and reversals, generic hybridity, and not least the background of the ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland – a significant topic in at least four of Jordan’s films (the others being Angel, Michael Collins and Breakfast on Pluto).

In this chapter, I will start by discussing Neil Jordan’s work and themes in more general terms, giving a survey of his oeuvre so far and highlighting selected concerns and areas of debate that will partly be taken up in the sample discussion of The Crying Game. Before the more detailed interpretation of the film, however, I will sketch several broader contexts within which the analysis can be situated, above all in a classroom situation. These include cinematic traditions and genres as well as cultural and political aspects, all of which play a part in my subsequent discussion of Jordan’s film without overly determining it. In any case, I see my contribution as opening up avenues for
debate and discussion rather than providing a prescriptive analysis of the film; an approach that is strongly suggested, in my view, by the openness, ambiguity, and complexity of Neil Jordan’s films themselves.

Neil Jordan: major works and themes

Neil Jordan was born in 1950 into an intellectual and artistic middle-class family in County Sligo and spent most of his childhood and youth in the Dublin area (where he continues to live). This was the period when the Republic of Ireland followed an isolationist course in European politics under the leadership of Eamon de Valera (first as Taoiseach and later as President), and was strongly dominated by the Catholic Church and its values. The character of de Valera (in his role in the Irish Independence and Civil Wars of the 1920s) is portrayed in an unflattering light in Jordan’s Michael Collins (1996), and a 1960s childhood in rural Ireland dominated by double-standard morality and its catastrophic effects are represented memorably and disturbingly in The Butcher Boy (1997). This is not to say that Jordan did not experience creative nourishment in his homeland; it is clear that Irish history and mythology are among the central inspirations behind his work, and he has named Samuel Beckett as one of his early influences (together with Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones, significantly). Before he became a director and screenwriter, he was a musician, actor, and writer of short stories and novels (his first volume of short stories won the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1979). These interests remain key influences in his films, as we will see, and he intermittently continues to publish novels (his fifth, Mistaken, came out in early 2011). His fiction and films clearly share an interest in narrative complexity, confused or liminal identities, myth and the Gothic, and are highly visual and sensual in character.

Neil Jordan’s film work started in the late 1970s, when he was beginning to write screenplays for TV and worked as a script consultant for John Boorman’s Excalibur (1979). His first experience as a director also came through this film, about which he made a short documentary (1981). Boorman became his mentor and produced his first feature film, Angel, in 1982. This film, for which Jordan also wrote the screenplay, was seminal in several respects. It was one of the few films to be funded by the newly established British television Channel Four on the one hand, and the Irish Film Board on the other, both of which were to play an important role in the British and Irish film industries during the 1980s and 90s. It also signals several of Jordan’s prevailing stylistic and thematic concerns: a Northern Irish setting with the violent conflict in the background, a resistance to easy interpretation, mythical or even mystical elements, a laconic style bordering on the surreal at times, the protagonist’s (unresolved) quest for meaning and identity, restrained but highly suggestive acting by Jordan’s favourite actor Stephen Rea (in his first major film role; he went on to appear in ten of Jordan’s films to date), and the central role played by music. The film was well received, if not a commercial success, and enabled Jordan to embark on his more ambitious next projects, the fairy-tale-cum-horror film The Company of Wolves (1984), after a story by Angela Carter, and the nostril “thriller” Mona Lisa (1986). These films were produced entirely in Britain with mainly British actors and clearly show Jordan’s stylistic and thematic versatility as well as highlighting additional trademark preoccupations: myth and storytelling, literary adaptation, psychology and (adolescent) sexuality, the family unit, the real vs. the fantastic, the criminal underworld, the theme of loss and bewilderment, and the structural element of unexpected plot twists. With the moderate financial and considerable critical success of these films Neil Jordan had made himself enough of a name to go to Hollywood and direct his next two films there: High Spirits (1988) and We’re No Angels (1989) were both comedies with much higher budgets and star actors (including Robert De Niro) but also much less creative control by Jordan. He resented the interference with the screenplay and the filmmaking process and returned to smaller-scale projects such as The Miracle (1991) and The Crying Game. When the latter became a surprise success in the US and earned Jordan an Oscar for his screenplay, he was tempted back to Hollywood to direct the $60m Anne Rice adaptation Interview with the Vampire (1994), starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. This time, he did retain creative control over the film. This was his final breakthrough as a commercially successful Hollywood director, grossing in excess of $200m worldwide. Since then, he has continued to make high-profile and expensive Hollywood films such as Michael Collins (starring Liam Neeson), The End of the Affair (1999, after Graham Greene, with Ralph Fiennes, Julianne Moore) or The Brave One (2007, Jodie Foster) alongside smaller-scale usually Irish-themed projects such as the two critically lauded Patrick McCabe adaptations The Butcher Boy and Breakfast on Pluto (2005), or his recent Ondine (2009).

With such a variety of themes, genres and production backgrounds, it is certainly not easy to generalise about Neil Jordan’s oeuvre; on the other hand, it is exactly this versatility and multiplicity which is indeed difficult to find in other contemporary filmakers. He is an Irish, British, European and Hollywood director; he is both an independent and stylistically innovative auteur and a commercial director of genre films; he has a preference for adapting literary texts and has written at least ten original screenplays; he has an interest in fantastic and surreal subjects as well as in historical and socio-political themes. Perhaps these dichotomies are precisely facets of Jordan’s Irishness, as has been suggested by Carole Zucker, among others: “The preoccupations that dominate Jordan’s work take much from Irish folklore, at base dealing with the polarities and contradictions within human nature that engender complexity of character.” (Zucker 2008: 3) This also demonstrates that a separation of Jordan’s work into an ‘Irish’ and a ‘Hollywood’ cycle or a ‘realistic/historical’ and a ‘fantastic’ one does not make too much sense, after all. Instead, it is more helpful to highlight the recurrent stylistic and thematic traits across his body of films, as outlined above. In addition to the aspects already mentioned, one
should emphasise his characteristic mixture of genres (including the horror and gangster movie as well as the (psycho)thriller), postmodern self-reflexivity and intertextuality, emphasis on grey zones and ambiguities, an interest in (self-)deception and illusion, Jordan's investment in symbols and parables, and the theme of impossible or at least heavily circumscribed love. In the last instance, Jordan's films are about what it means to be human, and the limits to which this can be expressed in words or rational thoughts.

Cinematic and cultural contexts

*Hollywood vs. Europe, independent vs. mainstream film*

As a wanderer between the worlds of independent European and mainstream Hollywood cinema, Neil Jordan highlights an enduring dichotomy that has characterised filmmaking and film criticism for the last century. By constantly bridging this chasm, and not just moving from one side to the other, he also draws attention to the artificiality and precarious nature of such a strict division. It is unquestionable that Hollywood, with its commercial focus, big studios and star system has dominated the global film industry at least since the 1920s, and continues to do so even after the financial problems and restructuring of many studios in the late twentieth century. In contrast, in many European countries, notably Germany, France and Italy, film is more typically seen as a cultural and sometimes national undertaking, and often linked to broader artistic movements such as realism, (post)modernism or expressionism. Britain and Ireland occupy a somewhat ambiguous role in that context, since by sharing a language with the USA they are both more immediately affected by Hollywood competition and at the same time at an advantage in marketing their own films for a global audience (as exemplified by the success of British "heritage" films since the 1980s).

It has to be said that this American-European opposition is a simplification, however. Cross-fertilisation and mutual influences have always existed between these two contexts. Not only did many British and European filmmakers and actors find their way to Hollywood from very early on (Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock perhaps being the most high-profile examples), but genres and artistic influences also crossed the Atlantic with ease. Similarly, the division between mainstream and independent film has become increasingly blurred in recent years. Neil Jordan's work exemplifies the "independent" ethos so far as he tries to maintain maximum creative control over his films and has a distinctive personal style and vision, makes "difficult" and complex films and has worked with and discovered many unknown or emerging actors, continues to make films in Europe and especially Ireland, and has profited from European (state) funding in many of his films. He is consistently contextualised in a European *auteur* tradition taking in Fellini, Bergman and Antonioni as well as New German Cinema (Fassbinder in particular), and his contemporaries Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman, among others. On the other hand, he has taken a commercial approach to filmmaking very early on and is one of the few European filmmakers that have made several multi-million-dollar grossing films and worked with a large number of Hollywood A-list actors. He has also cooperated with a number of big Hollywood studios including Warner Bros. and DreamWorks Pictures.

Irish national cinema

The link between media representation and national identity is closer than it might at first appear. Taking into account postmodern and postcolonial approaches to national identity as a purposeful collective construction on the one hand, and the growing role played by the media in modern Western societies on the other, it is not difficult to see why the visual media in particular have been instrumental in such "imagining" the Irish. For a small nation like Ireland, film can take on a much more significant role in identity construction and representation than elsewhere. However, until recently, there was virtually no Irish film industry, partly because of the hostile attitude of the Irish government and the Catholic Church until well into the post-war era. This meant that Ireland was predominantly represented on film from outside, mainly by British and American filmmakers. In this way, a number of clichés and stereotypical traditions of "the Irish" on film quickly developed. Particularly potent and long-lasting among these was a romanticised image of Ireland as a rural idyll with "pure" and resourceful if slightly primitive and eccentric people in it, exemplified by films such as *The Quiet Man* or *Ryan's Daughter*, but also much later films like *Circle of Friends* or *Waking Ned*, and even partly the more realistic early classic *Mam of Ann*.

If in these representations there was also sometimes an emphasis on the wild and rough nature of the Island, this is brought to the fore in the second dominant stereotype, that of atavistic and often inexplicable violence as somehow inherent to the Irish character, often treated with reference to the violent upheavals of Irish history, and the "Troubles" in the North in particular. Here, the genre of the "Troubles Film" as described below can serve as an example. These stereotypes have a long history going back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (cf. for example portrayals of the Irish in the satirical British periodical *Punch*).

It was only in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s that an indigenous Irish film industry started to develop. This was helped by the foundation of the Irish Film Board in 1980 and generally more film-friendly cultural and economic policies of the Irish Government, but probably even more by the enormous economic boom that the Republic experienced from about that time, which earned it the epithet of "Celtic tiger" (that lasted until the recent financial crisis). The breakthrough was symbolised by the Oscar successes of Jim Sheridan's *My Left Foot* and Jordan's *The Crying Game* in 1990 and 1993 respec-
tively. Since that time many more films have been produced in Ireland, both indigenous and foreign ones (including the big-budget productions *For and Away*, *Angela’s Ashes*, *Veronica Guerin* and the Scottish-themed *Braveheart*), and a critical discourse on Irish film developed through publications by Luke Gibbons, John Hill, Kevin Rockett, Martin McLoone, Ruth Barton and Lance Pettitt, among others. The emphasis in many of the films and critical writings was now clearly on a demythologised and anti-stereotypical representation of a modern Ireland that was very different from the age-old clichés.

Despite this generally healthy and hopeful development, several problems remain. Quite apart from the possibly catastrophic effects of the recent financial crisis on the Irish film industry, it remains a small national cinema which is wedged between the British and American film cultures, and dependent on the money from these industries as well as government funding. From a more theoretical point of view, a deconstructive and postcolonial approach to national identity also puts into question essentialist national notions that are frequently invoked in the discourse on (Irish) national cinema. Martin McLoone summarises this debate as follows:

Ireland’s small-scale indigenous film-making is a national cinema in the sense that it problematises the concept of Irishness itself. It is a cinema that inhabits a contradictory space between the local and the global and which negotiates conflicting definitions of the national. [...] Finally, in its relationship to an already existing tradition of representation, it is a cinema of inevitable intertextuality and internal reference. (McLoone 2006: 98-99)

More recently, therefore, the concept of “transnational cinema” has gained a new relevance for the discussion of small national cinemas like Ireland’s, but also Scotland’s and some Scandinavian countries’, emphasising precisely this provisional and negotiated nature of national representations on film in a necessarily globalised context (cf. Vitali, Willems 2006). These ideas clearly resonate in Neil Jordan’s films, above all in *The Crying Game*.

The Northern Irish conflict and the “Troubles film”

The ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland, often mistakenly reduced to a religious conflict between “Catholics” and “Protestants”, is the outcome of long-term historical developments in Anglo-Irish relations. In particular, the division of society into two distinct communities goes back to the so-called “Plantations” of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the influx of predominately Scottish Presbyterian settlers who went on to dominate this part of Ireland economically and culturally. This was the reason why the “six counties” did not want to become independent from Britain in the early twentieth century, which led to the Partition of Ireland in 1922 and the creation of Northern Ireland as part of the UK – the violent controversies about this development at the time are graphically depicted in Jordan’s *Michael Collins*.

The unionist regional government went on to establish an unfair and discriminatory rule in the Province, in which the Catholic community (that made up about 40% of the overall population) was disadvantaged with respect to political representation, work and housing opportunities, etc. This resulted in a two-class society, in which the two communities were almost totally segregated in everyday life. The conflict escalated into a violent (para) military fight through a series of events starting in the late 1960s (e.g. Bloody Sunday in 1972), including terrorist attacks from the Republican (Provisional) IRA and reprisals by the loyalist counterparts, the UDA and UVF, that were to claim 3,500 lives over the next thirty years. This phase of the conflict is euphemistically known as “the Troubles”. The British government sent troops to Northern Ireland to control the violence and assumed direct rule over the region in 1972. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that successful steps towards a de-escalation of the conflict were taken, including multilateral talks involving the various parties and groups in Northern Ireland as well as the British and Irish governments, and paramilitary ceasefires. This “peace process” has led in the long run to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the establishment of a power-sharing Assembly from 1999 (intermittently, reopened in 2007), in which even the more radical parties of both sides, Sinn Féin and DUP (who form the government at the time of writing) have managed to work together. Whether this really means the end of the conflict remains to be seen, however, especially since the segregation of the two communities continues virtually unchanged.

The media have played a central role in the Northern Irish conflict, since it was also clearly a propaganda war, in which both sides tried to represent their perspective on the events in the best possible light and suppress the others’. The British government and the unionist community were in control of the news media in Northern Ireland and used censorship to restrict access to them by e.g. Sinn Féin representatives. On the other hand, the nationalist community availed themselves of Irish and American media to make their voices heard, often to great effect (as during the Hunger Strike in 1981, which became a propaganda victory for the nationalists and the IRA). It is only logical, therefore, that the conflict should also be portrayed on film, even though once more from outside – Northern Ireland cannot really be said even today to have an indigenous film industry. The genre of “Troubles films” as described for example by John Hill (2006, esp. chapter 7) and Brian McIlroy (2001) came into its own in the 1970s and 80s but has several significant precursors, in particular Carol Reed’s *Odd Man Out* (1947). Recent key examples include *Cal, Four Days in July, Hidden Agenda, The Patriot Game, In the Name of the Father, Bloon Away, Nothing Personal, Some Mother’s Son, The Devil’s Own, The Beezer, Bloody Sunday, Omagh and Hunger*. This genre obviously owes a lot

1 The abbreviations stand for Irish Republican Army, Ulster Defence Association, and Ulster Volunteer Force respectively.
to the representational stereotypes of the Irish on film as described above, in particular the more violent and less romanticised variety. However, there are also particular characteristics which distinguish it: a generally dark, claustrophobic urban setting, mostly in Belfast (even though hardly ever filmed in situ for security reasons); a universal moral dimension tending towards fatalism; a strict division of the public (violent, political, male) and the private (peaceful, personal, female) sphere; generic influences of film noir and the gangster movie; the opposition of the “gentle” and doubtful IRA/paramilitary character to the psychopathic hardliner; a usually doomed cross-community love story; a certain “Troubles iconography” including the British army presence, roadblocks, “peace walls”, helicopters and armed vehicles, prison scenes and beatings, unionist and nationalist murals, street riots and shootings, and the priest figure; a vagueness about the political motives and historical background of the confrontations; and a focus on the nationalist community and neglect of the unionist side (strongly criticised by Mclroy 2001). The last two points, in particular, highlight the ideological dimension and the problems of this cinematic genre which have been analysed in the already extensive literature on the topic.

Since the peace process, however, a change has also been visible in cinematic depictions of the conflict. John Hill talks of a “ceasefire cinema” (Hill 2006: 196ff.) in this context, and highlights several new departures, including a more hopeful outlook (even happy endings); generic hybridity, intertextuality and postmodern pastiche (e.g. ironic play with Troubles signifiers); an emphasis on class and gender rather than politics or religion; use of the genres of comedy and romance; a depiction of Belfast as a “normal”, even consumerist modern city, and its actual use for shooting the films; and increasing reference to the European dimension. Examples for this new type of Troubles film would be Divorce Jack, With or Without You and Mad About Mondy. Even though the Troubles are only part of The Crying Game’s content, in my opinion it can be seen as a ceasefire film auent la lettre, while still bearing the imprint of the cinematic Troubles paradigm, as we will see below.

Interpretative approaches to the film

Synopsis

The Crying Game is a 110-minute feature film written and directed by Neil Jordan and falls into two main parts, of which the second is slightly longer. The first is mainly set in a farmhouse somewhere in Northern Ireland (although this is not specified), where a Black member of the British army, Jody (Forest Whitaker), is held hostage by the IRA, represented mainly by Fergus (Stephen Rea), Jude (Miranda Richardson) and their leader, Maguire (Adrian Dunbar). After a short interlude scene on the Monaghan Border, the second part is set in London, where Fergus meets Jody’s “girlfriend” Dil (Jaye David-
Jody tells him the fable of the scorpion and the frog, in which the frog agrees to carry the scorpion through a river, only to be stung by it in the middle of the passage, so that they both drown; the scorpion explains it cannot help it, because “it’s in my nature”. He shows Fergus a photo of his Black girlfriend and asks him to search her out in London should he be killed. When the IRA prisoner is not released, Maguire orders Fergus to shoot Jody. While Fergus is attempting to carry out the order, Jody manages to escape and is pursued by him but is ironically run over by a British armoured vehicle and dies. The IRA hideout is attacked and destroyed by the British army. Fergus escapes and asks an old friend to help him get to London. Once there, he searches out Dil and takes her to the Metro bar, as Jody told him to do. They slowly start getting to know each other, and he protects her from a violent ex-lover. After several meetings, they start making love and Fergus discovers that Dil is in fact a transvestite. He is initially shocked, throws up and leaves the flat, but later apologises and they remain close without sexual intimacy. Fergus now recognises the Metro as a transvestite bar, but he still returns there to see Dil. At this point, Jude (now changed into a tough-looking “business” woman) and Maguire reappear in London (they have survived the attack), and blackmail Fergus to help them assassinate a judge there; they use Dil as a lever to put pressure on him (by indirectly threatening her). Fergus has to agree and tries to protect Dil by cutting her hair, putting her in Judy’s cricket gear, and taking her to a hotel. She goes back to her flat, however, and gets drunk thinking that Fergus is attached to Jude. Fergus finds her there and tells her the truth about his involvement with Jody’s death but she is too drunk to react properly and they go to sleep. In the morning, Dil finds Fergus’s gun and ties him to the bed while he is sleeping, and then questions him about Jody’s death when he wakes up. Maguire and Jude get nervous when Fergus does not appear, and finally Maguire himself shoots the judge and is killed by the security men in the process. Jude flees and searches Fergus out in Dil’s flat, where she is confronted by Dil with Fergus’s gun. Dil shoots her several times while questioning her about her role in Judy’s death, finally killing her with a shot in the throat. Fergus is helpless to intervene being tied to the bed. Afterwards he urges Dil to leave the flat so he can take responsibility for the murder when the police arrive. The last scene shows Fergus in prison behind a glass wall, with Dil visiting him. They talk and joke rather lovingly; it is suggested the sentence is for over six years — Dil is counting the days. She asks why Fergus went to prison for her, and he answers “it’s in my nature” and retells the scorpion and frog fable, as we listen to “Stand by Your Man”.

Gender and (trans)sexual identities

The most obvious point of analysis in the film, despite its Troubles theme, is clearly its gender politics. It is introduced immediately by the initial song and the erotically charged scene on the fairground, and underlies the central twist of the film, which was also the most discussed element by critics and viewers, certainly helped by an ingenious Miramax marketing campaign in the US urging the audience not to reveal the “secret”. The emphasis on instable gender and sexual identities is woven into the film from the very start: ambiguous names like Jody and Jude, Fergus’s soft good looks and shoulder-length hair as well as his peculiar passivity for much of the film, the ambivalent attraction between Jody and Fergus, various reinventions and makeovers e.g. through haircuts (Fergus, Jude, Dil), the song lyrics, and the emphasis on performance. Indeed, on a second viewing of the film, various comments and statements on male and female “nature” throughout the film acquire a much more ambivalent meaning, and after the ‘discovery’ several double entendres comically emphasise this ambiguity. The point of all this is clearly to highlight the fluidity and constructedness of (gender) identity, its performative character, the possible confusions and in-between spaces. At the end of the film, Fergus and Dil seem to be (sort of) happy despite their differences, and the only “nature” that matters apparently is human nature or the nature of love.

However, the film has also been strongly criticised for its gender politics. For example, Jude’s role has been seen as the assertive (feminist?) woman — indeed, the only ‘real’ woman in the film — who is punished and silenced by a shot in the throat at the end, being excluded from the “homosocial bond” between Jody, Fergus and Dil (cf. e.g. Edge 1995). It is certainly true that her makeover during the film and the leadership role she takes on in the second part (in stark contrast to the first, where she is the sexy ‘bait’ and supplier of tea and sandwiches) are striking, and the similarity to other demonised women characters in contemporary films like Fatal Attraction is suggestive. However, this argument smackes of biological determinism, because Dil is not accepted as a woman simply because she is biologically a man; while the film is at pains to argue that in the end this might not matter. Taking this as given, it could be argued that in fact the gender roles represented by Fergus and Dil in the second part of the film are pretty traditional and conservative after all: he as her protector, buying her drinks and trying to keep her out of trouble, she as the loving and sexy companion bringing him vitamin pills to the prison to keep him healthy (Jordan: 103); moreover, she is also often (on the brink of) crying throughout the film. In this view, Fergus overcomes a crisis in his masculinity by finding somebody to protect and care for and therefore reinforces his male self-confidence. This argument has some persuasive force, I find, but is also slightly undermined by Fergus’s “feminine” traits and Dil’s agency in killing Jude. In any case, there is a connection here to the typical Troubles film tendency to displace the resolution of the film into the private rather than the public realm — the reasons for Fergus’s involvement with the IRA or even the context of his disciplining by the authorities are not explored further; it is on

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2 All references to the film in this essay are to the paginated PDF version of Neil Jordan’s screenplay listed in the bibliography; hereafter, I will give only the page numbers.
traditional representation of Blacks as linked to a heightened or exotic sexuality in both Jody and Dil. The fact that Jody is tempted by Judy fairly easily, as it seems, and the references to her genitals in the "urinating scene" with Fergus as well as an earlier scene in the fairground (where Jude is holding his hand while he is urinating in a toilet tent), appear to reinforce this. With Dil, too, there is a sense of the audience's (or camera's) voyeuristic gaze when she is performing the song "The Crying Game" in the Metro, for example, but above all when we see a close-up of her penis in the "discovery" scene (while we never really see any nude shot of Fergus). This can be countered by the central importance of this revelation and the heightened "shock effect" for the audience, of course, but it remains a conspicuous decision by Jordan. Moreover, in Monty Lisa, too, the prostitute at the centre of the film is Black. In his defense, one could maintain that this kind of gaze and stereotyping is in fact precisely the target of the film's "message" and therefore undermined at every turn. The peculiar tendency of critics to almost obsessively dwell on representations of ethnic characters in film is also in itself suspect and can be construed to exhibit stereotypical thinking on their part.

Overall, the film clearly opens many avenues for lively debate and argument in this field, which can fruitfully be pursued in a classroom situation. Indeed, it has been argued that it produces an excess of possible significations, which it cannot ultimately contain - while this may be true, I do not think that it is necessarily a disadvantage; it is certainly in keeping with many of Neil Jordan's other films.

Politics and national identities

With the abduction scene at the start and the introduction of the IRA group only minutes into the film, Neil Jordan clearly evokes the discourse on the Northern Irish conflict and Anglo-Irish relations more generally. At the time the film was released, the peace process had not really properly begun. Indeed, almost exactly at that moment, the IRA recommenced its bombing campaign on the British mainland, which also influenced the reception of the film (being attacked by some for siding with the IRA). It stands to reason, however, that the emphasis on the construction and performativity of identities that I have discussed so far with reference to gender and sexuality must inevitably reflect back on the political and national identities represented in the film. From this perspective, Fergus's doubts and confusion extend to his political convictions and nationalist beliefs, too, and therefore help to deconstruct these. This is made explicit early on in the juxtaposition of his attitude to Jody and the hardline approach of both Maguire and Judy - almost a cliché in the Troubles film genre, as we have seen. When Jody asks him what he believes in, he says: "That you guys shouldn't be here." (24) This is about as far as his political views are articulated in the film, and a similar sentiment is expressed towards the end of the film when he says to a photograph of Jody in Dil's flat:

³ Significantly, even though Ireland has had female presidents for twenty years between 1990 and 2011 (Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese), abortion remains illegal in the Republic.

Jimmy/Fergus caressing Dil shortly before the "revelation". Observe the gaze, haircuts, and Jody's cricket clothes.

Other elements worth considering here include national and ethnic gender stereotypes. In an Irish context, even though most of the stereotypes about resistance, drinking and violence are predominantly male, and the Catholic and more generally nationalist attitude to gender roles could be called conservative or even repressive, there is also a peculiar link between woman and national identity. While the nurturing and long-suffering 'Mother Ireland' is perhaps the most potent myth (together with the figure of Kathleen ni Houlihan), there is also a tradition of representing Irish women as wild, even violent figures. In fact, women did play an active, if underrepresented part in organisations like the IRA, e.g. during the Hunger Strike. In this context, the representation of Jude (even if played by an English actress) takes on an additional resonance. Similarly, it is no coincidence that both Jody and Dil are Black characters, and is it a deliberate choice by Jordan and opens the film to criticism of stereotyping. As David Lloyd has pointed out, it is highly unlikely that a British soldier would be found on his own in Northern Ireland in any situation, and much more so that he would be Black; Jude's comment that Northern Ireland is "the only place in the world they call you nigger to your face" (16) is also scarcely credible. More importantly in our context, there are shades of the
"You should have stayed home." (102). However, when it comes to the execution order, he interrupts Maguire’s official statement to Jody (‘I wish to say on behalf of the Irish Republican Army’ – 30) in uncharacteristically rude manner, and is of course unable to carry out the order in the end. When Jody catches up with him again in London, he says “No way, Jude. I’m out.” (71) and has to be blackmailed into compliance – when she leaves, she says “Keep the faith” (72), thus hinting that the involvement in the conflict is a matter of belief rather than historical or political inevitability. Finally, of course, he does not carry out the assassination, though once again not of his own accord. This essentially undermines the ideology of (political) violence, be it the IRA’s or the British army’s – after all, it is the latter who (inadvertently) kills Jody, and we are not led to sympathise with the assassinated judge at the end, for example. This can hardly be interpreted as IRA propaganda, even though a rather abstract and melancholic nationalist resentment at the presence of the British in (Northern) Ireland is certainly felt. More problematic is the complete lack of historical or political background to the actions of the involved parties in the film, so that it boils down to purely personal decisions and sentiments: Jody’s reply to Fergus’s above-quoted “belief” is: “It’s as simple as that?” “Yes,” says Fergus (24). But of course it is not (perhaps this is exactly what Jordan wants the viewer to think at this moment?). This lack of political and historical context opens the film to similar criticisms as those aimed at other Troubles films: it somehow elides the very real and substantial reasons and painstakingly argued positions of the conflict and thus paints a picture of irrational violence that comes perilously close to old stereotypes of the Irish.

Linked to this in a more strictly political and Troubles-related debate that the film so controversially addresses, there is a more general dimension of national identities and their construction underlying it. In a telling scene where Fergus first meets Dil while having his hair cut by her (she is a hairdresser), she asks whether he is American and then settles on Scottish, on behalf of his accent, which he doesn’t deny. This attribution is repeated in the next scene in the Metro bar, where Fergus also has to give a name – he chooses Jimmy. Until the very end of the film Dil does not know Fergus’s real name and nationality, and even when she does she keeps calling him Jimmy. The point here clearly is to highlight the relative insignificance of national identities when it comes to personal relationships (i.e. what really matters, in the logic of the film), and to stress its “linguistic” nature. Jimmy is a much more generic name than Fergus, which is clearly Irish, being of Gaelic origin (and incidentally referring to masculinity and an ancient warrior king). This theme of names and their (na-

tional) connotations runs through the film, in fact. Already in the Jody/Fergus scenes, Jody uses the generic name for Irishmen, Paddy, until Fergus discloses his real name, and the people on the building site also call him Pat. In both cases, it becomes clear, since it is clearly linked to pejorative stereotypes of the Irish. On the building site, the owner of the house replies: “Jim, Pat, Mick, what the fuck. Long as you remember you’re not at Lords.” (41) Again, this seems to stress the exchangeability of names (and national identities?) but simultaneously introduces the obviously important class issue. Though the reference to “Lords” here is to the famous Lord’s Cricket Ground in London (because Fergus has just been imitating a batsman with his hammer), the class reference is clearly implied by the context. This is also, of course, an important element both in the Northern Irish conflict (the Catholic or nationalist community, the predominantly working class) and the Anglo-Irish conflict more generally (with the British colonisers as the dominant class and the Irish as the suppressed section of the population; cf. e.g. the so-called Protestant Ascendancy since the 17th century). That this is deliberately implied here is made clear by an earlier conversation on cricket between Jody and Fergus, in which the former contrasts the game’s class connotations in England to his Antiguan home country (“Toffs’ game there. But not at home.” 16). Jody’s interpretation seems to express herself (he was a “shirt-hat bowler”, in his own words; ibid.) and the constant references to the game throughout the film take on a broader significance here. Thus, it is certainly no coincidence that the first words in the film are Jody’s “That’s cricket, hon.” (1) It is the English national game par excellence, it symbolises gentlemanliness and fair play, but it has also been one of the hugely successful exports to the Empire in the nineteenth century. As such, it symbolises an essentialised Englishness at the same time as introducing its multicultural complication. This is underlined by the recurrent dream vision of Jody in cricket gear, usually smirking at the camera in a sarcastic way, and in his dressing Dil in cricket clothes towards the end. One is reminded of Homi Bhabha’s notion of (post)colonial “mimicry” here, in which the colonised imitate the imperial culture but thereby also subtly undermine it. Incidentally, this may have motivated Jordan’s choice of Black actors for the roles of Jody and Dil. This persistent questioning of the stability of national identities is therefore already implied by the casting choices, as I have indicated. Not only is the Antiguan-British Jody played by the American actor Forest Whitaker, and the Irish Jude by English actress Miranda Richardson, but among the Northern Irish actors Stephen Rea is also cast against type in so far as he is originally from a Protestant background (even though he later married one of the female IRA hunger strikers, and now lives in Dublin). It is not unusual for a Troubles film to have British or American actors play the (Northern) Irish characters (on the contrary, it is almost the norm), but in this case the deconstruction of nationality seems clearly deliberate. It is against this background that we have to understand the debate about Neil Jordan and his
films’ “Irishness” that is among the key interests in the literature on this director.

Genre and style

From Neil Jordan’s first feature onwards, his conspicuous interest in diverse film genres and their limits has been among his trademarks. His first four films were all in different genres (thriller, horror, gangster film, comedy) while also usually undermining the genre conventions to a certain extent. At the same time, there is a sense of authorial control and complexity in his work, where the structure, setting, casting, mise-en-scène, plot, themes, dialogue, choice of music etc. all combine to make a multi-layered yet consistent whole that is usually more than the sum of its parts. In this section, I will focus on the more cinematic elements of the film, including genre (esp. Troubles film), style and production.

Apart from using various other genres, *The Crying Game* is certainly no stereotypical Troubles film, and takes the Northern Irish conflict as a background from which to explore broader concerns, as we have seen. This is in line with Jordan’s other treatments of this topic in *Angel and Breakfast on Pluto* (the latter again with a transsexual protagonist). In how far it can be said to belong to a new type of “ceasefire cinema”, as John Hill (2006) describes it, is however controversial. There are several elements that can be said to fit the Troubles film paradigm. Firstly, the rather strict division of the public and the private already mentioned, and the lack of historical and political explanation. In this context, the narrative of the “good” terrorist who is redeemed by a loving woman should be emphasised. There is also quite a lot of Troubles iconography: the abduction at gunpoint, the attempted execution, armoured vehicles and the army raid, the pressure put on IRA members to stay loyal, the assassination and the shooting at the end. The taking of a hostage is not a typical element of the Troubles film because it has never really been practised by either the IRA or the other parties in the conflict (another of Lloyd’s criticisms of the film’s improbabilities). However, there is a literary tradition of portraying such a scenario which Jordan deliberately taps into (being a writer as well as a director): Frank O’Connor’s 1931 short story “Guests of the Nation”, in which two British soldiers are taken hostage by the IRA during the War of Independence, and Brendan Behan’s 1959 play *The Hostage*, which in addition introduces a gay theme and also has the prisoner accidentally killed. In addition, there is also a direct reference to the prototypical Troubles film, Carol Reed’s *Odd Man Out*, when Fergus quotes the biblical words “When I was a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man I put away childish things...” (29), just as Johnny does in Reed’s film. With this representational tradition in the background, it is understandable that John Hill (2006), for one, hesitates to see the film as a new departure. In this view, the many ambiguities and contradictions could be interpreted as symbolising the unsolvable conflict in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, however, I see the constant negotiation and undermining of fixed categories of identity as being fundamentally opposed to the stark dichotomies of the conflict, and *The Crying Game* therefore as a post-Troubles film of sorts.

Structurally and stylistically, the film also repays closer analysis. Apart from the surprise twist, the most striking element is perhaps the way in which the Irish and London parts interrelate and mirror each other. Jordan has remarked that he deliberately constructed the two parts as mirror images of each other. This can be seen in the character constellations (Jody-Fergus vs. Fergus-Dil – cf. also the presence of the absent character in the triangle as photographs in both parts, the inverted roles of Maguire and Judy); the mirroring of climactic events such as the British army attack and the assassination of the judge, the killing of Jody and Judie, the two “penis scenes”; the repetition of the scorpion/frog fable; the use of songs at the beginning and end of the film; as well as more subtle links such as the cricket references, mentioning of bars and drinks, the glasshouse/prison glass wall parallel etc. On the other hand, these two parts are also contrasted stylistically by camera work (rather static vs. more mobile), lighting (mostly light and sunny vs. night-time shots and partly raining), setting (exteriors, farmhouse vs. interiors, cityscape). These various mirrorings can be interpreted as emphasising the artificiality of the narrative and therefore drawing attention to its own construction in the same way as it deconstructs essentialised concepts of identity. On a more speculative and perhaps mythical note, one could argue that it represents life’s eternal return and circularity, the idea that nothing ever really changes. For all the (superficial?) differences in gender, class, political belief and ethnicity, human nature remains the same, both in a negative (violence, repression, domination) and a positive (desire, friendship, love) sense. This is also where the scorpion/frog fable with its catchphrase “it’s in my nature” becomes suggestive and can thus be read in a positive or negative way: love and interpersonal relationships will always triumph over socially and politically constructed divisions; and/or political/social divisions, hatred, jealousy and violence will always compromise the personal utopias of people/lovers. It is to the credit of Jordan’s art as screenwriter and director that this delicate and bittersweet ambivalence is upheld at the end.

Sample analysis: two conversations between Fergus and Dil

With this film, it is certainly not easy to single out any one scene for analysis, simply because it creates meaning through its integrity rather than separately in individual scenes. Nevertheless, I will attempt to highlight some important aspects through a discussion of two scenes from the London section, both of
which contain conversations between Dil and Fergus (one pre-“discovery”, the other afterwards).  

THE JUKEBOX  
A hand presses a button. The needle selects a disk. A song by Dave Barry, “The Crying Game.”  

AT THE BAR  
Fergus looks up. Close-up of Dil’s hand, as music begins, making movements to the music. We see Dil, standing on a stage, swaying slightly. She seems a little drunk. She moves to the song. She smiles the words so perfectly and the voice on the song is so feminine that there is no way of knowing who is doing the singing. She does all sorts of strange movements, as if she is drawing moonbeams with her hands. The crowd seems to know this act. They cheer, whether out of approval or derision we can’t be sure. Fergus watching. Dil singing, noticing him. She comes to the end of the song. The crowd cheers. Fergus, watching her make her way through the crowded bar, toward him.  


DIL: So tell me.  

Fergus says nothing. He shrugs.  

DIL: Everybody wants something. — Fergus: Not me. — Not you. How quaint. How old-fashioned and quaint. Isn’t it, Col?  

Col shrugs.  

DIL: You old-fashioned? — Fergus: Must be. (42-44)  

EXT. HAIR SALON — EVENING  
Fergus, outside the hair salon. Dil, inside, is throwing off her snark and walking toward him. All the girls are smiling. Fergus looks from Dil to the girls as they approach.  

Fergus: Do they know? — Dil: Know what, honey? — Know what I didn’t know. And don’t call me that. — Can’t help it, Jimmy. A girl has her feelings. — Things is, Dil you’re not a girl. — Details, baby, details. — So they do know. — All right, they do. She takes his arm as they walk off.  

Fergus: Don’t. — Dil: Sorry. — I should have known, shouldn’t I? — Probably. — Kind of wish I didn’t. — You can always pretend. — That’s true... Your soldier knew, didn’t he? — Absolutely. — Won’t be quite the same though, will it? — Are you pretending yet? — I’m working on it.  

Fergus hears a car following them, and turns around to look.  


They reach her door. The car stops.

5 There are some minor discrepancies between the script and the actual film, it should be said. Also, I have indicated a change of speaker by a hyphen rather than a line break in most places here, to save space. Col is the name of the barkeeper (played by Jim Broadbent), who knows Dil well.

Neil Jordan, The Crying Game  

Fergus: Don’t ask me in. — Dil: Please, Jimmy. — No, can’t pretend that much. — I miss you, Jimmy. — Should have stayed a girl. — Don’t be cruel. — Okay. Be a good girl and go inside. — Only if you kiss me. — Fergus kisses her. He looks at her open lips as if in disbelief at himself.  

Fergus: Happy now? — Dil: Delirious.  

She goes inside. (67-69)  

Multi-layered meanings in both dialogue and mise-en-scene: observe the frame and composition, the gazes and the mirror  

The first scene is one of the first times that Fergus and Dil meet (after the hairdresser scene and an earlier bar scene). It is also, significantly, the first time we hear the title song. It becomes clear in the course of the film that this song was partly selected for its androgynous vocals; accordingly, it is sung first by a woman (Kate Robbins), then by the original 1960s singer, Dave Barry, and finally by the openly gay singer Boy George, thus underlining the gender ambiguity. This general ambivalence and in-between-ness is clearly stressed by Jordan’s stage directions, with Dil “seeming” to be drunk, our not knowing whether she really sings, her “strange movements” (whatever “drawing moonbeams” is meant to be), and the undecided response of the audience. In the film, Dil wears a glamorous, tight-fitting and glittering dress that emphasises the slightly over-the-top femininity which is so typical of her. It is only fitting that this image of Dil has become iconic for the film, being reproduced on various posters, CD and DVD covers. The lyrics of the song are full of ambivalent implications for the whole of the film (consider, for example, the line “and if [the moon] knows, maybe he’ll explain”), as is the nicely oxymoronic title. The ensuing conversation continues an interesting element of the earlier bar scenes, Dil’s indirectly addressing Fergus through Col. This creates a slightly surreal atmosphere but can also be quite funny and, in later scenes, poignant. Significantly, it highlights the mediating elements in interpersonal commun
cation and the potential for misunderstandings, thus further complicating the "realism" of the scene, and of course prefiguring the fundamental misunderstanding on Fergus's part. It also throws into relief his curious passivity and undeciderness (consider the final "Must be..."). His hesitancy to even talk. At this moment, Fergus is in a transitional state, the future seems uncertain. The mise-en-scène in the bar scenes stresses this impression by its use of the bar counter and pillars as separation and several mirrors multiplying and refracting the characters and images. The topic of the conversation (the qualities of a man, persistence, being old-fashioned and "quiet", (not wanting something) acquires various layers of meaning, both up to this point of the film and beyond. This is one of the (literary?) aspects of the film that can only be fully appreciated through repeated viewing.

The second conversation is both similar to the first in its equivocation and bittersweet humour and very different in Fergus's attitude towards Dil, which is much more assured (even confrontational) while also clearly hurt and reproachful, and yet somehow gentle and kind. This captures the tone of the post-"discovery" part quite well and is proof of Jordan's screenwriting abilities. The way the conversation is not allowed to become recriminatory but still shows the hurt feelings of Fergus and Dil, and how it reveals (rather than states) the continuing attraction between the two characters is done masterfully. For example, Dil's calling Fergus "honey", "baby" or "darling" and his meek protest at this (and her taking his arm) are nice touches, and also the ironic "be a good girl" or Dil's "delirious" at the end clearly show Jordan's literary sensibility at work. The theme of "knowing" and "pretending" is at the heart of this scene and one of the key topics of the film: even though Fergus is clearly "repeatable" in his insistence on knowing, what it is he now knows is not immediately spelt out but again circumscribed, and when he says it ("you're not a girl"), it is countered by Dil's ironical "Details, baby, details". He goes on to wish he didn't know, and Dil suggests he might pretend, on which he is then "working", with some success, as it seems (consider "as if in disbelief at himself"). As in many of his other films, Neil Jordan is here examining the fine line between reality and make-believe, between actuality and what merely "seems" real. The suggestion is that what we imagine to be can become as real as anything; indeed that in the realm of identities, most of what we take as real is in fact imagination anyway. This meditation can also be read as a meta-cinematic comment on the possibilities of the film medium, and the nature of "realistic" representation. On the other hand, it is also one of the recurring themes in literature, and in Irish literature and mythology in particular (perhaps even part of a "Celtic" sensibility). Apart from this theme, the scene is interesting for the typical understated but highly suggestive acting (there is little in the script to tell the actors what to do here), and the way in which the further developments are foreshadowed in the menacing car (which contains Jude and Maguire, of course, and not Dil's ex-lover Dave).

Didactic approaches to the film

The Crying Game lends itself to teaching in the classroom at both advanced secondary and university level because it raises controversial issues that are of interest to adolescents and young adults, it can serve as a key example of recent Irish and British cinema, and contains references to contemporary political and cultural issues such as the Northern Irish conflict. As such, it can be used to further intercultural understanding as well as analytical abilities in dealing with complex English-language texts and films. Students' everyday familiarity with the film medium (as opposed, for example, to plays or poetry) is certainly an advantage; however, it can also be a challenge to get students interested in such a comparatively 'old' and 'difficult' film, and to make them pay attention to aspects other than the mere action or plot — this should not be underestimated, in my experience. It is up to the teacher to decide whether he or she wants to use the film on its own, or in the context of other films/texts, such as Neil Jordan's oeuvre, other Troubles films (and perhaps novels, plays etc.), films on queer/gay topics, Irish films in general, other "independent" or "auteur" movies etc.

Taking the central "surprise" in the film as our clue, the first approach could be to discuss the gender issues and more generally the complication of straightforward identities. This is certainly an attractive issue for young adults who are also in an in-between phase to some extent, even though it might take some caution and preparation to make them talk about it. As a starter one could collect (stereo)typical male and female images from everyday culture (such as the press, TV, internet or advertising). What are the markers for femininity and masculinity respectively? Are there typical contexts/surroundings in which the different sexes are portrayed? Do students see a problem with these representations? Are there also ambiguous or androgynous characters portrayed? What about (homo)sexuality? From this, a list of gender stereotypes could be developed, then discuss its problems and constructed nature, possible alternatives, the connection with the students' own experience/identities etc. Such a discussion would sensitize the students for the cultural and ideological underpinnings of gender and sexuality in society and open the way for the analysis of the film and the introduction of more theoretical views on this topic, e.g. by feminist or queer critics. With regard to the film text itself, the following questions and activities could be helpful:

1. How would you describe Dil's (and also Jody's and Fergus's) gender and sexual identity? What in the film makes you think so?
2. Did you see the surprise revelation coming? Why/not?
3. In how far does the film take a "postmodern" or deconstructive view of (gender) identity? Do you personally subscribe to this approach?
4. Why have critics accused the film of conservatism and even misogyny? Do you agree?
5. Is there a link between gender and rational/political issues in the film?
6. Can you imagine being of a different gender? Would that essentially change who you are?

As a second possible approach, we can discuss the film in the context of the Northern Irish conflict and the "Troubles film" paradigm. It is essential that some background on the conflict and its development is given, including the historical context (not only the Troubles but also the broader Anglo-Irish dimension), the main players involved, the recent peace process, and the reasons for the continuing problems. In particular, it needs to be emphasised that the conflict is not one-dimensional (e.g. a religious problem) but has several interlocking facets and levels (nationality, ethnicity, class, religion, gender etc.), all of which have to be taken into account. Also, students should be alerted to the fact that many texts about the conflict (including films) take themselves a biased or ideologically influenced stance – one could even debate whether there is a "neutral" position in this context. A good way to start the discussion would be to develop a mind-map of students' knowledge and preconceptions about the conflict, follow this up with some factual input (timelines, list of various organisations, representations from the news media, political murals etc. – one of the best and most easily available sources is the CAIN website), and then debate the various possible positions and arguments, their motivations and limits. It will become apparent in the course of the discussion that these positions are usually represented through the media, which leads over to the discussion of the conflict as represented in film. Here, the development of the "Troubles film" as outlined above should be discussed with the help of examples, if possible, and The Crying Game situated within the genre. However, it is certainly significant to stress that the genre itself is an academic construction and that this topic is only one dimension of the film.

1. Would you say that the Northern Irish conflict is essentially about religious, class, national or ethnic identity?
2. What is the general significance of the media for the conflict, and where do you see key problems in this sphere? What about the film medium in particular?
3. Which elements of the "Troubles film" genre does The Crying Game exhibit? Is it very different? Is there a political bias in the film?
4. Comment on the meaning of the title of the film. What role does the music play?
5. Compare The Crying Game to other representations of the Troubles, such as In the Name of the Father or Bloody Sunday.

Finally, the film can be approached as part of several cinematic genres and contexts (apart from the Troubles films): as a "queer" or transgender film, as an Irish (or British, or European) film, as an independent or auteur film, as an Oscar-winning film, as a Neil Jordan film. Most of these categories draw the attention away from the themes and content of the film and focus on the stylistic and cinematic contexts instead. Most obviously, one could discuss the role of the film within Jordan's œuvre, both as a turning point for his career and as one of his four Northern-Ireland-themed films (Breakfast on Pluto, in particular, invites comparison). This could involve drawing up key characteristics of Jordan's films, such as personal style and recurrent themes, and highlighting his special connection with Hollywood (ideally, by watching several of his films). This in turn may help to raise the question of independent vs. mainstream cinema, and the general significance of auteur directors for contemporary film. In the context of Irish national cinema, it is useful to stress Jordan's importance and simultaneous marginality (since so many of his films have no Irish connections), for which The Crying Game is a prototypical example. Students could be encouraged to think of stereotypes about the Irish and to what extent they are influenced by films (such as Angela's Ashes, perhaps), to then go on to discuss their presence (or absence) in this film. This could fruitfully be contextualised by a comparison with students' own national or regional background and its representation in the media. For a German group, it would be interesting to discuss representations of Germans in world cinema (especially the Nazi period, obviously), or the cinematic afterlife of the GDR. This already implicates the discussion in the European context, which can then be used to debate the significance of national cinemas generally, and the existence (or not) of a specific European film culture.

1. What do you understand by an "auteur" filmmaker (themes, style, and production context)? Is Neil Jordan such a director?
2. Do you know any other "queer" or gay films? How do they compare to The Crying Game?
3. Is there an Irish national cinema? If so, what is Jordan's role within it? Is The Crying Game an Irish or a British film?
4. Is there a national film industry in your own country? How important is it for the representation of regional/national identity?
5. Do you see Hollywood and the American film industry as a threat or an opportunity for European film cultures?

Bibliography

Film


Literature


Laurenz Volkmann

Steve Jacobs, Disgrace (2008)

Teaching Disgrace: a problematic project?

Disgrace, Australian J.M. Coetzee’s 1999 fictional farewell to the country of his birth, is not an easy offering. Its protagonist, David Lurie, professionally disenchanted academic at Cape Town University and aging would-be Casanova, is not exactly what one might call a very amiable character. Right from the beginning, he comes across as a conceited, delusional professor of English literature who finds pompous excuses for his unequal affair with an inexperienced coloured student. Then he stubbornly refuses to accept his guilt, taking shield under the halo of a victim of political correctness. Stoically accepting his ensuing dismissal from office – yet stubbornly refusing to accept his guilt – he relocates to his daughter’s remote farm-house, where he commences to lick his wounds, casting himself in the comfortable role of a victim of political correctness. There he finds himself unable to defend his daughter Lucy against a vicious sexual attack by a gang of local black youths, is temporarily disfigured and has his burned scalp wrapped in white bandages. He insists on his unwillingness to accept his daughter’s intention to give birth to the violently conceived inter-racial child. Passing through several phases of humiliation, the former philanderer in the end finds his occupation as a “dog man”, a helper at an animal farm who puts unwanted dogs to the incinerator. David Lurie is cast in the role of a classical anti-hero, a struggling white middle-class academic male endeavouring to make sense of his life in a post-Apartheid South Africa permeated by unresolved racial tensions and strife.

Not only does the narrative feature an unlovable protagonist; moreover, it also employs an intentional imbalance when the genre of campus narrative (“professor seduces/capsets student”), set in clean, well-lighted university buildings and the affluent decorated abode of Professor Lurie, suddenly changes to a completely different setting. It is in the remote and barren environment, far removed from the urban scenery, that the main plot evolves, and what begins as a peaceful father-daughter reunion abruptly changes to a parable on the state of race relations in post-apartheid South Africa.

In spite of its well-manicured prose, elegant style and narrative terseness J.M. Coetzee’s Booker Prize-winning novel Disgrace (1999) does not make a for effortless reading: A hero with whom readers will struggle to empathizing with, a racially charged violent incident, various sub-themes such as the role of music in the protagonist’s worldview and his obsession with Byronic desire, or the issue of animal rights – the recalcitrant multidimensional quality of the text has often been hushed over by the critics’ overall ten-