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Sights of Extraction: Ireland's Rural Ecologies and the Legacy of Colonialism On Screen

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

Introduction

In *The Three Ecologies* (1989) Félix Guattari presented a unique and groundbreaking synthesis of ideas as a response to what was, at that time an already serious global ecological crisis. Guattari argues for a co-constitutional response to the ecological crisis. The three ecologies he refers to in the book's title are mental, social and environmental. Guattari posits that any response to an ecological crisis (specifically the ecosophical response he proposes) must consider the intersection of these three interdependent ecologies to achieve radical and meaningful change in society, culture and environmental care. He argues that the greatest obstacle to this co-constitution is capitalism which he recognises as "the motor of [the] generalized impoverishment of the biosphere" (2000, 4). This generalised impoverishment extends beyond the material destruction of global ecologies into the culture itself. Guattari argues that:

> Integrated World Capitalism (IWC), tends increasingly to decentre its sites of power, moving away from structures producing goods and services towards structures producing signs, syntax and - in particular, through the control which it exercises over the media. (2000, 47)

Guattari highlights the manipulation of society and individuals by a capitalist system, through the repression of "singularities" (2000, 50) through media. We might read this repression of singularities by a capitalist system as an effort to transform people from individuals (which encompasses the mental and social ecologies composed of the "worlds of childhood, love, art, as well as everything associated with anxiety, madness, pain, death, or a feeling of being lost in the Cosmos" (Guattari 2000, 50)) into consumers. Just as environmental ecologies

become a product for consumption. Guattari argues that now "more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture" (2000, 48) and as such it is not only the raw materials of environmental ecologies which are consumed but the complex interplay of associations and ideas which nature calls to mind which can be exploited by the capitalist system.

In the final lines of *The Three Ecologies* Guattari calls for a co-constitutional response to the ecological crisis which undermines this suppression of singularity by global capitalist systems. He emphasises his belief that

> subjectivity is able to install itself simultaneously in the realms of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual. The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquests in other domains - the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most minuscule level. (2000, 69)

Considering Guattari's assertion at a distance of nearly forty years, in which the global ecological crisis which so animated Guattari has only worsened, but the reach

and salience of capitalist structures "producing signs [and] syntax" has increased exponentially. It is imperative that we condor the meaning systems of our contemporary culture, as within them is the key to galvanising humanity in tackling this critical threat. Guattari's writings speak to the impossibility of tackling the global ecological crisis without a sustained and critical engagement with media. This is all the more relevant when we consider the limited reach of Guattari's ideas. *The Three Ecologies* is a text one is unlikely to encounter outside of ecosophical discourse. However media is ubiquitous and its reach is exponential, it has the potential to serve as a potent intervention in the global environmental crisis or to accelerate our journey towards total environmental collapse.

It is useful to briefly consider the scope of political action aimed at curbing ecological collapse over the past three decades. In 1990 the Rio Earth Summit took place. In 1993 the Convention on Biological Diversity was ratified. 1997 saw the signing of the Kyoto Protocol. The Paris Agreement came into force in 2016. These global ecological safeguarding agreements brought forward since *The Three Ecologies* was first published in 1989 have failed to effectively prevent our global ecological crisis. It is past time to consider the ecosophical approach which Guattari argues for, it is now an imperative. There can be no meaningful progress towards ecosocial justice without a co-constitutive approach which considers how society's perception of nature is shaped and manipulated by capitalist systems. We cannot hope to prevent further ecological destruction and the social and cultural trauma that this engenders without looking to the media and its profound and undeniable impact. Our only hope of preventing further ecological disaster is an examination and

complete transformation of our collective ideological and creative relationship to ecologies.

Guattari's call for an ecosophical approach has been largely unheeded. The capitalist system which he identifies as the central threat to social and environmental justice have now become so enmeshed with global politics and culture and so effective in stymying positive environmental action that we have now reached a point of international crisis. These capitalist systems are greatly empowered by neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

Writing on these systems in 1990, Frederic Jameson argues that the postmodern relationship to nature is drastically removed from a pre- or even early- industrial relationship to nature. He describes the postmodern moment as "a radical eclipse of Nature itself" (1990, 35), where the ideas of earlier philosophical thought are "irredeemably and irrevocably destroyed by late capital, by the green revolution, by neocolonialism and the megalopolis" (36). Jameson states that "the vision of a world capitalist system [is] fundamentally distinct from the older imperialism, which was little more than a rivalry between the various colonial powers" (xix). For Jameson, the global competition for resources (in the form of human lives, territory, and natural resources) which dominated the world in the modern era has been replaced by a far more insidious war, which does not necessitate the wide-scale theft of land or destruction of life (though these can and do still occur under the new global regime) but rather, a mass homogenisation of ideas, which facilitates the "eclipse of Nature itself". The postmodern era is defined not by warring colonial

powers and rebelling colonised peoples, but by a war of ideas, recalling the suppression of singularity highlighted by Guattari in *The Three Ecologies*.

Neocolonialism is central to this war of ideas. In Post-War Europe former colonial systems began to collapse and colonising nations were forced to cede political control to the states they had formerly subjugated. This political autonomy was supplanted almost from the outset however by the intervention of these former colonisers in the mechanisms of state which supported the newly liberated countries, who continued to exploit their former colonies under the guise of aid or diplomacy. This same technique was subsequently adopted by capitalist entities and multinational corporations who exploit the resources of a given state to generate profit under the pretence of bringing prosperity and investment to that state.

The term neocolonialism first appears in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964), where Sartre describes the nuances involved in colonial subjugation, notably that it is not just a matter of military force on the part of the coloniser, but also economic systems as well as systems of thought and culture. Sartre states that the coloniser keeps the colonised in "ignorance by force" (21) highlighting the degree to which a decolonisation of the mind, is essential to freedom from colonial control. By maintaining ignorance, the coloniser maintains the system. This would be explored further by Kwamé Nkrumah in *Neocolonialism* (1965) where he states that the coloniser attempts to prevent the "expansion of national media of information so as itself to capture the market-place of ideas" (194). This is enacted in addition to "breaking up former large united colonial territories into a number of small non-viable States which are incapable of independent development

and must rely upon the former imperial power for defence and even internal security" (7). In the intervening decades since Nkrumah's work, definitions of neocolonialism have expanded to place the domination of ideas and culture at the centre of the discourse. In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that the apparatus of "economic and political dependence of […] African neo-colonial bourgeoisie [is] spread by a corpus of state intellectuals" (2) forwarding understanding of neocolonialism as a means of political or economic domination facilitated by culture and ideas. Hardt and Negri would go on to posit in *Empire* (2000) that "Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very social life it governs. Empire thus ultimately creates the world it inhabits" (xiv). Hardt and Negri highlight the extent to which the cultural and social systems of neo-colonial regimes continually perpetuate and reinvigorate the regime.

Since the term first entered discourse, 'neocolonialism' has come to encompass not just mechanisms of third-party economic or military control in a given state but also systems of cultural and ideological suppression. This suppression is not adjunct to the third party's mission of extractivist exploitation but integral to the success of a neocolonial enterprise.

Kwamé Nkrumah was keenly aware of this interplay. He describes the basic tenets of neocolonialism, a term he coined while he was Premiere of Ghana, as follows:

> The methods and form of this direction can take various shapes. For example, in an extreme case the troops of the imperial power may garrison the territory of the neo-colonial State and control the government of it. More often, however, neo-colonialist

> control is exercised through economic or monetary means. The neo-colonial State may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products from elsewhere. Control over government policy in the neo-colonial State may be secured by payments towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperial power. (1965, 4)

Nkrumah also states that capitalist, neocolonial entities attempts "to capture the market-place of ideas" (194) was the means by which the exploitation he outlines would be achieved.

In the context of contemporary media and the global environmental crisis control over this trading floor of concepts is far more insidious than any other approach. Not only does it engender complacency in the neo-colony, but also affords the government of that country greater security in their complicity with the capitalist neocolonial agents. The creative and cultural output of a given state is influenced both implicitly and explicitly by the demands and desires of the neocolonial capitalist hegemony which exploits it. Once colonised, now postcolonial states and their governments have shown themselves to be more than willing participants in neocolonial activities. These governments are partially duped, in part actively furnishing self-interests, but always actively involved in the corporate plunder of their natural resources; whether real estate, intellectual property, physical labour, environment or, as this thesis will demonstrate culture. Nkrumah argues that neocolonialism takes place with the "consent" (73) of a nation's government and that "the governments of the new States are seen in the role of policemen for the banking and industrial consortia bent upon continuing the old imperialist pattern" (74). In this

context the careful management of national perceptions towards the industry and resources in which the neocolonial capitalist entity is invested is imperative, not only for the maintenance of those foreign entities but for those in power in the host nation. The state must be seen to be working in the interests of its people, and so the goals of the corporation and the state must be perfectly aligned in the collective imagination of the populous.

In an ecological context, then, there can be no hope of environmental justice without considering how ecology is perceived. This is particularly the case in neocolonial states where the foreign capitalist entity is the dominant political and economic power and thus the greatest influence on the national imagination. As such this thesis considers a variety of Irish and international case studies to consider specifically how Ireland's rural ecologies are presented and represented and how this set of territorial visualisations serves to either repress or encourage the kind of co-constitutional responses that Guattari calls for in *The Three Ecologies*.

When we consider the state of our global ecologies we must ask how could something of such magnitude and potential for wholesale devastation have been so casually ignored? How, now, do our cultural products reflect this wholesale complacency among human animals, and what can our cultural forms of expression do about the crisis beyond which we've now passed? This thesis has at its moral and intellectual core an in-depth examination of our contemporary local and global engagements with vital ecological questions. Its main jurisdiction of focus is Ireland – its culture, society, and political engagements – but my attention is not narrowly

concentrated just on that eco-topography. This research examines film, television, and media representations of rural Ireland's ecologies. It identifies approaches to representation and gauges the extent to which this representation in turn impacts attitudes towards Ireland's environment and biodiversity, both nationally and internationally. The process of identifying these approaches is based on analyses of films, television programmes, and screen media which take rural Ireland as their setting. Evaluation of the produced texts includes also a contextualising of the representation of rural ecologies in these texts within the wider framework of history, environmental discourse, and cultural criticism.

This project is informed by several previous studies on the representation of Ireland's rural landscapes in media, art, and literature. It also integrates apposite studies of the history (social, cultural, and economic) and environmental materialities of rural Ireland. Across five chapters I consider the social and environmental factors which inform representations of rural Ireland and how these representations have, in turn, had direct consequences for Ireland's rural environment. I consider the degree to which the political complacency they engender has become enshrined in the popular consciousness and how and to what extent this complacency is used by bad faith actors to corrode Ireland's environment through capitalistic and neocolonial exploitation.

This thesis proves that Irish culture has been scarred firstly by a legacy of colonial systems and subsequently held in the welcoming arms of neocolonial discourses. These are usefully exposed by recourse to both close readings of screen

representations of Ireland's rural ecologies and the production practices behind these. I argue that onscreen representations of Ireland's rural ecologies are indelibly marked by colonialism. This influence has served to enshrine cultural discourses that actively dissuade audiences from relationships to these spaces which extend beyond the narrow parameters of nationalism and aesthetic pleasure. The abstraction from socioeconomic, political, and environmental realities which is encouraged by this kind of representation further entrenches hierarchical relationships to the non-human world, which in turn facilitates inaction in the face of our global ecological crisis. This thesis argues that texts that actively disrupt these hierarchies, and demonstrate a representational shift away from regressive nationalism and the relegation of ecology to the status of scenic backdrop, can be understood as indicative of the potential of screen representations of rural ecologies to subvert the legacy of colonialism. These texts can encourage meaningful engagement with the non-human world. It would be negligent to disregard the potency of the hegemonic reach of detrimental discourses and practices of neoliberalism and unbridled capitalism. These operations have found purchase in nations as far-flung as Aotearoa/New Zealand and America. They are well-established and deeply rooted ubiquitous practices and, as such, find their way effortlessly into the local narratives discussed here.

The texts chosen are examples that perfectly demonstrate the dominant trends of representation, while an infinite number of possibilities were available for consideration, the texts chosen stand as the ideal exemplars of representation of Ireland's rural ecologies in film, television, and screen media. I draw on a selection of national and international case studies in order to demonstrate not only the ubiquity of, and commonalities between, colonial and neocolonial systems

worldwide, but more pertinently to highlight the specificities of colonialism and neocolonialism in Ireland to understand its devastating impact on Ireland's rural ecologies.

The methodological approach undertaken in this dissertation involved the development of a theoretical framework, the selection of relevant texts (which as noted above best demonstrate dominant representational trends), research into the ecologies represented and engagement with pre-existing literature concerning the chosen case studies. This methodological approach allowed the development of robust connections between the selected case studies and the overarching theoretical framework of the research and the development of novel critical responses to these texts.

The rationale for this methodological approach is as follows. First, it allowed for an analytical approach which centred on the ecologies and communities represented in the case studies selected by selecting case studies which specifically focus on rural ecologies and communities, and by weighing this focus against environment or social fact, it places the environmental, social and economic relies of rural Ireland at the centre of this project, which aligns with the ideological impetus of the project. It also allows for an interdisciplinary approach, which considers and highlights the many vital and engaging points of connection between ecology, art and philosophical thought.

In chapter one I demonstrate that international production practices, ineluctably consolidated by corporate capitalism, have found purchase within the well-

established neocolonial system of Irish representation. The ecologies and resources of small-nation cinemas are most susceptible to dominant market-led global trends, which impact existing cohesive collaboration between state bodies, environmental stewards, and interested populations; both human and non-human.

This chapter explores the influence of neocolonial film production practices not only on ecological sites but also on the wider cultural conception of these spaces. This chapter considers how the reimagining and repackaging of ecological sites as fantasy spaces — decontextualised and divorced from their socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental materialities — transform them into viable products within the global capitalist hegemony. I argue that the perceived benefit of this viability comes at the cost of robust and sustainable indigenous film production, and the effective care and management of critically threatened ecological sites. In this chapter I consider the use of Skellig Michael as a location in Disney's *Star Wars* films, arguing that the use of the island in the franchise has disastrous implications for the future of the Skellig Islands, both as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and as a Special Protection Area for wildlife. Damage to archaeological structures on the island and the bird populations that nest there is already evidenced and well documented. This damage is not only the result of film production on the site but also of tourist interest in Skellig Michael stemming from its association with the *Star Wars* franchise. Although the long-term impact of the Disney corporation's use of the site remains to be seen, I present two illustrative case studies as examples of products created by multinational corporations: Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* franchise filmed in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and *Game of Thrones* partially filmed in Northern Ireland. Both of these works draw upon the natural resources of their host nation to enrich the

corporations that own them, with little regard for the long-term impact of these works upon the host nations. Not only do these case studies indicate the long-term effects of film tourism on the Skellig Islands, but they also usefully demonstrate the extent to which small nation cinemas are particularly susceptible to neocolonial film production practices. I also examine popular relationships to the science fiction and fantasy genres and consider how the political potential of these genres is predicated on the prerogatives of their creators and the socio-economic context of their production. Ultimately I argue that, at best, the use of Skellig (as is the case with *The Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*) as a location asks local and national tourism initiatives to generate sustained revenue from transient cultural events. This tourism market has been deliberately cultivated by Fáilte Ireland in their "Otherworldly campaign", which relegates Skellig (and rural Ireland more broadly) to the status of backdrop in a neocolonial fantasy of decontextualised place; an idea that draws on older more established cultural conceptions of Ireland as a depopulated ready to be brought under colonial control.

In chapter two I propose that within power systems over which the patriarchal, colonial gaze has historically established complete authority, the Picturesque emerged as an aesthetic of possession; a "taking" that justified colonial expansion and reified landscapes by occluding populations, socioeconomic realities, and cultural specificities. These aesthetic value systems inherently objectified spaces in both *a priori* and *a posteriori* ways. This chapter considers the global reach of the Picturesque as an instrument of colonial control which could be employed as a method of Occidentalisation. I argue that Picturesque representations of space are intimately connected to colonialism, positing that the aesthetic movement, or

authoritarian discourse was both consciously and unconsciously employed as a vital part of the colonial project. I argue that the Picturesque has been reappropriated as part of contemporary neocolonial discourses to legitimise the commodification of rural ecologies as products within the global capitalist hegemony. This chapter begins with an overview of the Picturesque and draws on Finola O'Kane's research on the formative role that Irish ecologies played in the production and definition of the Picturesque as an aesthetic movement. I argue that the Picturesque was actively and effectively employed by colonial regimes as a strategic device of occupation in Europe in the nineteenth-century. and to illustrate the ubiquity of this approach, I draw a comparison between the Hudson River Painters in nineteenth-century America and the travelogues and pamphlets of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish travel writers. I argue that the centuries old aesthetic and ideological value systems of the Picturesque have been appropriated by Fáilte Ireland in the conception and marketing of The Wild Atlantic Way tourism trail, where that tourist board presents the West as a neocolonial frontier. The Wild Atlantic Way is represented as a sparsely populated, anachronistic place of "wild" nature and aesthetic purity, in direct contravention of ecological fact, and to the detriment of communities who live along and adjacent to the route. This marketing approach serves not only to entrench colonial and extractive conceptions of ecological space as a resource to be exploited for financial gain, but also to increase Ireland's reliance on direct investment from large multinational corporations, by eliding their ecological and social impact on the West of Ireland.

The postcolonial and neocolonial discursive strategies are proficient at maintaining structures of subjugation and authority. These often see the feminisation of

ecologies, and the punishment of the errant female body within them. In chapter three I argue that postcolonial and neocolonial discursive systems are adept at co-opting established patriarchal traditions, values and cultural practices to facilitate control of populations, environments, and their integrated resources. These regimes of authority are highly effective, regardless of their manifestation as discursive or material actualities. We find these in land management practices, social regulations, and collective (participatory) cultural myth-making. The systems of authority examined in this chapter (both the British colonial and Irish Free State era regimes) construct ideologies of colonial and national identity, by mapping these ideas onto the female body. Patriarchal value systems and the control of the female body became central to both regimes and ultimately are foundational in their economic, social, and cultural systems. This manifests in an exclusion of women — particularly rural women — from personal, economic, and political power. This value system was, and is, maintained by cultural production. This chapter begins with an overview of the political and cultural exigency and dominance of productivist agricultural practices in Ireland and the intersection of these practices with colonial and postcolonial control of Irish women's bodily autonomy. It considers the extent to which the female body in the deeply patriarchal Free State era was employed as a symbol of national identity and cultural purity, and the degree to which this inevitably curtailed the personal and collective freedom of Irish women. This control of the female body was enshrined by the practice of patrilineal land transference which understands farming and by extension, ecological, material, and cultural engagement with rural ecologies as the preserve of men. I examine several cultural texts from the Free State era to illustrate this point. I then analyse how this conception of women's roles was incorporated into on-screen representations of rural

Ireland which I argue serves to naturalise patrilineal land transference further as the socially and morally "correct" approach to rural land management. I make this point with an in-depth analysis of *The Quiet Man*. I then evaluated the clear categorical characteristics of rural women in contemporary Irish cinema, highlighting the near-complete absence of women in films set in rural Ireland, except in the specific instances of "errant" women, highlighting *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *The Field* as case studies. These women serve as cautionary tales as their presence outside the home typically provides the catalyst for a chaotic disruption of the "right" order of the world of the diegesis. I also point to attempts to subvert this dominant trend in Lee Cronin's *The Hole in the Ground*, which highlights the damage caused to people and ecologies by the interrelationship of patriarchy and productivist agriculture. I show that the productivist approach to farming which patrilineal land transference engenders an approach which has been consistently bolstered and enshrined by Irish cultural production critically threatens rural Ireland's ecologies and impacted the collective freedom and autonomy of women in rural Ireland. I argue that a direct causal link can be observed between the patriarchal tendencies of Irish cinema and the degradation of rural ecologies.

In chapter four I assert that there is a liminal space with some degree of unrealised potential between the discursive Picturesque and the social realism of contemporary Ireland, where the ideological imperative to invest ecological spaces of representation with patriarchal significance can be deconstructed affirmatively by divesting these spaces of heightened aesthetic value. This chapter highlights the perennial presence of a codified patriarchal masculinity in Irish culture which is inseparable from broader cultural conceptions of rural Ireland's ecologies. It

demonstrates that representational approaches to rural Irish masculinities occur in ways that align with either Picturesque or social realist traditions. These entrenched representational approaches further enshrine patriarchal systems. I argue in this chapter that an alternative approach, which destabilises patriarchal hegemonies, can be identified in screen representations that undermine and challenge Picturesque aesthetics. I begin this chapter by highlighting the relationship between patriarchy and Picturesque aesthetics noting the presence of an "ideal" male viewer posited by Picturesque discourses, who is abstracted from the labour of the land. I argue that this stands in contrast to the "strong farmer" archetype (Kane, 140) and its importance to Irish nationalism and Irish masculinity in the Free State era and beyond. The strong farmer archetype a codified, patriarchal, expectation of Irish masculinity, is in direct conflict with the ideal Picturesque viewer in that, unlike the Picturesque, it stresses the centrality of labour in ecological relationships. However, it is likewise founded upon a patriarchal and hierarchical relationship to nature and society. This chapter highlights the degree to which the masculine archetype has failed to provide a meaningful way to navigate both masculinity and rural labour in a contemporary context. I argue that in the light of this failure, the Picturesque is once again employed on-screen, eliding the socioeconomic realities which this archetype (with its attendant mythologies of land ownership) fails to encompass. This elision serves to naturalise systems of patriarchal dominance in rural Ireland even further. To illustrate this, I draw attention to the parallels between the television series *Killinaksully* and John Ford's *The Quiet Man*. Picturesque aesthetics and the absence of agricultural labour in *Killinaskully* suggest discomfort with the "strong farmer" as well as a yearning for a romanticised past. The absence of agricultural labour in *Killinaskully* is contextualised with recourse to two further case studies: *Pilgrim Hill*

and *Garage*. Both films contest romanticised images of rural Ireland's ecologies and the role of men and masculinity in these spaces, by highlighting the failure of patriarchal systems - and by extension - the codified masculinity which has dominated in Irish culture. Despite this, however, I argue that these films are haunted by the archetype and they do not disavow it entirely. I introduce the television series *Hardy Bucks* as a concerted and frequently successful attempt to break entirely with the patriarchal archetypes. The series consistently demonstrates the material impossibility of the archetype in the contemporary West of Ireland. I argue that through its formal and aesthetic qualities of *Hardy Bucks* and the foregrounding of edgelands (spaces of ecological liminality), the series presents a break with representational tradition and highlights the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural realities of the West of Ireland. In doing so, the series subverts the strong farmer archetype and destabilises it's attending patriarchal mythology, suggesting that it offers no real power to enrich rural men's lives or to safeguard rural ecologies for posterity.

Finally, in chapter five, by exploring the relationships and intersections between ecologies, corporealities, and folk memories, I show that there is potential in Irish cinema to challenge and undermine established representations of anthropocentric, hierarchical, and regressive ideological perspectives. This chapter considers the interrelationship between human, non-human animal animals, biotic entities, and abiotic entities in certain Irish films. The identities in these case studies present a sustained and meaningful challenge to the hierarchical, patriarchal, and colonial discourses which have inflected on-screen representations of rural Ireland's

communities and ecologies. I argue that the films *Ondine* and *Arracht* challenge rigid hierarchical binaries, and in so doing, foreground the interrelatedness of people and ecology. I begin by analysing *Ondine*, focusing in particular on its use of selkie mythology. I argue that the selkie figure carries an inherent subversive potential, not only in its trans-species identity but also in its border-crossing potential: it belongs neither on land nor in the sea but can make a home in either. I consider this potential in the context of Donna Haraway's slogan "Make kin, not babies" (2016, 5). I note that while the film is relatively conservative in its subversion of patriarchal and hierarchical systems, the border-crossing potential of *Ondine* invites the viewer to consider what it would mean to extend one's ability to make kin, to recognise worth, agency and consciousness in the non-human. I then consider *Arracht* which similarly approaches themes of kin-making and border crossing, in the context of a humanitarian disaster. I argue that *Arracht* demonstrates the degree to which kin is already made and present, should we care to attune ourselves to the connections. Throughout the film the binaries between animals, humans, pathogens, and abiotic objects are undermined, foregrounding the interconnectedness between them. This dissolution of binaries serves to undermine the hierarchies which rely upon binary conceptions of ecology and society. As such, the film lays the blame for the Great Famine at the feet of colonial regimes and, by extension, offers a way of considering our contemporary ecological crisis that does not implicate human individuals or nature, but rather the regimes which set them at odds to exploit both.

Chapter One

Layers and Levers of Neocolonial Intervention as Practise

Introduction

In December 2015 Fáilte Ireland and advertising agency Rothco[1] unveiled a new advertising campaign titled 'Otherworldly'. Its objectives and principles are best summarised by then Executive Creative Director of Rothco Allan Kelly's description of the advert: "Our cinema ad showcases the stunning Wild Atlantic Way as if it is being beamed from another planet and sold as the perfect galactic tourist escape by an outer space tourist body, Tourism Cyhhacm" (*Fáilte Ireland Taps into Star Wars to Promote Wild Atlantic Way*, 2017). Intending capitalise on the cultural moment around the release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Fáilte Ireland sought to promote the Wild Atlantic Way to a captive cinema audience by forging an obvious link to the film. This move is reminiscent of the "Hobbiton" tours of Alexander Farm in Waikato, Aotearoa/New Zealand, where visitors can see the set of Hobbiton from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, exactly as it was presented on screen, with

[1] Rothco has since been renamed 'Droga5'.

the additional pleasure of being able to eat, drink, and play in this fantasy space. In-and-of itself, this act might seem innocuous, however, Ian Conrich argues that:

> [Aotearoa/New Zealand] is being exploited […] a distant country which is on the edge of the world cleverly manoeuvred and adjusted into a perceived Middle Earth which can be reached through mass culture and corporate packaging; and fans' insatiability for all things Tolkien neatly controlled through a heightened protection of production images and the steady release of executive and toy related products. (2006, 119)

The "insatiability for all things Tolkien" which Conrich has identified as supplanting the real history and geography of Aotearoa/New Zealand can be attributed, to some degree, to popular relationships to the fantasy and science fiction genres. Hypothesising on potential motivations for readers' engagements with the fantasy and science fiction genres, Jack Fennell states that consumers of the stories "read fantasy to experience a history completely removed from their own; and [science fiction] allows them to experience history in an altered context" (2014, 19) Fennell's theory might be usefully complemented by "geopathology", a concept coined by Una Chaudhuri. Describing contemporary society's estranged and ill-at-ease relationships with its geographical environments, Chaudhuri describes "geopathology" as "the problem of place and place as problem" (1997, 55) that speaks to a tension between characters and landscape; a "politics of location" (1997, 61). Science fiction and fantasy present the opportunity to create landscapes safely, purportedly devoid of these politics. This is not to state that these works are inherently a-political, just as realist works cannot always be said to engage with political realities. The representation of socioeconomic, cultural or political realities

onscreen does not guarantee truth or fidelity to fact, only a fidelity to real world aesthetics. Still, it does suggest that the *degree* to which fantasy and science fiction engage with a geo-sensitive dramaturgy is predicated on the prerogatives of their creators and the socio-economic context of their production. In the instance of large multinational productions funded by media conglomerates, which operate with a profit motive as their bottom line, we can typically expect an absence of meaningful engagement with geopathological conditions in ways that might problematise the 'imagined landscapes'. It is useful then to consider Fáilte Ireland's *Otherworldly* campaign within the wider context of their overall approach to landscape promotion and representation and an ideological disposition informed by internal and external location politics around the use of Skellig Michel as a location in the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Star Wars: The Last Jedi.*

The island's appearance in the film and subsequent marketing by Fáilte Ireland became the nexus of an ideological battle between the government, a multinational production studio and several Irish state bodies, all with competing motives and considerations in how and by whom rural Ireland's ecologies should be represented. The diverse factors which succeeded in bringing about the global rebranding of Skellig Michael as Ach-To can be traced back to the beginnings of the Irish Free State and are intimately connected to how Ireland's ecologies have been imagined and reimagined in the popular consciousness. To understand this, it is necessary to situate a discussion of the island's representation within the wider international context of film tourism, to demonstrate the enduring legacy of colonial representations of Irish ecologies and the neocolonial reworking of these

representations. This chapter will begin with an analysis of the production and aesthetics of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, before considering two comparative case studies: *The Lord of the Rings* franchise and HBO's *Game of Thrones* television series. The respective tourism markets generated by these texts are considered in the context of the psychogeographic reimagining of space as well as their impacts on domestic film and television production in their host nations. Finally, Fáilte Ireland's relationship to the *Star Wars* franchise will be explored as part of a wider system of neocolonialism and ecological exploitation which has critically threatened rural ecologies. It is necessary at this juncture to provide a working definition of neocolonialism, Kwame Nkrumah has defined the phenomenon as a state which is:

> in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. The methods and form of this direction can take various shapes. […] More often, however, neo-colonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means […] The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world (Nkrumah 1965, 4).

The following analysis of the Disney corporation's interactions with Irish state bodies will reveal a relationship built upon the neocolonial systems which Nkrumah describes above. We will see how the emerging depictions, directly associable with the aims and objectives of the Irish tourist board come to influence and reaffirm global, neocolonial attitudes towards Ireland's ecology.

Skellig Michael

Writing in 1910, George Bernard Shaw described Skellig Michael as: “not [belonging] to any world that you and I have lived and worked in: it is part of our

Year	Progress of Production
2013	The Irish Film Board pitches Ireland to Lucasfilm as a potential location for the upcoming *Star Wars* trilogy.
Early 2014	In early 2014 the OPW was officially contacted by film commissioner Naoise Barry about filming on the island, the shoot was originally scheduled for September.
Mid 2014	Naoise Barry begins coordinating contact between the filmmakers, the OPW and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
July 2014	The Irish Wildlife Service seeks an environmental assessment of the site ahead of filming.
	The Attorney General warns of possible legal issues, because of the island’s protected status under the EU directives.
Late July 2014	Nesting season on Skellig Michael. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* begins shooting on the island.
June to August 2015	Malachy Walsh and Partners, an engineering consultancy firm prepared an assessment and screening report for Minister Heather Humphreys in order for her to make an informed decision about allowing Lucasfilm to shoot on the island again in September 2015.
September 2015	Storm Petrels and Manx Shearwaters nest on Skellig Michael. *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* begins shooting.
December 2015	Star Wars: The Force Awakens is released in cinemas.

dream world" (Luke 2017). Shaw's description of Skellig Michael succinctly contextualises the aesthetic imperative for the use of the island as a setting in Disney's *Star Wars* sequel trilogy. It is a visually arresting place, with an otherworldly quality, conferred by the island's unique ecology. In both *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* Skellig Michael is the setting of an ancient Jedi monastery on the planet of Ach-To. Among the inhabitants of the island are a host of wimpled, frog-like nuns and Luke Skywalker, former Jedi Master-turned-recluse. There is certainly a parallel to be drawn here between historical fact and fiction. Just as the fictional Ach-to monastery is a site of religious devotion, Skellig's remote westerly location, nearly twelve kilometres off the coast of Kerry and the stricture of the harsh living provided by the island marked it as an ideal location for an early-medieval Christian monastic site. The remains of the monastery are still extant on the island, including six drystone cells, a mortared church, two oratorios, and a variety of crosses. Another parallel to be drawn between the diegesis of *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* in representation of the ecology of the site. Skellig Michael has been awarded Special Protection Status as its unsuitability for human habitation has made it a sanctuary for bird and marine life. Among the non-human inhabitants of Skellig are seals, Manx Shearwaters, Storm Petrels and, perhaps most famously and iconically, Puffins. Diegetically, the island is also home to a diverse range of plant and animal life, entirely reminiscent of the island's real-world ecology. Very little is done to reimagine or reconstruct the island space of Ach-To with CGI or practical effects. Its on-screen manifestation is practically indistinguishable from the real space of Skellig Michael. Luke Skywalker's subsistence on a sparse diet gleaned from the sea, and the island's cliffs is also

perfectly in line with the asceticism of monastic life on Skellig. During the filming of *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*, the drystone cells or beehive huts which appear in the film were reconstructed on a separate site in Sybil Head, Ballyferriter, on the Dingle Peninsula, in line with production conditions, although they are replicas of those on the island.

***Star Wars* on Skellig**

That the *Star Wars* production team adhered so closely to a non-fantastical reference point for the film's set design speaks less to the fantastical quality of the island's aesthetics and more to the embedded nature of the island's transformation from heritage site to global tourism product from the very beginning of its association with the Disney corporation. While Skellig Michael is not the first real-world location that has been incorporated into the *Star Wars* universe largely unaltered, it marks a significant deviation from previous approaches to representation at sites such as Tikal National Park in Guatemala or The Villa del Balbianello in Italy. The use of Skellig Michael in *Star Wars* is heavily inflected by a representation of the site which seamlessly blends the historic realities of monastic life and the ecological actualities of Skellig with the fantasy space of Ach-To. The two spaces, real and imagined, become one and the same. This approach which lends itself well to tourism initiatives and a global rebranding of Skellig as Ach-To, as the island's real history becomes indivisible from the *Star Wars* diegesis. This is also evidenced in the presentation of the island's bird life. With production due to take place while the birds that occupy the island for the greater part of the year were nesting, diegetic and consumerist fantasies aligned to create a double-layered and functioning product:

one that would simultaneously offer fictional escapism and also mask, with equally fictitious denial (through marketing), the devastation wrought in service of the production. This was the purpose of introducing porgs, mammal-bird hybrids that nest on Ach-To's rocks and cliff faces to the diegesis. The birds were "inserted to overwrite the [island's] birds" (Keralis, 2019, 3) and served to expedite the process of filming on Skellig as they allowed for shooting to take place during nesting seasons. The creatures were also merchandised; iconically reproduced as plush toys, water bottles, backpacks, and stationary.

The proliferation of these cuddly tie-ins belies the grim realities of the *Star Wars* production and its effect on Skellig's ecology. The film's shoot was marked by a lack of clarity from production departments about on-set protection failures as well as conflict between diverse national interest groups including Screen Ireland and the Office of Public Works. The realistic, unblemished and unadorned representation of Skellig Michael – including a minimum of set dressing, the incorporation of the island's birdlife into the *mise en scène*, and the integration of early Christian architecture and costume into the lore of the *Star Wars* franchise – was not the result of inspiration spurred by the unique ecology and history of the site. Evidence attests, rather, to a financial imperative on the part of the Disney Corporation and the Irish government that fuelled a reckless determination to plough ahead with production despite persistent and informed opposition and significant ecological and archaeological damage.

To illustrate the resulting conflict between various interest groups it is necessary to provide a brief timeline of production on the island.

In an interview with Lorna Siggins, Claire O'Halloran, an Office of Public Works guide on Skellig Michael has asserted "that Minister for Heritage Heather Humphreys gave filming the go-ahead based on incomplete ecological data" (Siggins 2016). In her interview with Siggins, O'Halloran also claimed that "production conditions were breached" and that damage caused to the site's ecology and monuments was not fully disclosed, nor was the severity of the damage accurately represented in official reports. As detailed by Siggins, O'Halloran notes that Skellig Michael's special protection status:

> Prompted Birdwatch Ireland and experts in heritage and archaeology to criticise the initial decision to permit filming there in 2014 […] a 'destructively large-scale plan' for the 2014 shoot was averted only at the last minute, after the intervention of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. (Siggins 2016)

In her interview, O'Halloran also states that Screen Ireland, which had promoted the location as suitable for use in the film franchise, seemed to have no awareness of the ecological sensitivity of the site. (Siggins 2016) Siggins asserted that Screen Ireland's representative Naoise Barry allegedly offered to intervene on the part of filmmakers if the National Parks and Wildlife Service (the government body partially responsible for the maintenance and management of Skellig Michael) thwarted the production. Barry was instrumental in pitching Skellig Michael as a location for Disney studios. Siggins reports that after securing it as a location Barry:

> Co-ordinated contact between the filmmakers, the OPW and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, assuring the filmmakers of a 'high level of OPW support and co-operation' but not mentioning the need to include the wildlife service or consult Unesco. […] It was only when the film-makers planned to import grasses and ferns, to dress the set, a month before filming, that the OPW flagged the implications for Skellig Michael as a nature reserve.[…] When Frank Shalvey, who oversees national monuments at the OPW, emailed Barry over reservations about the location contract, several days before the first delivery of equipment, he alluded to Barry's 'strong response'[…] On the back of an environmental assessment requested by the Wildlife Service, The Force Awaken's supervising location manager cut a team of 300 to 60, and restricted helicopter traffic to 14 passenger flights, and scrapped plans to drop equipment to Skellig Michael by air. […] During a helicopter reconnaissance mission ahead of the film's first shoot, a group of kittiwake chicks were swept into the sea by the downdraught and eaten by gulls. (Siggins 2016)

After the commercial success of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, a sequel was announced and Skellig was again flagged to be used as a setting. Consent was once again given to the production by then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys. Siggins, quoting O'Halloran, claims that Humphreys made her decisions on the basis of "incomplete ecological data" and that "four of the 16 [*sic*] conditions set by Humphreys's consent were breached, to do with time limits on filming, use of specified areas, and use of helicopters" (Siggins 2016). O'Halloran also described damage to monuments on the island noting that one: "was recorded as a 'disturbance' to stonework at the entrance to the upper monks' garden; the other was a paint spill at a rock formation known as the Wailing Woman" (Siggins 2016). However, the damage which O'Halloran describes would seem to be far more significant than the record detailed (Siggins 2016).

The failure to protect nesting bird populations adequately at the site, as well as the failure by the *Star Wars* production team to tailor production plans to the specific requirements there are indicative of infrastructural and negotiation breakdown on the part of the Irish interest groups. Having been provided with conflicting government mandates, one side to protect a site of historical and ecological significance, the other to facilitate and make successful the shooting of a multinational film franchise. Both groups were determinedly in opposition to the demands of the other. Had *Star Wars* been anything less than a globally recognised franchise, with a budget of nearly two billion dollars, and had the rights to film on the island not been granted by a minister who oversaw *both* of these conflicting interest groups, production might have been shut down. However, the corporate weight and influence of Disney and a governmental decision in favour of revenue generation over environmental protection saw the concern of the OPW pushed to the side in favour of any potential returns the site might yield.

Ireland and Neocolonialism

Writing in 1980, Francis Walsh observes that "despite superficial indications to the contrary, the Irish economy is basically neo-colonial in nature" (1980, 71). Walsh notes: "By 1977, 680 overseas plants had been established in Ireland with a total employment potential at full production of 80,000." (1980, 69) Walsh's research demonstrates the degree to which the Irish population was increasingly reliant on multinationals for the development of a labour market and consequently employment opportunities. In the intervening years, Walsh's assessment has proved no less accurate. According to a report published by the Central Statistics Office in 2024:

> In 2021, there were 12,436 foreign-owned multinational enterprises in Ireland, which represented just 3.4% of total enterprises in the Irish Business Economy, but they generated 72% of both total turnover (€798.8bn) and total GVA (€266.7bn). They employed 28.2% of the total number of persons employed in the Business Economy. These foreign-owned multinationals were 26.1% EU owned and 73.9% non-EU owned. (Multinationals: An Irish Perspective*, CSO Report*, 2024)

When considered in this context, the Disney Corporation's involvement in Ireland and the use of Skellig Michael as a setting can be understood not as a cultural watershed, or as a success story for Irish arts and culture, but rather as part of an ongoing neocolonial process. Whereby multinal corporations exploit the resources of a nation. This exploitation is facilitated by the government of that nation. As Nkrumah argues, in a neocolonial system government's "consent" (1965, 73), to their own exploitation, he argues that "the governments of the new States are seen in the role of policemen for the banking and industrial consortia bent upon continuing the old imperialist pattern" (1965, 74).

In 2017, the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation stated that "*Star Wars* filming on Skellig Michael was worth an estimated €40m in advertising to Ireland" coinciding "with more than 200,000 additional visits from North American tourists" (Nugent and Riegal 2017). A direct impact on Skellig tourism has also been observed: "An Taisce claimed [that visitor numbers had risen] to more than 16,700 in each of the last two years following the promotion of Skellig Michael as a location in the Star Wars series" (McCárthaigh 2019). There should have been an inherent tension between the revenue generation which arises from this influx of tourist interest in the

site (and Ireland more broadly), and the protection of the threatened ecologies that have been featured in the *Star Wars* productions. However, both conflicting mandates were subsumed under the auspices of one ministerial role. This allowed for the privileging by then Minister Heather Humphreys of potential revenue over certain environmental impacts. We can also recognise a missed opportunity to reinvest revenue generated from the productions back into environmental, this failure is indicative of the complete lack of communication and synchronisation between various states bodies. As Nkrumah argues "the ideal neo-colonialist State would be one which was wholly subservient to neo-colonialist interests" (1965, 8). For elucidation and better evaluation of the long-term impacts of Skellig Michael's association with the *Star Wars* franchise, it is useful to consider two further case studies: that of the representation of the fictional "Middle Earth" in real-world Aotearoa/New Zealand in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the location use of Northern Ireland in *Game of Thrones.* These case studies will demonstrate the universal and widespread nature of neocolonial practise, it will also reveal the degree to which this practise is, tragically, inevitable within the global capitalist hegemony. They will also shed light on Ireland's appearance in the *Star Wars* franchise, highlighting the extent to which these neocolonial production are by their nature; temporary (in terms of their ability to boost a country's GDP and global profile), exploitative (in their use of labour and resources), enacted with the consent of a national government (who grant consent for the production even at a risk to the rights of citizens or the futurity of indigenous film production), unequally weighted in terms of profit margins (with the multinational accruing the majority of the profit while the nation takes on the greater

cost of the production) and damaging to the integrity pre-existing national infrastructures (state laws, governing bodies and ecologies).

The Lord of the Rings and Aotearoa/New Zealand

Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) is a landmark of modern cinema that has had wide-ranging critical, cultural, and cinematic impacts. "Each of the three films cost about $93 million to make, but they collectively grossed almost $3 billion in ticket sales (as of November 2011), making them among the most profitable Hollywood productions in recent times" (Goh 2014, 263). At the time Jackson began shooting his trilogy, the impact of the Indigenous Aotearoa/New Zealand film industry was modest in global industrial terms, but the influential encouragement by the New Zealand government to present the country's reputation as "The World in One Country" (Conrich, 2006, 120) to the international film production market. The trilogy was initially considered by its studio Warner Bros. to be an enormous financial gamble. At the time executive endorsement was being sought, the fantasy genre was not typically regarded as blockbuster material. While J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was well known, the books nevertheless were considered by the studio as an artefact belonging to a somewhat niche subculture that could not easily ensure the attraction of general audiences, in a way that might reassure investors. The film's director Peter Jackson has consistently championed the country as a location. His advocacy is explained partly on the basis of the sublime variety of "outdoor sets" that the country boasts, as well as the fact that production costs were considerably lower in Aotearoa/New Zealand than they would have on a studio set in America.

Robbie Goh writes that:

> Jackson's teams of location scouts scoured both islands of New Zealand (including by helicopter and boat) for settings that would realise Tolkien's landscapes, spending some three years in the planning process (before actual filming of the *LOTR* films began), and finally constructing more than 300 sets in over 100 locations spread out throughout New Zealand. Jackson's locations included remote places for which new access routes had to be created when filming began and some which were only accessible by helicopter – indicative of how important location was to Jackson's visualisation of the novels (2014, 264).

With the immense global success of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, the Aotearoa/New Zealand government began to explore the potential of a closer association between Jackson's films and the country that provided their backdrop. Jackson's trilogy soon came to reinvent the mechanisms of tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand when "a number of local and international tourist providers began to offer holidays that were framed on the cinematic trilogy". This marked a shift away from "previous initiatives which had focused on ecology and Maori culture." (Tzanelli, 2004, 30) Anne Buchmann has explained:

> It is interesting to note that most tour operators reacted to requests, e.g. by potential tourists or governmental institutions, and only then established Lord of the Rings tours. Only some were already fans who decided to "give it a go" as a tour operator. Most are small-sized businesses and some exclusively cater for the film tourism market. Of those, most had been surprised by the impact of the films and had not expected to become involved in consequent film tourism. (2010, 78)

Buchmann's research highlights the market driven, globalised nature of interest in Aotearoa/New Zealand's association with the the films, the impetus to capitalise on

this association is driven not by an inherent link between domestic cultures and Tolkien's work but rather an acknowledgement of shifting trends within the global capitalist hegemony. We might draw a compasrison here between pre-existing boat tours to Skellig Michael, which previously focused on promoting the history and ecology of the site to tourists, but now include "*Star Wars* filming tours" as part of their offerings. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and its subsequent integration into the aesthetics of Aotearoa/New Zealand tourism promotion and policy planning began to decontextualise the country's geography, with a purposeful blending of the fictional sites of Jackson's franchise and the real ecology and culture of the nation. As Ian Conrich notes, the borders between the real ecology and "imagined landscape" of Middle Earth had at one point grown so thin that

> Middle Earth [could] be reached, journeyed to with its own official airline, Air New Zealand. In a promotional campaign that saw the airline unite with the trilogy, Air New Zealand became 'Airline to Middle Earth,' a claim proudly announced on its products and assets from flight ticket wallets to the fuselages of three planes – a Boeing 747, a Boeing 767, and an A320 Airbus. (2006*,* 135)

This dissolution of the borders between Aotearoa/New Zealand and Middle Earth highlights the degree to which the generation of revenue will often win out over the protection of indigenous cultures and ecologies. *The Lord of the Rings* began production at a time when the Aotearoa/New Zealand film industry's ability to offer employment was incredibly limited and the country's GDP lagged behind its Oceanic neighbours. The choice to encourage the production should be understood as an attempt to raise the profile of the nation both culturally and economically. It is noteworthy, however, that this reinvention should take place in a postcolonial nation,

wherein the process of reinvention was already fraught by historic violence against the Maori population, many of whom would go on to work on *The Lord of the Rings.* As Nkrumah argues, neocolonialism would seem to be the next stage in an imperial project, rather than a novel intervention. He describes the way in which departing colonists will endeavour to establish economic and cultural strongholds in the country that has become "liberated" from them *"*land concessions, prospecting rights for minerals and/or oil; the 'right' to collect customs, to carry out administration […] Also demanded and granted are privileges in the cultural field" (1965, 191). The open violence of the colony is exchanged for an insidious economic and cultural assault on the sovereignty of that nation.

Middle Earth in Crisis

The reinvention of Aotearoa/New Zealand as "Middle Earth" was thrown into chaos during the filming of Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* trilogy (Warner Bros. 2010). After several years of false starts and torrid negotiations, production on the film halted due to an industrial relations dispute. The dispute arose when the New Zealand Actors Equity Union "sought to exercise its members' internationally recognised rights to bargain collectively on employment terms" (Kelly 2012). The union called for a worldwide boycott of the films and was supported in this by the Australian Actors Union and the United States-based Screen Actors Guild. (Dunleavy & Joyce 2012, 225)

Peter Jackson warned against the industrial action, claiming that the move would cause Warner Bros. to consider relocating the film's production, a move which would

have “cost the country $1.5bn” while “the projected loss of earnings to New Zealand in the medium-term was estimated to be around NZ$500 million of expenditure over the four-year production cycle of the two *Hobbit* films” (Burgess and Hunt, 2010). As rumours of a potential Warner Bros. exit began to gain traction in the media “several other countries, in order to attract the project, expressed their willingness to make more generous tax concessions than those available in New Zealand” (Dunleavy and Joyce 2012, 225). This trade union action against the Warner Bros. corporation is indicative of the kind of neocolonial resistance which Nkrumah sees as central to the ousting of neocolonial regimes. He describes African Trade Union movements of the 1960s as already having made a start in undermining neo-colonial control he states that:

> Bolstered with ideological clarity, these organisations, closely linked with the ruling parties where liberatory forces are in power, will prove that neo-colonialism is the symptom of imperialism’s weakness and that it is defeatable. For, when all is said and done, it is the so-called little man, the bent-backed, exploited, malnourished, blood-covered fighter for independence who decides. And he invariably decides for freedom. (1965, 191)

The power of these ideologically robust and liberatory groups proving the ultimate threat to neo-colonial entities is given further credence in the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, where Warner Bros. actions in the wake of the strike, reveal the extent to which the union had the power to change production practices and demand more equitable conditions. Here the complicity of governments in neocolonial systems becomes relevant once again. In an effort to avoid making concession Warner Bros. ultimately negotiated not with the trade union, but directly with then Aotearoa/New

Zealand Prime Minister John Key who in addition to further tax breaks for Warner Bros. oversaw changes to the The Employment Relations (Film Production Work) Amendment Act to Warner Bros.' benefit. The president of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, Helen Kelly, who was present for and engaged in initial union negotiations wrote:

> The [New Zealand/Aotearoa] government collaborated with Warners to create a narrative that by seeking to bargain collectively, the actors would cause the movie to be moved overseas; meaning job losses, destruction of the film industry and a dent to national pride. This dubious claim was used to justify a law change removing employment rights from workers in the New Zealand film industry, and the extraction of hefty additional taxpayer subsidies for the film by Warners [sic]. (Kelly 2012).

Kelly pointed to the significant groundswell of public opinion against actors during the debate, something fuelled by the negative coverage of the actors in the Aotearoa/ New Zealand media. She claimed that this coverage deliberately portrayed the unionists as opportunists "waiting furtively for the highest profile production to come along which would provide the greatest leverage to secure exceptional benefits" (Kelly 2010).

This conflict is indicative of the precarity faced by host nations when they become both financially and culturally reliant on the continued presence of large multinational media conglomerates aided by high-level government concession. Given the long-running relationship between Warner Bros. and the nation, it is possible that members of Actors Equity may have expected to have more bargaining

power, having provided a location, a workforce and support to Warner Bros. product for over a decade and been instrumental in the production of a highly profitable product with enormous cultural capital, the unions felt in a position to demand conditions which their colleagues in non-tertiary film production industries were in receipt of. The unions however failed to recognise that the unequal distribution of resources they were experiencing came not as a result of an oversight, nor could it be rectified with a request for fairer treatment. Rather it was an embedded element of the process of neocolonialism to which the Aotearoa/New Zealand government had given its consent with the initial arrival of the corporation. As Nkrumah states, countries under neocolonialist control lack "the financial strength to force the developed countries to accept their primary products at a fair price" (Nkrumah 1965, 7). This has proved to be the case in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as evidenced not by a change in policy to allow film industry workers to demand fair pay for their labour but by a restructuring of Aotearoa/New Zealand's laws in favour of Warner Bros. whose withdrawal from the country the government deemed too great a financial risk.

The Hobbit trilogy was a commercial success for Warner Bros. studios and reinvigorated the New Zealand tourism industry. The continued impact and perceived economic benefit of Jackson's Middle Earth films were made evident by the "Dwarf" statues erected at the arrivals gate of Wellington airport; a counterpoint to the giant Gollum statue that had pre-existed them on the same site[2]. Despite the

[2] These sculptures were built by Wētā Studios (a Wellington special effects and prop company whose creations had been used in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies) The Gollum statue was erected at the airport after the success of Jackson's initial trilogy.

financial and executive pressure brought to bear on the State by Warner Bros., the *Hobbit* films were a critical failure, and were widely disparaged. The adaptation was also criticised, perhaps most notably by the late Christopher Tolkien, executor of his father's estate, whose sentiments on the entirety of the Jackson and Warner Bros. Tolkien adaptations were recorded by Kevin Jaegernauth in a piece that appeared in 2013:

> Tolkien has become a monster, devoured by his own popularity and absorbed into the absurdity of our time […] The chasm between the beauty and seriousness of the work, and what it has become, has overwhelmed me. The commercialisation has reduced the aesthetic and philosophical impact of the creation to nothing. There is only one solution for me: to turn my head away (Jaegernauth 2013).

The Rings of Power and the End of an Era

Tolkien's assertion that commercialism had won out over the "beauty and seriousness" of his father's work proved correct when, in November 2017, Amazon Studios bought the television rights for *The Lord of the Rings* for $250 million and went on to make a five-season production commitment that was worth at least $1 billion (Siegel, 2018). This purchase made it the most expensive television series ever made (an accolade which demonstrates how far the product had risen in cultural salience and bankability from being a tentative 'gamble' in 1997). Notwithstanding renewed corporate interest, the question of whether the series would be filmed in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and indeed whether Aotearoa/New Zealand could reasonably continue to associate itself with the *Lord of the Rings* brand was by no means a certainty. The Aotearoa/New Zealand government entered a series of talks with Amazon. Madeleine Chapman explained the initial outcome of these talks:

> The government would kick in the standard 20% rebate on local spending for big international productions, plus a 5% 'uplift' for projects with 'significant economic benefits'. In return, the government [would secure] the rights to use the series as a branding tool for years to come. (Chapman, 2021)

In early 2021, after several months of negotiations between Amazon and the Aotearoa/New Zealand government, it was announced that the series would, like Jackson's trilogy, be filmed in the country. However, the governments' success and the sense of security which these talks engendered was short-lived. After filming was completed on the series' first season, Amazon announced that production would be moving to the United Kingdom. This choice by Amazon to move the production to a new host nation speaks to the extent with which ecologies which become iconographic by virtue of their inclusion in a major international film franchise can just as easily be discarded and replaced with new ecological site. This demonstrates that the actual ecological or aesthetic quality of the site is never the central motivator for the multinational media producer. As the makers of meaning within the global capitalist hegemony, they alone have the power to render a site iconic, or to discard it as irrelevant.

Amazon's series, titled *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, draws on Tolkien's work and refers to the events of the preceding Jackson trilogies but its diegetic scenario predates both trilogies. It is effectively, only tangentially related to the narratives established in Jackson's films and, more significantly, when its change of location and new studio involvement, as well as the intervening twenty years of

cultural change and audience expectations, are taken into account, it is safe to assume that the series will manifestly distance itself artistically from Jackson's films. The effect of this is a potential sea change in the popular conceptions of *The Lord of the Rings* which will likely herald a distancing in the popular imaginations between the ecologies of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Tolkien's world, ensuring that the nation becomes a less obvious point of correlation with the texts for contemporary audiences. While it is unlikely that the tourism and cultural initiatives of Aotearoa/ New Zealand will effect a clean break from Middle Earth, and while fans of Jackson's trilogies may well choose to holiday in the locations from the films, Amazon's production has the makings of a show aiming for maximum cultural impact. Although the show's first series was met with critical disdain and did little to impress fans of Tolkien's work, the eagerness of other countries to host the project is likely based less on any perceived artistic merit of the productions, than on the potential for revenue generation which these productions promise, either in the form of employment or film tourism markets. The transient nature of Amazon's *Rings of Power* production also offers them significant leverage in negotiations. If a country isn't willing to be generous, they will simply take their business elsewhere. Additionally, as media conglomerates are consolidated into monopolies and dissemination of moving image narratives proliferates across increasing numbers of actual and virtual exhibition spaces into every media channel, so too have studios learned how much influence they can have over statutory and national governing administrations who are eager to cash in on financial profit for short term gain.

On the departure of Amazon from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Madeline Chapman has struck a hopeful note:

> Had Amazon honoured its agreement and filmed all five seasons here, New Zealand would have spent 30 years and counting moulding its national identity around a piece of fiction that has no connection to this country. Instead, we've been given an opportunity to rebrand. There are New Zealanders about to graduate from university who weren't even born when The Fellowship of the Ring was released. What will their New Zealand be known for instead? (Chapman 2021)

There is reason to be sceptical about the optimism of Chapman's assertion. Dunleavy and Joyce point to the events surrounding the production of *The Hobbit* as a potent illustration of "the intensification of global influences upon New Zealand film production" (2012, 259). Maori science fiction writer Alex Stronach (Kāi Tahu) argues that Jackson's films and their subsequent afterlives are tantamount to "the erasure of Māori mana whenua […] a sort of soft colonialism: by making Aotearoa a proxy for England, you say Aotearoa *is* England" (Stronach, 2020). Stronach further illustrates the power of the association between Aotearoa/New Zealand's ecologies and the fictional world of Middle Earth, drawing attention to comments made by fantasy writer George R. Martin when he served as toastmaster of the 2020 Nebula Awards (an online ceremony nominally held in Aotearoa/New Zealand due to the Covid-19 Pandemic). In his speech Martin describes the country as "Middle Earth". Martin's description is prescient given the psychogeographic restructuring of place which his work has similarly inspired. His fantasy series *Game of Thrones* was adapted for television by HBO in 2011 with much of the filming taking place in Northern Ireland, a country which has subsequently come to parallel

The Lord of the Rings effect in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in ways that further inform this phenomenon and require consideration.

Game of Thrones and Northern Ireland

The HBO television series *Game of Thrones* (created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss for HBO) was based on a series of fantasy novels by author George R. Martin. The show was internationally successful and critically acclaimed, and achieved a degree of cultural currency that saw the show's refrain "Winter is Coming" enter common parlance. Production took place in locations across the globe, with sound stages established in the United Kingdom, Canada, Croatia, Iceland, Malta, Morocco, and Spain. Among these sites, many of which aimed at capitalising on the film tourism potential of the production, it has been noted that following the show's success "Northern Ireland stand[s] out as the earliest and most connected to the original HBO brand" (Ipek *et al*. 2020, 654). This can be ascribed to a concerted effort on the part of Tourism NI, Discover Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland's domestic and international tourism bodies), and Northern Ireland Screen (Northern Ireland's national screen agency) to place the series at the forefront of their marketing campaigns and to hail the series as a success story for domestic and international tourism as well as screen production in the North. Tourism NI describes the series as "Northern Ireland screen tourism's most valuable asset" (*The Game of Thrones Effect*, Tourism Northern Ireland Website). What is distinctive —from other nations which played host to *Game of Thrones'* production— in NI Tourism and NI Screen's approach to capitalising on association with the series are the concerted

efforts made to link *Game of Thrones* to the real heritage narrative of Northern Ireland.

A heritage narrative can be understood as a general overview of a community's history, which stresses the most inspiring or engaging aspects of this history. It is "broad renditions of a community's history […] the character of its people (both past and present), and its trials and triumphs over time" (Bridger 1996, 355). As noted by Ipek *et al.* note:

> Northern Ireland distinguishes itself from other production locations by territorializing the series and fastening it to the region's heritage narrative. This is made evident by a series of partnership deals signed by the national tourist board and HBO for the use of copyrighted materials (logos, names, etc.) and promotional channels. Such double branding tightly associates the screen production with its context/location and ensures the longevity of screen tourism while making heritage tourism appealing for a wider group of tourists. (Ipek *et al*. 2020, 649)

Northern Ireland's association with the series can be thus defined along much the same lines as Aotearoa/New Zealand's connection to the *Lord of the Rings* films. Eforts were made from the outset of production negotiations and campaigning that would ensure a rebranding of Northern Ireland as "Game of Thrones Territory". In a case that mirrors Aotearoa/New Zealand's film tourism initiative in the wake of *The Lord of the Rings*, visitors to Northern Ireland can now immerse themselves in the "history" of Westeros at multiple locations throughout the country. Pubs, bus tours, tapestries, and hiking tours all ask that tourists blur the cognitive lines between the

"imagined geography" of Westeros and the "real geography" of Northern Ireland. One example of this is the *Game of Thrones's* tapestry exhibition.

The tapestry, unveiled in 2017, is eighty seven metres long and depicts key events from the television series embroidered onto linen produced in one of Northern Ireland's last surviving linen mills. The piece literally weaves together the heritage of Northern Ireland and the fictionalised history of Westeros. Ipek *et al*. note that the placement of the piece within the museum as well as the material content of its production suggest to the viewer that *Game of Thrones* and the Northern Ireland are indivisible from one another (2020, 659).

Northern Ireland Tourism and the Legacy of 'The Troubles'

While in the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, a tourism market existed prior to the success of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which then modulated itself to fit the emerging market trend, Northern Ireland has consistently struggled to market itself as a viable tourist destination. "The key agents in the development of tourism in Northern Ireland (NI) since the late 1960s have been working against a backdrop of violence in the province —'the troubles'— which has been exacerbated by media attention and sensationalization" (Leslie 1999, 37). This cultural conception of Northern Ireland stands in contrast to typical depictions of the Republic, which has traditionally been marketed and perceived globally as a peaceful, rural idyll. This particular construction of place was one that successive Northern Ireland tourism initiatives had attempted to instigate, as far back as the early 1900s. John Hill notes the difficulties faced by the UTDA (Ulster Tourism Development Association) in the

1930s in presenting an image of Northern Ireland which would distance the country from associations with bigotry and political extremism. The focus which the UTDA placed on rurality and rural ecologies in their marketing "served a double purpose" (Hill 2006, 15) as it not only facilitated the attraction of visitors to the region but also "distracted from the political turbulence and sectarianism commonly associated with urban-industrial areas (and Belfast in particular)" (Hill 2006, 15). As such, there is a historical precedent for placing the veil of fictional geographies, histories, and socio-economic narratives of Westeros on top of the very real space of Northern Ireland, as it provides the opportunity for tourism groups to rebrand a country formerly associated with violence and civil unrest, as an unmissable destination. The irony of this approach is in the adoption of fictional narratives and geographies equally riven with violence and civil unrest. This adoption of fictionalised violence, however, is politically identical to the attempts made by the UTDA to create a cultural conception of the North which occluded the socio-cultural and economic realities of sectarian violence and civil unrest. Nkrumah argues that neocolonialism "like colonialism before it, postpones the facing of the social issues which will have to be faced" (1965, 6) The capitalisation of *Game of Thrones* by Northern Ireland Tourism allows for a presentation of violent histories set simultaneously inside and outside the historical and contextual politics of violence of the North. This allows for the creation of a space wherein the violent history of Northern Ireland is held in stasis while violent narratives, which also evade meaningful engagement with "the social conflicts of the capitalist countries" (Nkrumah 1965, 6) play out on screen. Most presciently, the settings for this violence are not the streets of Belfast but instead the Dark Hedges on Bregagh Road, Co. Antrim and the Tollymore Forest Park in Co.

Down. The rurality of these settings should not be overlooked. By taking tourists out of Belfast into rural areas, they are diverted from Black Taxi tours and the obvious ongoing economic impacts of the Northern Irish Conflict into a setting — which if only by lack of obvious visual association with sectarian violence — invites new associations with fictional violence. This kind of decontextualised violence can be perceived as an "easier sell" to tourists influenced to travel by film or television, than the kind of screen narratives from that region that were plotted around struggles between characters motivated by local postcolonial legacies and sectarian divisions. What is evident in this approach is that when the narrative content of a production might usefully divert from the socio-economic issues of a location this narrative is adopted into tourism experiences as a new kind of heritage. Christoph Doppelhofer argues that in the case of *Game of Thrones* "new unifying heritage narratives and alternative readings of landscapes can be asserted through a shared global media culture, detached from exclusionary identity markers" (2024, 770). Doppelhofer argues that the series is capable of serving as a cultural touchpoint wherein national trauma and memory conflict can be overcome by the local population. This reading of the text, however, is only applicable if we disregard the context of the series' production and its subsequent effects on Northern Ireland's screen industry.[3] While Doppelhofer is keen to acknowledge the generation of "new" heritage in Northern Ireland as a result of *Game of Thrones*, through his interviews with locals, Doppelhofer does not catalogue or acknowledge an engagement with the series

[3] It is also contingent on the extent to which the series will continue to retain cultural salience, (something which Doppelhofer acknowledges (Doppelhofer 2024, 770) not only within a global context, but in Northern Ireland itself, already "the company behind the *Game of Thrones* studio tour [in Belfast] has undergone a significant financial restructuring after a disappointing initial performance." (Campbell, *BBC.com*, 2023)

which moves beyond its immediate economic and representational impact for Northern Ireland. There is little sense that those in the North connect with it on an ideological level. Rather one interviewee states: “It’s not political. And everybody knows about it” (2024, 766).

The attested a-politicism of the series however is in doubt. The series is undoubtedly political, but its politics, rather than focusing on contemporary ethno-religious conflict and its fallout, looks instead on the distribution and acquisition of power among a (predominantly) elite class. *Game of Thrones* is patently uninterested in the effects of conflict on civilians. This is manifestly evident in the show’s focalisation of characters of nobility. It is their worldviews that shape our understanding of Westeros and it is their decisions (both personal and political) that shape events. These are narratives of the elite achieving their ends through violence, which is ultimately justified as being effected for the common good. In contrast to this, representations of violence in Northern Irish cinema have often demonstrated more nuance. Films from the region have in cases like Pat Murphy’s *Maeve* [1981], John Davies’ *Acceptable Levels* [1985], or Margo Harkin’s *Hushabye Baby* [1989], exploring the intersection of violence with class, gender, religious belief, and personal experience, in a way which demonstrated how violence effectively serves to disenfranchise the entirety of society. Concurrent with this is Colin Coulter’s argument that the violence of the Northern Irish Conflict cannot be understood outside of the intersections of class. He argues against the “popular media commentary” of the conflict which states that its effects were felt by all, stating:

> While this faith in the quintessentially democratic spirit of politically motivated violence enjoys widespread currency, it fails to square with the distribution of fatalities that defined a quarter century of conflict in the region. Looking at the deaths that occurred over the course of the Troubles reveals a remarkably consistent and concentrated pattern. Northern Ireland has 94 postcodes, but more than half of the fatalities that punctuated the conflict were concentrated in just 12 of them. What these dozen neighbourhoods shared in common was that they were – as they remain – sites of grinding, multigenerational poverty. (Coulter 2019, 123)

In addition to the opportunity for cultural rebranding that *Game of Thrones* has facilitated for Northern Ireland's tourism authorities, many commentators have expounded on the employment opportunities that the multinational production has brought. These have been hailed as a success story for the country, particularly by Northern Ireland Screen. Phil Ramsey *et al.* write:

> NI Screen has argued that having 'large-scale film and television production (NI Screen, 2014) based in NI has helped to develop a skills base in the screen industries (NI Screen, 2010, 2012, 2016). At the core of the narrative around the impact on skills and jobs, is the attention given to the impact of GOT on the labour market. (2019, 852)

The Fantasy of Opportunity

However, Northern Ireland Screen's analysis of their engagement with HBO fails to account fully for the company's choice to film in Northern Ireland. Nor does their overarching claim of labour market growth illustrate the complexity of the fallout of the gargantuan production on the wider film and television communities in the region. Ramsey *et al.* explain:

> GOT initially had filmed its US$13 million pilot episode in NI (NI Screen, 2010: 43), with £1.6 million offered in direct funding by NI Screen. The financial climate

> in which NI Screen attracted HBO to produce its pilot in NI was in part influenced by the exchange rates at the time, with the agency stating that being in the Sterling currency area made it more attractive to US companies as compared to Euro-zone production destinations (NI Screen, 2010: 20) [at the time of this article's publication] GOT has received £14.85 million of public funding from NI Screen, a major investment which peaked at £3.2 million in 2012 - 2013. (2019, 853)

This direct investment in *Game of Thrones* ultimately influenced the amount and kind of indigenous projects Northern Ireland Screen Fund could commit to supporting. Additionally, Ramsey *et al*. find that the narrative of *Game of Thrones*' impact on jobs and revenue creation is not a straightforward one:

> In terms of employment, we note that the projection of 2800 direct full-time equivalent job years through NI Screen's investments is rather minuscule compared to a total NI workforce of 837,000 employees (NISRA, 2018: 3). While precarity in the workforce in the creative industries is again not unique to NI, figures such as the 80 FTE equivalent jobs that were created for extras in one year tells a much more sobering story than the overall policy narrative would suggest. Indeed, the transitory nature of the employment of many of the crew members who come to NI to work, and then leave in quick succession once a shoot has finished (cf. Burt, 2017: 175) is mostly absent from the policy narrative. For example, if a crew member resides in NI for 6 months of filming and then moves to their next location, they may have had very little impact on the wider NI economy in terms of their personal expenditure, especially given the long hours that they are working. (2019, 855)

Multinational corporations are emphatically uninterested in boosting the GDP or facilitating the economic growth of their host nations, most often, they will actively oppose or even thwart it. As Nkrumah observes, neocolonial "manufacturers naturally object to any attempt to raise the price of the raw materials which they obtain from the neocolonialist territory in question, or to the establishment there of manufacturing industries which might compete directly or indirectly with their own

exports to the territory" (1965, 9). They have highlighted that rather than increasing employment opportunities and growing a skills base of film practitioners within Northern Ireland, *Game of Thrones* uses Northern Ireland as a cost-effective hub to host skilled practitioners from outside the region. While there is certainly a possibility that the presence of the production in the country might sway some practitioners to settle in the area long-term or indeed to make citizens conscious of a skills market which they had not previously considered, the presence of *Game of Thrones* is a transitory one. Hosting HBO in Northern Ireland does not directly promote the development of an indigenous media production, the studio has not offered or attempted to develop a skills base in the region in exchange for the services Northern Ireland has provided, nor is it likely to do so.

These case studies begin to indicate a pattern and suggest a recurring profile of representation and exploitation that bodes extremely poorly for Ireland's association with the *Star Wars* franchise and the Disney corporation. We have seen, both locally and internationally, the same strategic mechanism put into operation by multinational media corporations. In the first phase, a financially potent corporation situates itself within a small, developed economy. Having secured the essential legal and contractual reassurances and support of the relevant authorities they begin operations which function without concern for the exploitation of local resources and, notwithstanding guarantees for costing and covering damages and inconveniences, bring about considerable alterations to both the nation and region's workforce, infrastructure, ecosystems, and landscapes. In facilitating the enterprises, and in line with agreements put in place during phase one, indigenous governments instigate

unilateral changes to their laws and often provide financial compensation to the visiting company with the objective of enticing them to stay for long-term production schedules, with the aspiration of creating feasible employment. The same elected authorities maintain dialogue with the corporate executives with a view to ensuring a boost to tourism and trade in the underdeveloped area that has provided the backdrop for the diegetic settings of the production. Both provide opportunities for affirmative press commentary for the administration in question. Inevitably, in the final phase, the corporation leaves the location post-production, and there is a discernible change in public opinion: the initial legislative changes made to facilitate the schedules, profit motives, and productions of the transient cultural movement remain in place. It is hard to imagine how a relatively tiny Western European nation with little relative political negotiation potency and less economic influence might have stood up for itself when nations with far more political clout failed to do so within the context of a highly refined and insidious, neoliberal, capitalist, neocolonial mechanism. It is against this backdrop of exploitation, that a trend of deeply problematic ecological representation, which engenders the exploitation of already critically threatened ecologies can be identified. The remainder of this chapter will examine how Ireland's real ecologies become a fantastical theme park for the neoliberal imagination.

Rebranding Ireland

Since the establishment of the Free State, Irish tourism initiatives have sought to promote an image of the nation that portrays an unbroken traditional culture, despite (or against) colonial occupation. Representations of Ireland in tour materials have

tended to stress a culture which has endured through millennia, rather than a culture inflected by eight hundred years of colonial occupation. The cultural identity of Ireland is consistently presented as distinct from the socio-economic and historical materialities of colonialism, effectively downplaying the effects of colonial violence and administration while simultaneously highlighting Ireland as a unique cultural product. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Irish government sought to distinguish its cultural identity from that of England. Central to this effort was the establishment of rural ecologies as culturally and spiritually linked to Irish identity. This approach was partly informed by the practical imperative of encouraging domestic agriculture, but also provided a tangible point of identification in that these ecologies were real spaces which had been liberated from British rule. This approach however necessitated rendering these ecologies as ideologically Irish, the government set about attempting "to distinguish a landscape that would represent an essential Ireland: a highly recognisable, immediately identifiable landscape that was 'thematically' unique […] wild, ancient, mysterious, anachronistic" (Costa 2017, 41). The poverty of the nation was rebranded as heritage which stood in contrast to England's perceived industrialised sophistication. As Kelli Ann Costa notes: "The battered and backward but breathtaking landscape of Ireland was re-imagined as the traditional and well-preserved" (2017, 41). The landscape that most neatly encapsulated this ideal was that of the West of Ireland, which was constructed as the place from which the renewal of Irish culture would flow, by virtue of its geographic distance from the empire and the perception that an authentic Irish culture had endured there in spite of colonial rule. However, in a contemporary context, to present the West as an Edenic space of regeneration and renewal calls for an evasion,

through a careful restructuring of the space on the part of Fáilte Ireland, to facilitate an intervention into the socio-economic realities of the West. There has, since the 1990s, been "an increased push towards transforming the Irish countryside from a predominantly working agricultural one to a tourism landscape where Irish history can be retailed to the overseas visitor and local" (Johnson 1999, 191). This is exemplified in initiatives such as the Great Western Greenway and Wild Atlantic Way campaigns. Johnson notes that synonymous with this reimagining of rural Ireland as a leisure space "visual representations picture Irish 'natives' as predominantly working in agriculture and implicitly suggest that an organic relationship between people and their natural environment is to be found in Ireland" (Johnson 1999, 191) This "organic relationship" which is cultivated though marketing is analogous to economic and ecological fact. If rural Ireland is understood by the visitor to be a pastoral fantasy, its ecologies must serve a purely aesthetic purpose divorced from colonial brutality. Its inhabitants similarly become part of that fantasy, the socio-economic realities of human experience and culture in rural Ireland are also subsumed within a politically safe fantasy.

Otherworldly Advertisement

This is neatly exemplified in the design of Fáilte Ireland's *Otherworldly* video advertisement, which opens with a wide cinematic shot of a sunset dropping behind an island, while an "alien" language begins to describe "the earth planet". As the voice narrates, subtitles in a fictional language flash across the bottom of the screen, before the subtitles change into Irish then English. The scene cuts to a snowy mountain range and to several sites along The Wild Atlantic Way trail, including

Skellig Michael. The advertisement ends on a shot of a cliff face, with strange blue alien growths erupting from it, but not before the alien narrator has informed the viewer that the "Wild Atlantic Way" is the "perfected [sic] galactic escape" and that the "culture is uniquely [sic] from rest of planet". The advertisement features a huge array of ecological sites in less than one minute of screen time, encompassing coastal areas, mountains, and agricultural land. Each of these landscapes shares a common feature: they give the appearance of an utterly uninhabited country. It is not the lack of human figures in these adverts alone that gives this impression, but the fact that aside from a brief shot of field systems the only man-made sites in the whole presentation are two small cottages, surrounded by vast open landscapes. The visualisation invites the question of who might be a proponent or practitioner of the "unique culture" that Fáilte Ireland is advertising. It is not the unique culture of the West of Ireland (which is as diverse as its landscapes) which is being advertised, but instead the opportunity for the tourist to engage in a psycho-geographic dialogue with, and experience of, the landscape, where primitive "empty" spaces are sold based on offering a blank slate for a preconceived notion of Otherness, frontier inhabitation, and conquest. This representational approach recalls Chaudhuri's concept of "the problem of place and place as problem" (1997, 55). Just as fantasy and science fiction literature can offer the reader or viewer a depoliticised representation of place, Fáilte Ireland's representation of the West as a primitive, empty space allows the viewer to consider a place as being without the politics of people, in particular a postcolonial people.

This is where the dissonance between the "organic culture" which Johnson notes and the approach taken by Fáilte Ireland is most evident. The empty spaces advertised by Fáilte Ireland are intimately connected to colonial occupation and the dramatic shifts in population and settlement patterns which occurred across Ireland, though particularly in the West, in the nineteenth century. Writing on population patterns in the wake of The Great Famine Arlene Crampsie observes: "By 1851, a quarter of all farm holdings had been abandoned. In the immediate post-famine decades, landlords [engaged] in policies of land consolidation and clearance, which created larger, more viable farm sizes" (2017, 139). The outward migration and rising mortality, particularly in the West of the country, caused a reconfiguration of zones of agricultural activity in many sections of these areas, as abandoned land was absorbed into larger estates and frequently converted into parkland, all in line with either procreational agricultural ideals of land use or fetishised romantic ideals of landscape. The combination of these factors permanently altered settlement patterns, agriculture practices, and ecological structures across Ireland. The ecological spaces which had formerly been sites where subsistence living was eked out under a colonial administration now became pleasure gardens for new populations of wealthy colonising proprietors.

In the Otherworldly advert ecologies are presented as hierarchical spaces where a specific human experience of place is the dominant experiential relationship. This conception of space does not foster a reading of ecologies which account for human subjugation and suffering nor do they accept humanity as part of a wider interconnected system, but rather as separate and exclusive: not part of nature but a

visitor to nature. This conception stems from a complex interplay of cultural, sociological and environmental changes across thousands of years, but can be understood as intimately connected to Judeo-Christian concepts of mastery over nature (White, 1967). That is an ecology that is given to humans by a supernatural being to serve their needs "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purpose" (White 1967, 1205). Humans are not connected to ecology within this conceptual framework but are set apart from it. Lynn White notes that this exceptionalism is demonstrated by the biblical narrative of Adam naming the animals in the garden of Eden and consequently displaying his mastery over them. The impact of this conception of the world also serves to establish a narrative of linear progress through time, which is distinct and separate from 'nature'. White notes that Greco-Roman mythology and Aristotelean concepts of time precluded the idea of a definitive starting point for the world, given the centrality of cyclical time to thought in the ancient West. Christianity by contrast offered "a concept of time as [non-repetitive] and linear" (White 1967, 1205) as well as a fixed creation narrative, which saw the world created by an all-powerful being in stages, and a definitive point from which society and nature could be seen to progress. This relationship to time is central to philosophical movements in Western culture, among them dominant schools of thought such as humanism. The concepts of reification and human exceptionalism which these ideas engender serve to provide some context as to the dominance of this relationship to ecology across human culture, where nature is positioned as a resource to be exploited and the human as the rightful exploiter. This conception of ecology as a series of resources to be used as opposed to a series of interconnected systems of which humans are part, is ideologically foundational to

not only the global ecological crisis but also to justify the acquisition and repurposing of land through colonisation. If the inhabitants of a prospective colony could be sufficiently othered, with the same ideological approach taken as with hierarchical relationships to flora and fauna, then the "resources" of a given colony could be effectively reified and exploited.

The Politics of Science-Fiction

The use of the ecologies of the west of Ireland by the State in their tourism initiatives, both in their own manipulation and in their subsequent facilitation of the work of the Disney corporation, mimics this pattern of reification and control. The West of Ireland frontier has been reimagined for the twenty-first century. Kitchin and Kneale write:

> No matter how weird, new or unexpected, the spaces and places of science fiction are always realized through the conventional world-views of implied reader-writer communities. Off-world narrative adventures are always grounded in familiar geographies, just as those geographies are in turn always partly the product of familiar narratives, shared ways of describing, and rhetorical conventions. (2005, 156)

In the twenty-first century, the ecology of Ireland continues to be configured as a place of imagined ecologies where the viewer is encouraged to relate to these ecologies as otherworldly landscapes rather than as living ecosystems. "Visitors" are encouraged to exploit and enjoy the landscape as a product, divorced from its contemporary socio-economic realities. Writing on Board Fáilte's approach to tourism marketing and the presentation of rural Ireland in the 1990s, Nuala C.

Johnson suggests that this particular approach — one which discards timelines and local specificity in favour of a sweeping "thematic" relationship to place — suggests that "concomitant with depictions which evoke 'empty space', tourist literature similarly conveys Ireland as occupying 'empty time'" (1999, 191). This elision of timelines is synonymous with the elision of history. If place is divorced from time, it allows for a destabilisation of chronology. This ensures that ecologies can be perceived outside of their relationship to time and thus outside any relationship to history. This approach is employed in the post-*Star Wars* marketing of Skellig Michael, which suggests that Ireland can be anywhere at any time. This is a quality which Johnson suggests is part of a colonial conception of Ireland instituted in part by the travel writers of the nineteenth-century whose writings convey a sense of "time being ordered differently in Ireland, running counter to the "chronocracy" of Western conceptions of time" (1999, 192). In the context of *Star Wars* and Skellig Michael this destabilisation of chronological time in favour of a thematic relationship to the product of a multinational corporation, speaks to the enduring legacy of these ideas, as well as their renewed efficacy and currency in a neocolonial context.

Studios are eager to film in locations such as New Zealand and Ireland (both north and south) because, in spite of the lack of a significant filmmaking infrastructure (compared to mainland Britain and the United States) in those regions, these countries can provide cheap skilled labour and seductive tax incentives. There is also a benefit to the governments of these countries, as the iconography and narratives of these productions become a means of occluding real socio-economic issues on a

world stage by breaking down the psychogeographic fabric of a country and repackaging it as a fantastical space "where today is like yesterday and yesterday is like tomorrow" (Johnson 1999, 192). The presentation of Skellig Michael in both the *Star Wars* films and in subsequent Fáilte Ireland marketing of the site present it both diegetically and extra diegetically as a place where nature exists in a state of harmony, a wilderness at the edge of the Atlantic where birds are free and safe to nest among the remains of an ancient monastic site. This representation of the site, neatly disguises the environmental and political realities of Skellig Michael. It is a site where its populations of endangered birdlife are increasingly threatened not only by visitor numbers as a result of the *Star Wars* franchise, but also by the failure of successive governments to make meaningful progress in tackling the worsening environmental crisis. The most recent report on Skellig from the National Parks and Wildlife Service found that the Kittiwake population, observed to be in decline both on the island and nationally, is most likely falling victim to the effects of climate change (Tierney 2024, 25). However, the image of a green, spired island in the middle of the sea surrounded by seabirds, has the power to allay fears of biodiversity loss in the popular consciousness. This particular representation of space is also in line with the goals of Fáilte Ireland "to structure the Irish past, not around chronological time but around 'themed spaces'" (Johnson 1999, 193) which can be neatly packaged as discreet experiential products. This process of psychogeographic and chronological restructuring also aligns itself with the motives of multinational production studios. There is no obligation for these studios to provide compensation to communities for the long-term impacts of film production in a given place. Communities are instead implicitly and explicitly encouraged to "capitalise" on the

association with a cultural product, in the hopes that it will generate revenue, a further extension of the "visitor" and "host" relationship which has underpinned rural Ireland's ecology since the 1990s. In the case of Skellig Michael, TDs such as Jimmy Deenihan (former Minister for Arts) have argues that such schemes, monetary deals, and contractual arrangements are of massive economic benefit to the country and, in the case of *Star Wars*, to the local community. In reality, the Disney Corporation's use of Skellig Michael, an island under the mandatory care of the State, amounts to little more than the building of a State-funded theme park on a site of massive ecological and cultural significance.

Conclusion

In their analysis of the ecological impact of *The Force Awakens* on Skellig Michael, Allen and Lennon observe that:

> Interviewees directly involved with the management of visitors to the island relayed stories of *Star Wars* fans trespassing off the standard walking paths into ecologically sensitive areas when attempting to recreate scenes from *The Force Awakens*. As noted by one member of the island's management staff "There's plenty of data to show that the island can't sustain such a project [Star Wars filming] and also that it can't sustain the promotion that would follow such a project". (2018, 486)

Nkrumah argues that "Neocolonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress" (1965, 5). To date, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* has grossed over $2 billion. Skellig Michael which has begun to deteriorate as a result of its use in the films and the State has received no

compensation for damages or provisions towards repair. Nor has the National Parks Service received recompense towards helping the injured seabird populations. Nor has the local population of Ballinskelligs, which catered to the production crew and personnel, received any share of the profits. Just as in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Northern Ireland, Ballinskelligs locals have been left to their own devices to attempt to generate sustained profit from a transient cultural event; a fact that throws the pre-existing and agreed revenue generation arrangements into utter disarray.

In his analysis of the Porgs of *Star Wars*, Spencer Keralis makes a poignant observation regarding the scene wherein the fictional birds observe one of their flock being roasted and eaten by Chewbacca, one of the film's more humanoid protagonists. He writes:

> There is no more radical othering than to be rendered as meat. Chewbacca's apparent shame [at being observed eating the bird] notwithstanding, we do not see him discard his meal. Rather he turns away from the gaze of the Porg, avoiding the intended affect of pity or remorse. Cuteness is no defence against radical othering in the absence of other forms of agency. And the Porgs' infestation of the Millennium Falcon is likewise not an effective act of resistance. Rather it becomes akin to a diaspora population - totally dependent on those who control their lived environment and ultimately, as we see with the Porgs' reaction to Chewie's piloting during battle, complicit in the violence of the dominant species. (2019, 4)

By its nature, tourism requires a commodification and an othering of the host country. More often than not, the scales are tipped in favour of this othering by the lure of the potential revenue it might generate. When an ecological space is reimagined as a "fantasy" space, as has become the case with Aotearoa/New Zealand, Northern Ireland and now, Skellig Michael, this risks not only occluding

the postcolonial legacy of these regions by instating a new neocolonial system of psychogeographic interpretation but also risks endangering the ecologies of these spaces. If sites such as Skellig Michael are understood by visitors as film sets, they cannot be appreciated for what they are, sites of enormous ecological significance that are increasingly imperilled by human action and inaction.

Chapter Two

Fáilte Ireland, The Picturesque, and the Aesthetics of Colonialism

Introduction

In her analysis of the relationship between Ireland and the Picturesque, Finola O'Kane argues that Ireland's ecologies were instrumental in the development and definition of an identifiable aesthetic movement. Questions about and writings on the Irish landscape were essential in "formulating a way of seeing which had a profound influence on the architecture, landscape design, conservation theory, leisure practise and tourism of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland" (O'Kane, 2012, 3). By its reification of ecological spaces, the Picturesque has from its inception carried latent potential for commercial profit-bearing attraction and reproduction. The Picturesque continues to proliferate in representations of Ireland's ecologies and is best disclosed in Irish tourism policy and advertising, particularly in relation to Fáilte Ireland's marketing of the "Wild Atlantic Way". The social and

ecological effects of this approach are wide-ranging but are most usefully understood as part of a colonial and, later neocolonial, relationship to people and place wherein the process of looking at ecologies is never neutral, always hierarchical. Furthermore, this hierarchical looking frequently manifests in patriarchal representations of and discourses around the spaces represented. As Ann Bermingham argues:

> As a connoisseur of Picturesque, a man could confirm his masculinity by displaying his specialized knowledge of painting, aesthetics, landscape, and nature, and satisfy his connoisseur's love of looking by anaesthetising and secularizing women and impotent feminized Others – the poor, the old, the dilapidated – through a process of detached picturesque viewing. (2010, 93)

The Picturesque was knowingly constructed within a classist, colonial and patriarchal hegemony. Regeneration, reuse and reiteration of the Picturesque serves patriarchal and colonial systems serve to further endorse and support its ideological purpose. As O'Kane notes, the "conquering eye may bear some comparison to the [Picturesque] touring eye as both are constantly in motion and engaged in the continuous evaluation of the environment through which they pass" (2012, 6). This chapter understands the Picturesque as inherently colonial and closely linked with a possession of Ireland's ecologies. It charts the development of colonial Picturesque aesthetics and their centrality to Western colonial projects. Further to this, there is a correlation between the "touring eye", which O'Kane identifies, and the neocolonial process. Kwamé Nkrumah has argues that in a neocolonial context: "The young countries are still the providers of raw materials, the old of manufactured goods. The change in the economic relationship between the new sovereign states and the

erstwhile masters is only one of form" (1965, 34). This chapter will demonstrate how Picturesque aesthetics and ideologies have been reappropriated in a neocolonial context in Fáilte Ireland's advertising campaigns, and it will identify the effects of this on Ireland's culture, economy, and ecology. The re-application of Picturesque aesthetics in Fáilte Ireland's advertising relies on indigenous raw materials (Ireland's rural ecologies), but it is the colonial ideologies of the Picturesque and its endurance which manufacture the product (the "touring eye") and Ireland as an eco-tourism destination.

The Picturesque as Colonial Tool

Picturesque theories developed in the eighteenth century as part of the broader cultural phenomenon of Romanticism. The theoretical development of the Picturesque was spearheaded by several writers and theorists, most notably William Gilpin, an English artist, Church of England clergyman, and travel writer. He wrote extensively on the merits of Ireland as a Picturesque location. Gilpin used the vistas he observed in Ireland as demonstrative examples of an ideal Picturesque image. Notions of the Picturesque were widely adopted across Europe and beyond throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and it is noteworthy that an aesthetic movement so intimately connected to a specific *kind* of landscape should have such universal appeal and application.

To render a space Picturesque was to acknowledge not merely a "state of nature" (Gilpin, quoted in O'Kane 2012, 18) but a state of nature that was distinctly European in its context and appeal. The Picturesque edges of the empire are the

"state of nature" permitted within the coloniser's broader hegemonic value system. They serve as a pressure valve for the centre and they are a place of permissible wildness and romance where transgression is safely contained within the conservative parameters of Picturesque ideologies. These wild edges do not destabilise or threaten the centre of the Empire, rather they strengthen, define, and justify its existence by the ability of the colonial administrations to contain and control them. They are a vital component in a dichotomy which, as Nadel-Klein has argues

> is not a simple complementary opposition but duality that is inherently hierarchical. It tends to reify the concept of the social margin or periphery in terms of geography, class and the bourgeois bureaucratic value of social efficiency. In doing so, it lends itself to employment in the administration of power (1996, 126).

By representing a given ecology through the codes and conventions of the Picturesque, it is subsumed within a newly constructed discursive geography of empire, where the economic, political, and social materialities of the place are rendered Picturesque and the inherent threat that these marginal spaces (as the less-governed or unstable edge of the colony) pose is contained and neutralised through abstraction. As the dominant aesthetic approach to representing landscape in Europe at that time, the discursive Picturesque facilitates the representation of colonies as European. This became a process of Occidental reimagining which transformed the margins of European empires from places of conflict to places of acceptable wilderness, reliably under colonial control. To understand the process of Occidentalisation in the Irish colony and neocolonial state, it is worth considering a

case study which demonstrates the traumatic nature of this process and the effectiveness of the Picturesque as a tool for enacting colonial violence. As an echo of the same process at a distance, the transatlantic case of the Hudson River School can shed light on the ideological situation of Ireland and its relation to the Picturesque, both in the past and in the present day.

The Picturesque and The Hudson River School

Gilpin's influence can be perceived in the works produced by the Hudson River School. The collective was a group of nineteenth-century American artists whose work focused primarily on representations of the Hudson River Valley in New York. Elizabeth Kornhauser notes that, among others, the writings of Gilpin "informed [the group's] ideas on the basic categories of the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque" (2003, 3). The name "Hudson River School" was applied to the group retrospectively, after the movement's decline in popularity. The moniker was intended to be derogatory, with the specific geographic link to the Hudson River stressing the provincial and by that inference, dated, quality of the works. Despite the derisory intention behind the term, it usefully highlights the group's fascination with America's ecologies. This fascination was an integral quality of the works, which had seen the school's "vision of American nature [prevail] from 1825 and [into] the middle years of the century" (Ferber, *GilderLehrman.Org*). This fascination with landscape and its relationship to socio-cultural identity was heavily informed by a white, landowning class. Kornhauser states that the interest in landscape art was predominant among a Northeastern elite, who "turned to England as a cultural model and were educated in the contemporary theories of English

landscape aesthetics" (2003, 3). These aesthetics were developed by Gilpin and his contemporaries, such as Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, who drew on the vistas they encountered in colonial Ireland as exemplars of the Picturesque. The aesthetics of the Picturesque, carried the anxieties and desires of the coloniser. The Picturesque informs us how the margins of the empire were reimagined by the coloniser. Picturesque landscapes present ecologies replete with natural resources (water, trees, and space which can be converted for alternative uses) but offer them to the viewer as wild and untamed. They derive their aesthetic exigency from presenting nature in a state of purity, which exists beyond or outside of human influence. What is absent from the images is equally informative. There is a distinct absence of socio-economic, cultural, and human influence within the Picturesque. This absence is indicative of an attempt to elide or efface geopolitical tensions in the region in favour of "pure" nature. It should also be noted that the process of Occidentalisation, had a number of steps.

1. Identify the zone needing containment within the discursive Picturesque;
2. Simultaneously (a) establish the expert; (b) establish an experts terminology; (c) Use this terminology to describe the Picturesque;
3. Create a discursive space along dialectical lines: As these steps happen the place comes to define the Picturesque as the Picturesque defines the place;
4. Develop the discourses (of hierarchy and power) around the newly rendered-as-Picturesque spaces, and write of them in specific ways;
5. Map these onto the colonial project (in both ideological and abstract terms);
6. Use all of the above to justify the subjugation of the colonial subjects and their space.

The process outlined above can be observed in the production of, and cultural relationship, to the Hudson River School's works.

The group's landscapes are characterised by their realistic, detailed, and frequently idealised portrayal of nature, often juxtaposing peaceful agriculture with wilderness. The peak of the School's popularity coincided with the height of what contemporary commenters described as 'the Frontier', marking the rapid American colonial expansion westward. This westward expansion saw the genocide and violent removal of Native American peoples from their lands. The Mohican and Musnee peoples of the Hudson River Valley had already been forced to relocate by the time the School began painting their former territory. The violence of this forced removal was quite considerably anaesthetised by being neutralised and justified in the works. Thus the paintings dictated a specific narrative, wherein Native Americans are seen to have been:

> so fully integrated into the wilderness scenery that they seem one and the same. To justify their claim to this vast landscape, artists and the American public romanticised the Indigenous presence while eliminating all signs of the Native Americans' actual relationship with the land. They appear in northeastern scenery as symbols of the original purity of God's wilderness; and later, as they are encountered in the western territories, they are documented with a sense of urgency that forecasts their threatened extinction. (Kornhauser 2003, 6)

The Picturesque converts historic and contemporary violence into a distorted romanticism where cultures and contexts were seen to have been tamed, and brought into the hegemonic discourse of the coloniser. The Picturesque presented a

"wildness" that thus could be safely observed, and with which outsiders could interact. This served to remove guilt and justify the carnage of the colonial project by presenting its material impact on colonised peoples and ecologies (discursively constructed as wild) as elements of its romantic appeal. As such the very ideological structures of the propagandist Picturesque did not follow the colonial domination of peoples and the ecology - they were the mechanism that rendered it possible, acceptable, and 'natural'. From a postcolonial context, the works of the School are inseparable from the violence of America's colonisation and could be considered its cultural counterpart. The artists created beautiful, rugged landscapes devoid of unrest, promoting this narrative to a white American elite who stood to benefit from the colonial project and were also culturally invested in displaying its magnificence (and moral justifiability) on the walls of their illegitimately acquired properties. Kornhauser notes that this was part of a wider national process of creating "local associations" (2003, 9) to American ecologies for colonists who were keenly aware of their recent arrival to the continent, in comparison to the peoples, flora, and fauna whom they were displacing. The group's artistic products depict the colonised spaces of the Catskills, the Adirondacks, and the Hudson River Valley as pastoral fantasies, devoid of their socio-historical and contemporary contexts, ripe for exploitation. The process of the American elite's creating local associations was also taking place in Ireland where, as Slater notes, "The picturesque was a cultural attribute of the landed elite" (2007, 242). In a process which mirrors the American colonial project, the Irish counterpart saw groups of Irish people removed from land which the coloniser considered to have Picturesque value. Ultimately this resulted in "the detaching of the local population from […] picturesque-defined locations […] for

'high' cultural reasons, the actual consequence for the native Irish was the creation of a 'no-go' area within their own ancestral lands" (Slater 2007, 238).

This local fascination is also demonstrated in the artistic process of The Hudson River School, which often drew on preliminary oil sketches made during hiking excursions to the Valley (and later the Catskills and Adirondacks). This *plein–air* approach is noteworthy as it further contextualises and situates the artists' choice of subject matter. It is here that the "touring eye" can be observed at work. O'Kane argues that tourism "is also a stage in the appropriation and colonisation of territory" (2012, 2). And so there was a double articulation at work in each of the School's paintings, as the act of appropriation simultaneously conferred ownership of the landscape as well as a depiction of the landscape itself. The popularity of the School's works among the American elite was bolstered by this same ideological relationship to tourism. Kornhauser observes the popularity of "travel guides, travel literature, treatises on aesthetics and tourism" in the eighteenth century (2003, 3) among this elite demographic, and noted how these guides served to shape authoritative looking processes. The influence of Gilpin and the Picturesque aesthetics he developed is again relevant here. "William Gilpin and others, taught people how to be tourists, and the correct appreciation of the landscape scenes became at least as important as the landscapes themselves" (O'Kane 2012, 9). The attitudes expounded by Gilpin and his contemporaries came to dominate elitist thinking about nature but also served in creating this elite through a bestowing of a status of expertise. This is usefully informed by the colonial context of Gilpin and his contemporaries' work. They were English theorists writing about colonised

ecologies and communities who, typically for that hegemonic domination, disregarded the subjugated or dissenting colonial context of their subjects. O'Kane notes "the artificial construction of picturesque routes and tours where the view or image became more important than the reality it depicted" (O'Kane 2012, 19). These routes circumvented areas where colonial violence would be otherwise obvious to the observer in favour of areas of Picturesque beauty. The Picturesque became a means of controlling the perception of a country and creating a comforting image of stability by occluding the mechanisms of colonisation. This process is empowered by a relationship to ecology which is hierarchical and regards the human look (and some human looks more so than others) as dominant in the landscape. As such the Hudson River School performed a key ideological role in cementing public perception of America as a Western (Occidental) nation and ultimately their form and content were deeply conservative and endorsed a utopian idealism that offered no threat – implicit or explicit – to colonial advancement.

The Politics of the Picturesque

This hierarchal relationship to ecologies can be usefully informed by an understanding of what Gilpin and his contemporaries imagined to be the ideal purpose of nature. Stephen Bending highlights Gilpin's reflections on contemporary English garden design. Gilpin disliked the embellishment and improvements made to gardens of stately homes and objected to them on grounds of inauthenticity. Bending argues that Gilpin's writing on gardens expresses a "desire for landscape as a cue for imaginative reverie" (2017, 585). In his analysis of Gilpin's visits to Park Place, the Berkshire estate of General Henry Seymour Conway, Bending showed that Gilpin's

reaction to a manufactured landscape was something he considered "vile" and "absurd". Gilpin's putative desire for simple and unadorned nature and his ostensibly apolitical abstraction of landscape can however be problematised. Gilpin's writings reveal a specific moral and social relationship to landscape improvement and ownership, heavily influenced by a Christian doctrine, stressing the central importance of hierarchy and control.

Stephen Copley notes that despite Gilpin's attempts to efface "economic activity entirely from the landscape" (2010, 48) in his writings, there are instances where he does highlight economic activity. Gilpin as "a clergyman with a developed sense of his social and moral duties and obligations" (Copley 2010, 51) was most at ease with sites of economic activity that aligned with these morals. Copley notes that on a visit to the Lake District, Gilpin was impressed by what he perceived as the simplicity of life there. Of the inhabitants, he praised "their isolation from the contaminations of luxury, and specifically […] their distance from the roads which would bring trade and allow the development of a taste for luxury goods" (Copley 2010, 55). Gilpin's comments highlight an uneasiness towards human intervention in nature or, more specifically, interventions that would disrupt Picturesque conceptions and representations of space by virtue of their highlighting socioeconomic and cultural materialities. As such, Ireland became an ideal site of experimentation for Gilpin; its status as a colonised nation had left rural areas of the country (the very areas Gilpin was interested in cataloguing and engaging with) impoverished and underdeveloped. In Gilpin's view, the Picturesque could not be the product of human involvement, although a cottage might improve a landscape a little under certain conditions, he

viewed agricultural spaces to be "barren" (Gilpin, quoted in O'Kane 2012, 13) in the sense that organised and productive field systems, in his view, afforded little by way of aesthetic value. O'Kane notes that Gilpin was drawn to Irish and Scottish landscapes because he perceived them as "clear examples of countries in 'a state of nature'". This is a reading of space that is intimately and inherently linked to questions of power. O'Kane writes:

> The underlying dialectic is that between the concept of improvement and that of the Picturesque, which attempted to divorce landscape appreciation from the landscape's utility and associated material value to its inhabitants. Improvement, and the question of who was obliged to improve and when was not a straightforward subject. What defined Ireland, and in particular sometimes justified her colonisation was her evident lack of improving herself before her coloniser's arrival. (2012, 19)

This "lack of improvement" was, as O'Kane observes, also noted by Gilpin's contemporaries. In 1756 Charles Smith wrote that the Irish did not "plant either gardens or orchards, inclose [*sic*] or improve their land, live together in settled villages or towns or make any provision for posterity" (Smith, quoted in O'Kane 2012, 20). O'Kane notes that Smith attributed this lack of improvement to "strange inheritance traditions, involving gavelkind rather than primogeniture" (*ibidem*). What justified Ireland's colonisation is closely linked to its Picturesque potential. The choice by Gilpin and his contemporaries to read the absence of what they understood to be an "improvement" of the land did not engender a political reading of the space, which would only read this lack of improvement as symptomatic of political and social unrest. Instead, it justified an abstracted relationship to the materialities of that space. The Picturesque relies on a degree of separation between

the subject and the observer. The economic, social, cultural, or political meanings of a place are elided in favour of an imagined aesthetic 'purity'. This elision facilitates a reading of place that could usefully remove uncomfortable power disparities from view. This became a convenient tool in the colonial project both in America and Ireland; one that enabled a representation of colonised nations that were firmly under the control of their administrations by virtue of a lack of dissent and, in many instances, a perceived lack of dissenters. These same Picturesque aesthetics, developed using Ireland as a model and exported to America by English theorists, continue to dominate aesthetic presentations of rural Ireland in the global tourism market. Such approaches remained highly effective in creating idealised images of Ireland and subsequently have been adopted by the Irish state as a means of selling a Picturesque vision of the country. State tourism bodies have eagerly adopted the aesthetics of the Picturesque. We might attribute this willingness to reinvigorate a colonial aesthetic movement in a postcolonial nation as the prioritising of revenue generation over any sustained critical engagement with the nation's postcolonial identity. It is far easier to sell a vision of the Picturesque which has become a global shorthand for "escape" and abstraction from labour and retreat to the safe margins of economic and political hegemony, than it is to market socioeconomic realities to a potential tourist. The intervening centuries since the development of these theories however have seen a deterioration of Irish ecologies, so much, that the Picturesque abstraction developed by eighteenth and nineteenth-century theorists and facilitated and endorsed by the state now carries the potential of devastating damage to rural communities and ecologies. The re-appropriation of Picturesque aesthetics in Fáilte Ireland's advertising relies on Indigenous raw

materials (Ireland's rural ecologies), but it is the colonial ideologies of the Picturesque and its endurance, which continue to manufacture the product, (the "touring eye") and Ireland as an eco-tourism destination. In a contemporary Irish context the discourse of visual authority is transferred onto the eye of the tourist. The tourist purchases this position of empowered looking from the picturesque theorists of the eighteenth century, by Fáilte Ireland commodifying the process of Picturesque looking.

The Wild Atlantic Way

The Wild Atlantic Way is a tourist trail in the west and in parts of the north and south coast of Ireland. The 2,500 km driving route passes through nine counties and three provinces, stretching from County Donegal's Inishowen Peninsula in Ulster to Kinsale, County Cork, in Munster, on the Celtic Sea coast. The initiative was launched in 2014. The route had been well trodden for decades — however this new incarnation marked a kind of upgrading of the entity, with a coherent identity and marketing. The tourist route has been described as "one of the great successes of modern Irish tourism." (Daly, 2024) and "has helped breathe a fresh lease of tourism life along previously overlooked towns and villages." (Daly, 2018) Fáilte Ireland describes the initiative and the areas it includes as follows:

> The Wild Atlantic Way route from start to finish unfolds the wonders of nature, the power of the ocean and its imprint on the west coast of Ireland, and the stunning countryside in all its diversity. Enchanting villages are nestled along the coast as well as ancient monuments – their origins having long sunk into the mists of oblivion dot the landscape. Behind every bend on this magical coastal road a new delight awaits. (*Welcome to the Wild Atlantic Way,* WildAtlanticWay.com)

The language used to describe the route is redolent of Picturesque travel guides, which typically juxtapose impressive ecological sites as a counterpoint to romantic ruins. Digital advertising of the initiative however is deeply entrenched within the Picturesque tradition a fact borne out by a close analytical reading of some of their most prominent marketing campaigns.

Advert Case Study 1: Fáilte Ireland — Wild Atlantic Way

Reelgood Productions' *Fáilte Island — Wild Atlantic Way* advert opens with shots of the coastline, crashing waves, sunrise over an inlet, and ponies trotting across a cliff while a voice intones "rugged, wild, untamed." It frames a large wave rolling in, while the narrator describes the scene as "the place where land and sea collide. This is Ireland's last frontier against a marauding Atlantic." This vaguely antagonistic language stresses a constant battle between humans and nature, and it is repeated throughout the advert. We are told that the West is shaped by "the invading sea" and "the defiant land that battles it." This description is in keeping with the "wildness" of nature as described in Picturesque and romantic traditions of representing Ireland. In their travel guide to Ireland written in the 1840s, Mr and Mrs Samuel Carter Hall[4] for example describe a visit to Crampton Estate at Lough Bray, where they write:

> The wall that surrounds these grounds is not, in some places as high as the bank of peat within a few feet of it, and the contrast between the neglect, the desolation, the barrenness that reigns without, and the beauty within, is very striking, exhibiting the

[4] The Carter Halls were popular travel writers of the period who visited Ireland several times in the 1840s and published travelogues of their expeditions "to induce visits to Ireland, especially from mainland Britain" (Slater, 2007, 232).

> mastery which science and civilization hold over nature even in her sternest and most rugged domain. (Mr and Mrs Samuel Carter Hall, quoted in Slater 2007, 236)

Eamon Slater argues that the "spatial contrast between 'the neglect and the barrenness' of the bog outside the walls with the 'order and cultivation' of the garden within is further conceptualised in the aesthetic dualism of the beautiful and the sublime" (2007, 236). In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and* Beautiful, Edmund Burke posits that "terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close" (1757, 4). Burke argues that the Sublime is felt in the presence of the possibility of destruction, and especially human destruction by greater than human forces. This awe at the possibility of destruction is reflected in the push and pull between order and cultivation that Slater recognises in the Carter Hall's writings. The contrast between order and disorder was central to the Picturesque, creating an inherently hierarchical duality (Nadel-Klein 1996, 126) and enshrining the spaces of wilderness or aesthetic purity as the safe fringes of hegemonic culture. As Luke Gibbons argues there "is an assumption that romanticism is precluded from dealing with misery, suffering and horror, from attending to the dark side of the landscape. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth" (1987, 196). By including the indomitability of nature and man's struggle against it in a romantic image, the possibility is given credence and the romance of the image is heightened by its Picturesque context, what Gibbons identifies as "the urge to embellish and beautify even the most disturbing and intolerable aspects of reality" (1987, 197).

The advert moves on to highlight more coastal sights including the Dun Briste Sea Stack and the narrator informs the viewer that “this is where you can journey along our nation’s soul. This is the Wild Atlantic Way” before a mournful violin melody starts up. Our first indication that there might be any human life in the region is a shot of a car, with surfboards mounted to the roof and two figures, filmed from a distance, walking away from it. Eventually, the advert cuts to a coastal town before returning to a clip of a traditional Irish music concert, while the voiceover describes the players as “the native Irish that enrich this unique region”. The words “wild” and “native” are frequently included in the script. For example, the statement; “wild, raw beauty is your constant companion” this is a particularly pointed description of both the people and the place. Nuala Johnson argues that “visual representations [tend to feature] Irish ‘natives’ as predominantly working in agriculture and implicitly suggest that an organic relationship between people and their natural environment is to be found in Ireland” (1999, 191). This link with nature serves to place Irish people firmly on the depoliticised “organic”, or wild side of the nature-culture axis.

The most illuminating term used in this advert is “wilderness”. The words “natural, rugged, wild, and wilderness” are keywords and the preserve of the Picturesque as they recall the “state of nature” in which Gilpin perceived Ireland as existing. This ideological framework posits humans as separate or estranged from nature and the Picturesque as a temporary or transient route “back to nature”, via aesthetic appreciation. This aesthetic appreciation itself also serves to entrench this perceived estrangement, by applying arbitrary values to ecological processes but also by the implication that there is a spiritual separation from nature which can be resolved by

the kind of mediated return to it facilitated by Picturesque looking. It is also worth noting that this perceived estrangement and separation from nature which Gilpin and the Picturesque movement more broadly cultivates, facilitates notions of "wilderness" by identifying permissible interactions with nature which are exceptional by their scarcity. The use of the word wild in Fáilte Ireland advertising can be understood as a commodification of nature as a dwindling resource.

The advert presents a series of images to the viewer: a fishing trawler at sunset, and a fisherman silhouetted against the sky and sea. The sun goes down behind a manor house followed by an image of a man wearing body paint and breathing fire. The narrator explains that "amidst this wilderness, the Irish have long worked and played". The advert then encourages the visitor to share in the natives' "creativity" (we see a potter in his studio), "their history" (we see a dolmen), and their "native Irish language" (three road signs are shown in both Irish and English). The advert then highlights the variety of water sports available to tourists along the west coast before noting the "independence" of the Irish people which is described as being "born of the land and sea". This section of the advert's narration is reminiscent of the Carter Halls' introduction to their 1853 guide *Handbooks for Ireland: Dublin and Wicklow* where they write:

> Those who require relaxation from labour, or may be advised to seek health under the influence of a mild climate, or search for sources of novel and rational amusement, or draw from a change of scene a stimulus to wholesome excitement, or covert acquaintance with the charms of nature, or wish to study a people full of original character—cannot project an excursion to any part of Europe that will

> afford a more ample recompense. (Mr and Mrs Samuel Carter Hall, quoted in Slater 2007, 232)

As Slater observes, the Carter Halls made their visits to Ireland at a time when the country was experiencing crushing poverty and deprivation under British colonial rule. He argues that the pair construct Ireland

> as a place of escape, where one can depart from the routines of British everyday life and engage with exotic peoples living in the natural environment […] evading the economic reality of mass poverty by encouraging their travelogue readers to see Ireland as a landscape picture. (2007, 232)

This same ideological process of escapism is at work in the Reelgood Productions advert. In this advert, the semantic openness of the language attempts a decontextualising of Ireland's broader historical narrative in favour of a safe yet exorcised 'other'. With this comes the socioeconomic and sociopolitical neutralisation of space already established as a modus operandi within Picturesque aesthetic conventions.

Advert Case Study 2: Wild Atlantic Way Trailer - Fáilte Ireland

The *Wild Atlantic Way 'Trailer'* advert, makes implicit reference to the presence of Irish cinema at the 2023 Oscars. The advert was released in early March of 2023 and the use of the term "trailer" as well as the parodying of trailer-esque terminology attempts to capitalise on the cultural moment. The advert begins with the phrase; "In a world… Where travel destinations are endless… One rises above all others". The advert also uses the term "featuring" as a means of introducing different sites along

the route, as though they were cast members. The advert cuts rapidly between shots of the coast (deserted apart from walkers admiring the view out to the horizon), people engaging in water-sports and a shot of two women; one playing the flute, the other playing the fiddle. It then cuts to two women dancing. Several shots used in the Reelgood Productions advert are used again here, including a shot of a dolphin jumping above the crest of a wave. In this case, however, with a gesture distinctly different from the previous advert, there is a more intimate quality to the shots. The camera hovers just over the shoulders of people as they laugh together, or look out to sea. There is also a sense that the Wild Atlantic Way is more peopled in this instance. We see a group sitting down to a meal in a restaurant, where they are not the only customers. The focus on groups continues as we see three people on horseback and a group of people surfing. The advert closes with a shot of five people arriving at a cliff top and looking out to sea. The advert is only a minute long and includes over two dozen locations in its runtime, but the connecting thread is the recurrent theme of rugged coastal sites, identical to those we see highlighted in the previous advert. This advert is unique in that it subverts a common trope in other advertising of the Wild Atlantic Way where the presence of human characters within the diegesis is typically limited or nonexistent. When human characters feature, it is in contexts that demonstrate the practice of traditional culture or sports activities which can be engaged in along the west coast (eg music, art, hiking, surfing or cycling). We should understand the human characters in these adverts as facilitating points of access for the viewer into the narrative. That human characters are depicted only in the pursuit of cultural engagement demonstrates where advertisers believe these points of access to be necessary and enticing. With the exception of the shot of a figure aboard a

fishing trawler (recycled from the Reelgood Productions advert) the relationship to place presented to the potential visitor is recreational. This is not unusual or unexpected in a tourism advert, but it is the context of leisure in a decidedly unpopulated space which aligns the advert with Picturesque ideals. The peopled representation in this case study allows for the personification of the "tourist gaze" or "visitor's eye" has been personified, just as the native and their geography have been reified and objectified, a space has been created for the insertion of the (formerly) absent, transcendent spectator who gradually "inhabits" the place. This is again, reminiscent of a process of the Picturesque restructuring and effacement carried out by the Carter Halls in their travelogues, where villages and towns (centres of industry and commerce) are mentioned only in passing, while *en route* to Picturesque locations. The Picturesque, it should be reiterated, was not there awaiting discovery by the Carter Halls or indeed by any of the theorists, artists or tourists who engaged with or promoted the movement. The Carter Halls and others were active agents in the contributions of its construction, maintenance, "rewriting", recording, and discursive representations across time that consolidated its semantics. Slater argues by "only identifying the picturesque locations of the landed estates, the Halls have filtered out of their travelogue account the working, productive aspects of those estates. In doing so, they foster the notion of the estate as a social space, omitting the presence of the peasantry within the landscape" (2007, 237). In the mode of Gilpin, Fáilte Ireland removes the presence of work, industry, and population from the landscape to present a version of the West in a Picturesque 'state of nature'. This state of nature can be accessed through wilderness and the ideological implications of this can be neatly revealed with recourse to the

etymology of the word wilderness, the first recorded use of the word can be traced back to

> c.1200. The word originally suggested wild or uncultivated land but early uses did not always preclude reference to a place in which one might take refuge. Later associations with "pure" or untouched nature, adventure or visions of the "noble savage," point to a complicated etymology. Small wonder that the word has provided settings for works by numerous artists and authors. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, physical "wilderness" was deemed worthy of preservation. It became a keyword in discussions on the orientation of national parks and remains rich in connotation today, whether in connection with land management or leisure, or indeed biodiversity or evolutionary biology. (*Environment and Society*)

The ideas of refuge, a lack of cultivation and the idea of aesthetic or environmental purity are all contained within the word and its attendant associations. What is of particular interest in this instance, that it is what the use of that word is intended to invoke. Contrary to contemporary social and cultural discourses around biodiversity and conservation, in the of Fáilte Ireland's advertising it instead seems to evoke, considerations of ecology which were central to Picturesque ideations of space but are inherently at odds with environmental care. The idea of a wilderness imagines a place which is maintained by its own internal ecological system, it is at a remove from human influence and as such environmental damage wrought by human activity. In the Anthropocene, no such place exists on Earth. To imagine a place as a wilderness is to both elide the reality of the global environmental crisis and to divest ourselves of of responsibility to care for these places and protect them from further deterioration.

Advert Case Study 3: Soaring Over the Wild Atlantic Way Advert

This advert features aerial footage of locations along the Wild Atlantic Way. The coast is a constant presence throughout the short video. Some wildlife is also present, including sheep climbing a hillside and a gull sweeping over the sea. Once again group activities are presented, but this time they are framed against wide open spaces. We see a shot of three people on bikes driving along a deserted beach with mountains in the background before the video cuts to a misty and deserted Cliffs of Moher. We see two boats from a distance, the vessels themselves are not distinct but we can see their wake. The commercial then cuts to a car driving along a deserted, winding coastal road. Water sports again make an appearance as we see four rowing groups, paddle-boarders, surfers, a kayaker, and a sailing boat all shot from above. This advert is more inclined towards cultural specificity with regards to manmade structures, featuring a Galway Hooker and Kylemore Abbey. The combined effect of this adverts' use of aerial views, wide shots, absence of diegetic sound, and minimal human presence within the *mise en scène*, is an affirmation of the central importance for potential visitors of the aesthetic qualities of the Wild Atlantic Way over its cultural or social value. The aerial cinematography used in this advert is reminiscent of the Carter Halls' writings on Wicklow:

> Wicklow is the garden of Ireland; its prominent feature is, indeed, sublimity — wild grandeur, healthful and refreshing; but among its high and bleak mountains there are numerous rich and fertile valleys, luxuriantly wooded and with the most romantic rivers running through them, forming in their course, an endless variety of cataracts. (Mr and Mrs Samuel Carter Hall quoted in Slater 2007, 233)

Slater argues that this description of Wicklow is not only charged with Picturesque imagery but also carries inherent power disparities within it. He argues that:

> The Hall's way of proceeding is to follow the description of the 'high and bleak mountains' with a description of the 'rich and fertile valleys'. The syntax is sequenced around the word 'after', and this syntactical structure of the passage is not only imitating a viewing process but also a downward glance. The Halls have 'placed' their readers in the position of a commanding vantage point, allowing them to 'see' a wide sweep of the landscape. (2007, 233)

While this particular advert co-opts newer technologies to achieve the "commanding vantage" Slater identifies in the Carter Halls' writings, the intended effect and the ideological outcome of the advert also serve to facilitate the same hierarchical, abstracted look which is a preserve of the Picturesque. The viewer experiences rural Ireland as a series of disconnected vignettes. Each of these vignettes has the specific purpose of engendering escapism and a relationship to a place that is abstracted not only from socioeconomic materialities but also from itself. There is a destabilisation of geographical actualities, these places form a new geography composed of Picturesque locations, connected by their adherence to those aesthetic signifiers, no longer separated by actual geographic space. The series of images presented are detached from their geographical and ecological context and instead are composed in a new Picturesque geography.

Advert Case Study 4: Top Experiences Along the Wild Atlantic Way

Top Experiences Along the Wild Atlantic Way highlights the six distinct "regions" of the tourist route. These regions are fabricated, in that they do not make reference to actual geographic spaces, but instead segment the west coast in terms of the different experiences it provides to the potential tourist. The aesthetics in *Top Experiences*

Along the Wild Atlantic Way are in keeping with what has already been established as emblematic of the regional brand. Where it differs is in its Picturesque re-imagining of the geography of the West. While the names of certain locations (i.e. Kylemore Abbey, Skellig Michael) are given, none of the counties where these sites exist is mentioned by name. Instead, the viewer and prospective customer are introduced to the Northern Headlands, The Surf Coast, The Bay Coast, The Cliff Coast, The Southern Peninsulas, and The Haven Coast. It begins with the 'Northern Headlands', where "incredible vistas and unforgettable history" are highlighted. Several shots of the coast are presented, including Fanad Head, before cutting to Glenveagh National Park. The advert quickly moves on to "The Surf Coast" with its "breathtaking surf and dramatic headlands". Shots of water sports and beaches are then presented, some of which are recycled from previous adverts. Ben Bulben and Dun Briste Sea Stack are highlighted as areas of interest. The advert moves on to "The Bay Coast" with "raw beauty and bohemian Galway city". The advert highlights Kylemore Abbey, Killary Fjord, Derrigimlagh Bog, and Galway City as sites of specific interest and intersperses shots of these sites with more shots of the coast. Eventually, it cuts to "The Cliff Coast" with "epic views and sky-high cliffs". Shots of Dunguaire Castle, Poulnabrone Dolmen, Loop Head, Burren National Park, and the Cliffs of Moher are again interspersed with shots of the coast. This section also highlights the Doolin Ferry to the Aran Islands. This is one of the few examples of labour presented in Fáilte Ireland's advertising. That this labour is performed in service of the visitor adds to the representation of Ireland, its people, and ecologies as existing to serve the Picturesque 'touring' eye. Next, we come to the "Southern Peninsulas" described as "five peninsulas at the World's edge". Dunquin and the Blasket Islands, Valentia

Island, Portmagee, Skellig Michael and Dursey Island. Bantry House and Mizen Head, are also emphasised. Finally, the advert introduces the "Haven Coast" with its "picturesque and perfect port towns" which open with a shot of a humpback whale surfacing. The advert then highlights Baltimore, Timoleague Abbey, The Old Head of Kinsale, and Kinsale Town. It is worth noting that this seamless journey through utterly separated spaces recalls the very first images of Ireland in narrative cinema, the Kalem Company Productions, which drew heavily on Picturesque conceptions of Irish ecologies in their *mise en scèn*e. As Eamon Slater observes, the "new visuality of the picturesque was not a passive activity; it was a process that involved reconstructing the landscape in the imagination according to the compositional principles of the picturesque" (2007, 234). The reimagined geography of this advert emphatically draws on the act of Picturesque looking, which necessitates a new Picturesque geography constructed from composite elements; themselves abstracted from sociocultural, historical and political contexts. This campaign mobilises Picturesque looking and tourism practices to veer away from cultural specificity. What is instead offered is the geography of commodity, of Picturesque pleasure. Slater argues that:

> This mediated relationship of the picturesque and its compositional principles had to be learned and were indeed learned so thoroughly that it became impossible for anyone with an aesthetic interest in landscape to look at the countryside without applying them, whether or not they knew they were doing so. (2007, 234)

The Picturesque, Time and Ecology

The Picturesque has become so deeply ingrained within a Western culture, specifically visual romanticism of our relationship to ecologies which is permanently altered by its influence. It retains and renews its cultural salience with each new iteration of Picturesque forms and with each revival of its techniques. It is this legacy which Fáilte Ireland draws upon in its Wild Atlantic Way campaign to present the west of Ireland as a Picturesque playground for the neocolonial tourist.

The legacy of the Picturesque is further evidenced in marketing guidelines for the Wild Atlantic Way laid out by Fáilte Ireland. An analysis of these recommendations issued for third-party collaborators reveals that, like Picturesque travel guides, emphasis is placed on landscape and antiquity, not people and communities. There is a passing reference to acknowledging residents of the West. The guidelines suggest that campaigns should consider how the landscape "has shaped the development of its people, communities and settlements, a landscape that has inspired its own particular language, literature, art, song and dance" (3rd Party Brand Usage Guidelines, *FailteIreland.ie,* 1). Furthermore "campaigns should also encourage the visitor to "explore the history of the Gaels and their religion" (*FailteIreland.ie*, 1). It is worth noting how this language begins tentatively to situate people within a historical context. The word "settlements" recurs throughout the document, and is typically used in lieu of the words "town" or "village" giving the distinct sense that what is being marketed is not just a pre-industrial space but something akin to an Iron Age territory. It suggests something archaic, something that deviates from modern conceptions of a community, suggesting instead an ancient tribal

community. This is not quite a depoliticisation or muting of socioeconomic realities, but is is nevertheless a very tightly regulated representation.

What the Wild Atlantic Way campaign offers, then, is the illusory ability to time-travel and to hold the people that one meets in this space at a distance from oneself preordained as relics of the past. O'Kane argues that "seeing landscape 'as a picture' removes the responsibility of seeing it from other perspectives. As a tourist one is absolved from trying to understand landscape as a native might" (2012, 2). By rendering a location Picturesque, a potential tourist is transformed into one whose experience is already being pre-established. The sights position, disempower, and set (cognitively) the prospective visiting viewer into a cognitive map of the location. This placement is manufactured through established codes and conventions of visualising (the angles for photos, the backdrops for performing against, the walkways to hold hands on, etc.) long before the tourist even arrives. As such, the exclusion of people or a rendering of them and their communities as somehow historical, more akin to museum exhibits, is connected to the tradition of Picturesque looking. It establishes the illusory experience of a reliving of the first colonial settler – the frontiersmen – coming as primal inhabitants to possess 'all he surveys'.

In the Fáilte Ireland *Third-party Interpretive Design Toolkit* it is advised that:

> A diverse range of images may be used. Sometimes it will be appropriate to use heritage images that provide a glimpse into a forgotten past; […] Where appropriate, you may use images of contemporary life, or of local people, that will help the visitor relate to the life and culture of that area (*Fáilteireland.ie*).

There are several indicators within the marketing guidelines that stress the need to orient the visitors focus towards the past, to have them experience the West as a place of antiquity. The description of people as "Gaels" and the use of the word "settlement" conjures a pre-modern culture.

In their *Third-party Interpretive Design Toolkit,* Fáilte Ireland states: "The words 'Wild Atlantic Way' are well known as indicating Fáilte Ireland and this tourist initiative. Fáilte Ireland has very significant unregistered or Common Law rights in the words 'Wild Atlantic Way'" (*Fáilteireland.ie*). This is more than a statement of copyright ownership. It espouses that the central capitalisation strategy of Fáilte Ireland and the Wild Atlantic Way Campaign which is the sale of a constructed notion of wilderness. Ecologically speaking there is nothing "wild" about the "Wild Atlantic Way": rather there is a notional "wildness" which is knowingly constructed to generate profit, in contravention of the ecological realities of that space. What Fáilte Ireland sells is a conservative form of wilderness. It does not threaten to destabilise Picturesque notions of place by highlighting the global climate and biodiversity crisis but rather sells the West of Ireland as an escape from a vaguely oppressive reality. The Wild Atlantic Way serves as a pressure valve for the neocolonial capitalist culture which constructs it.

Ireland's National Parks

Eco-tourism is the marketing and development of "relatively undisturbed" ecological areas based on promoting their aesthetic, cultural, and recreational value. The Wild

Atlantic Way's main appeal to visitors and what endows it with wildness is its perceived scenic quality. The route takes in five of Ireland's six national parks, however, the prevalence of national parks along the route is not directly referenced within the campaign's marketing. This might seem surprising, however, the formalised government-mandated nature of a national park undermines the qualities of western wildness that Fáilte Ireland aims to present. It is necessary to provide clarity on what constitutes a national park in Ireland.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service offer these definitions of the nature reserve:

> Where one or several ecosystems are not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation; where plant and animal species, geomorphological sites and habitats are of special scientific, educational, and recreational interest or which contain a natural landscape of great beauty; Where the highest competent authority of the country has taken steps to prevent or eliminate as soon as possible exploitation or occupation in the whole area and to enforce effectively the respect of ecological, geomorphological or aesthetic features which have led to its establishment. (*NPWS.ie)*

There is a widespread public perception of National Parks as havens for wildlife and there is some degree of evidence to support this. Wuerthner *et al.* note that "inclusion of habitat in protected areas has been shown to promote threatened species recovery

when little else does" (2015, 275).[5] In June of 2023, the Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service announced their Strategic Plan for 2023-2025 which "outlined a new organisational structure with a coordinated focus through six Directorates to deliver upon its mission to protect nature" (2023). In a statement, its Director General, Niall O'Donnchú said: "As a society we are at a tipping point in our relationship with nature. I am confident that the NPWS can be the lead agency of change in that engagement" (2023). The goals outlined in the Strategic Plan point to a commitment towards "excellence in nature conservation". There is specific reference made to the "support [of] nature protection through excellent EU and international engagement" (2023, 11).

Historically, Irish-EU relations on the topic of climate change and conservation have been fraught. The European Investment Bank has described Irish firms as "laggards" on climate change (Collins, 2024). Of the ten infringement cases brought against Ireland by the EU between 2022 and 2023 all of them have been environmental issues. While Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan, spoke publicly in June of 2023 of his approval for a nature restoration law reached by an EU Council "that would put in place recovery measures that would cover at least

[5] One recent example of the potential of National Parks to protect and promote wildlife is the case of Ireland's "White Tailed Eagle" breeding program. The birds had been native to the island but became extinct in the nineteenth century. In 2007 the NPWS began working with partners in Norway as well as with local farmers and communities to reintroduce the species. In August 2023, the ongoing program experienced a resounding success with the release of 24 white-tailed eagle chicks. According to NPWS records "a total of 171 white-tailed eagles have now been released through the program to date [and a] small, established population of eagles is now fledging chicks around the country and has even produced triplets." This project is part of a network of initiatives currently being undertaken by the NPWS to "protect endangered species in Ireland and prevent their decline." (Kelleher, 2023)

20% of the EU's land and 20% [of the EU's] sea areas by 2030" (Abnett, 2023), it was revealed in the same month "that Ireland is among a group of European Union countries that want to water down parts of the bloc's flagship nature law by adding loopholes to dodge certain targets" (Abnett 2023). Research published by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland found that "more than half of Ireland's native Irish plants have declined in range and abundance and non-native fauna now outnumbers the native plant life, 987 to 952. […] Many of the habitats Ireland's native plants depend on have been destroyed or changed through farming and forestry since the 1950s" (Lee, 2023). In the context of such rapid ecological deterioration, the number of National Parks in Ireland would seem to be highly encouraging, given their potential as wildlife havens. It should be noted, however, that in the Republic of Ireland, National Parks cover only 0.9% of the total land area. Among 41 other European states, Ireland has the fifth lowest Protected Area Connectedness Index Rating and is in the bottom 15% of European countries (BIP, 2019). This index uses terrestrial protected areas to measure the ecological diversity of a country and Ireland's rating is emphatically poor. Despite the high number of areas designated as ecosystems "not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation" both these zones and the land around them are heavily altered and affected negatively by human activity. In this context, Ireland's national parks are functioning less as zones of committed biodiversity management and environmental care, than as geographically suspended and separate islands, onto which the last of Ireland's native fauna and flora have gathered for safety, and which the State permits to exist only out of a begrudging adherence to international law. If the Picturesque represented the beginning of the "visualised" or "imagined" from the "real", then

this process has become all the more pervasive now. In this context, Fáilte Ireland's marketing approach is further problematised. It amounts to the use of generic, narrational, characterisational, tropes and formal devices – sweeping images of seascapes and coastlines and emotive non-diegetic music coalescing – to form a constructed geography of Ireland; one that on a completely imagined level exists in a state of nature. This cinematic approach to presenting Ireland's rural ecologies draws on cinematic techniques viewers' pre-existing positive associations with nature, which are mobilised and revised in a reconstruction of "Ireland as a location to visit" eliding and effacing the threats presented by the worsening biodiversity and ecological crises.

The Wild Atlantic Way: Local Contexts

The Wild Atlantic Way campaign has been hailed as a resounding success. However, using the Picturesque as a means of rural regeneration compounds pre-existing socio-economic issues in the region.

In their study of attitudes to the Wild Atlantic Way campaign, Hanrahan *et al*.observe that:

> 94% of people polled supported the development of the driving route […] citing the route's potential to 'generate revenue and produce employment along the route [and the] development of rural communities which look rundown and unattractive'. (2017, 518)

In a historically underdeveloped area of Ireland, which has been comparatively overlooked by employment and growth in industries based in the east, this response is hardly surprising. However, the team's research also reveals that there is a widespread lack of interest among communities in being actively involved with the Wild Atlantic Way: this is a cause for concern given that "one of the core elements of developing tourism is encouraging local community participation as it is central to the sustainability of any tourism agency" (Hanrahan *et al*. 2017, 519). An analysis by Pafi *et al*. of coastal development initiatives provides some context for this lack of community engagement. This group surveyed several tourists (categorised by their reasons for travelling to the Wild Atlantic Way) as well as locals along the route. They identify "conflictual forms of landscape valorisation" and note that:

> The success of the Wild Atlantic Way […] has intensified local resource pressures. Concurrently, the country's commitment to Blue Growth has framed the West Coast as a site for the development of the aquaculture and offshore renewable sectors. These policies potentially contradict the Wild Atlantic Way portrayal of the West Coast as a wild and unspoilt space and may lead to conflict between Blue Growth developers and coastal communities reliant on tourism. (2020, 11)

This Irish government's explicit indication that "the west is a site to do business" by signposting the Wild Atlantic Way as a location of value, is in direct conflict with the experiences of local communities and tourists. Pafi *et al*. note the cynicism and discontent of some visitors who site "the over-commercialisation of the coastal areas, especially Galway" (2020, 5) and "the caricature of Irishness" as a detraction from their experience; a sentiment shared by local communities. They also highlight

a level of ignorance – very much in the Picturesque tradition – displayed by tourists about the wilderness of the Wild Atlantic Way. Certain groups surveyed do not

> seem to identify signs of contestation on the coast [due to] a romantic perception that this type of tourism is in balance and harmony with nature, and by extension coastal landscapes. It could also be motivated by the most iconic representations of the west of Ireland, where dispersed developments dot the coast and hence, they are perceived as the equivalent of a "rural" and by extension "authentic" way of life. Their indifferent attitude to dispersed settlement patterns and how they reflect community choices and traditions is a case in point. (2022, 6)

Pafi *et al*. identify how the lack of community engagement and suitable infrastructure initiatives threaten the long-term stability of the campaign. These discontents are rooted in Picturesque ideations of space, and carry far-reaching ecological implications. The first potential consequence of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative, according to Pafi *et al*. is that the depiction of the West as wilderness curbs local industry and development outside of tourism. They argue that the EC's Blue Growth ambitions will industrialise the coast, especially through the expansion of aquaculture and wind farms, and deepen competition for resources and space, while new opportunities will, predominately, remain inaccessible to communities. They go on to note the conflict that may arise from this and note the suppression of community pushback against this expansion as a result of planning processes. (2020, 1) Pafi *et al*. also find that:

> With limited capital, skills-base, and asset ownership, most communities are unable to participate in technology savvy, capital intensive Blue Growth sectors, such as biotechnology, renewable energy or aquaculture. (2020, 4)

This is where and why tourism becomes a vital industry in communities such as those along the Wild Atlantic Way, but the operation only succeeds in trading one form of exploitation for another. Re-inscribing a colonial conception of ecological spaces, as frontier spaces, ideally suited to exploitation and resource extraction in the form of Picturesque tourism, is not a solution. Re-instating the West as a neocolonial playground while multinational corporations exploit the country's natural resources only serves to entrench and concretise inequalities established during British colonial rule. The former head of Ireland's Central Bank Patrick Honohan states:

> Ireland is a prosperous country, but not as prosperous as is often thought because of the inappropriate use of misleading, albeit conventional, statistics […] Using GDP as a measure can mislead analysis of such matters as debt, carbon intensity and inequality. (Honohan quoted in Pogatchnik 2021)

The Corrib Gas Pipeline

Honohan's concerns were given further weight in 2022 when Ireland's Department of Finance's Annual Taxation Report revealed "two of the State's most important revenue streams, income tax and corporation tax, were now highly concentrated around a narrow base of employees and a handful of big companies, creating a "potential vulnerability" at the heart of the Irish tax system" (Burke Kennedy 2022). Any shock or disruption to foreign direct investment "would have significant negative implications for the public finances" (Burke-Kennedy 2022). The report also highlighted "that the risks inherent in both tax bases [income tax and corporation tax] were interlinked as over 30 per cent of income tax receipts and around 80 per cent of corporation tax receipts are related to foreign multinational

firms" (Burke-Kennedy 2022). As such, Ireland's public finances are contingent on the actions of foreign corporate entities. The implications of the above vulnerabilities have already had a direct impact on the West and the Wild Atlantic Way in particular.

This is best exemplified by the controversial Corrib Gas Pipeline in Co. Mayo. The Corrib gasfield is a developed natural gas deposit off the northwest coast of County Mayo. In 2001, a Government petroleum lease was granted for Corrib, which was eventually acquired by Shell, a British multinational oil and gas company. Shell planned to build a pipeline and onshore terminal in Ballinaboy, the planning request for which was initially denied because An Bord Pleanála deemed it unsuitable based on "strategic planning, balanced regional development, environment and sustainable impact" (Siggins, 2017). They advised that the route be modified. A year later, however, a subsequent planning request submitted by Shell was approved. At that point, opposition to the development resulted in protests, which were met with counteraction by the State most notably the imprisonment of a group known as the "Rossport Five" who were jailed "for contempt of court over their continued protests over the pipeline route" (*ibidem*). Protests continued for several years with the "Shell to Sea" organisation central to campaigning against the project on the basis that it would be detrimental to the health and safety of local communities and ecologies. The group proposed that the gas be refined at sea, rather than inland, as had already been done with Irelands' only other producing gas field off County Cork. The project continued however, despite a 2009 finding by An Bord Pleanála that "up to half of [the] modified pipeline route [was] 'unacceptable' on safety grounds" (*ibidem*).

Violent clashes between protesters and Gardaí continued. In April 2009, Rossport farmer Willie Corduff was hospitalised after an assault by Gardaí. In November of the same year the Garda Ombudsman initiated an investigation after two members of An Garda Síochana, the official arm of the state, were recorded 'joking' "about raping women they had arrested at the Corrib gas protest" (*ibidem*). The project was completed in 2014 and in 2015 then Minister for Energy, Alex White, granted final consent for the project; then owned and operated by Vermillion.

Conclusion

The events in Rossport are indicative of the Irish governments' relationship to the West, and to rural Ireland more broadly. The town is a Gaeltacht area. It is rural, rich in history and has immense ecological value. Rossport is in Erris, an area described in Wild Atlantic Way marketing as an area on the so-called 'Surf Coast'. Tellingly, it is not indicated on the official Wild Atlantic Way route, no doubt because this is the kind of ecological and socioeconomic reality which utterly destroys the Picturesque fantasy which has been carefully cultivated by Fáilte Ireland. The elision of Rossport from the Wild Atlantic Way is indicative of a wider neocolonial Picturesque process in contemporary Irish representations of rural ecologies which, despite the intervening centuries, steadfastly recalls the "contorted routes" of Picturesque travel guides.

Describing the removal of local populations from colonial estates or areas deemed "Picturesque" by colonial landowners to perfect the landholdings' Picturesque value, Slater writes:

> Though the detaching of the local population from these picturesque-defined locations was for 'high' cultural reasons, the actual consequence for the native Irish was the creation of a 'no-go' area within their own ancestral lands. Crucially not only were the natives debarred from entry to the picturesque spots, but the actual material, natural structures of their ancestral lands were changed to respond to the new sensibilities of the picturesque. (2007, 237)

The case studies in this chapter are indicative of a neocolonial process, through which under a residual guise of rendering Picturesque Ireland's rural ecologies are converted to raw materials, both for tourism and the fossil fuel industry. What these case studies demonstrate is the degree to which the state is willing to appropriate the Picturesque mode as a means of circumventing egregious failures to protect threatened rural environments and communities, in favour of generating profit under a neocolonial system.

Chapter Three

Woman of the House: Patriarchy as Land Management Practice

Introduction

The following chapters will move from a broad analysis of neocolonial ideologies and operations into a closer-focused consideration of how established (patriarchal) internal ideological conceits, narratives and socio-cultural practices were frameworks into which the neocolonial enterprises could fit all too easily for pillage and plunder. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how operations relating to land ownership and management are problematically informed by patriarchal ideological discourses, which have endured in Ireland for centuries and have been variously co-opted by both colonial powers and the Irish State. This dialogical relationship problematically reinforces both systems of oppression and systems of representation, enshrining both within a cultural hegemony of patriarchal dominance and control. These are manifestly set out and perennially reinvigorated and ensure the

dispossession of women from property ownership and ensuring the oppressive management of female social participants. This, in turn, contributes to and maintains a productivist system of agriculture which has critically damaged biodiversity across rural Ireland all of which come to establish patterns of expectation making certain territories and psycho-ecologies all the more susceptible and vulnerable to external (neocolonial) exploitation. A direct causal link can be observed between the patriarchal tendencies of Irish cinema and the degradation of rural ecologies. Four internationally acclaimed "Irish" films serve as excellent case studies to set this scene; *The Quiet Man, The Field, The Secret of Roan Inish* and *The Hole in the Ground.* These will expose a common representational trope which has informed cultural representations of women's lives in rural Ireland since the establishment of the Free State.

In 2021 the National Women's Council of Ireland identified:

> An undervaluing of the contribution of women to rural communities and a lack of access to power and resources. Gains and progress for women have not been shared equally […] Women's experiences, their role and contribution to families, communities and businesses including on farms often go unacknowledged and unrecognised in the social protection system and in rural development strategies. (*Paper on Women in Rural Communities,* 4)

The Council's assertion that "gains and progress" in rural Ireland have not been shared equally is a regrettable revelation when considered in the context of Ireland's productivist agricultural system, which has been promoted by successive Irish governments as a certain route to prosperity for rural Ireland. Ethel Crowley writes:

> Productivism advocates the relentlessly intensive use of land and natural resources, regardless of negative social or environmental effects. It is heavily influenced by the agri-scientific establishment, whose aim is to constantly reach new frontiers in order to conquer nature. It is based on the notion that a desirable agriculture is one in which there is progressive, self-reinforcing improvement in its total factor productivity through agricultural research and organisational upgrading of farm and agro-food firms. (2006, 20)

Patriarchy, Productivist Agriculture and the Female Body

Productivist agriculture has been widely perceived as the route to prosperity in rural Ireland. Ethel Crowley argues that "the productivist 'story-line enjoyed supremacy for several decades and it is only now that a serious challenge is being mounted against it" (2006, 134). This storyline was the result of a confluence of several interconnected factors, among them State policies which called for the pollution and destruction of rural ecologies (2006, 134 but just as presciently, cultural conceptions of the value of agricultural land not as a site of stewardship and interconnectedness with the non-human world, but as a site of resource extraction and an intergenerational asset. This extractivist view of rural ecologies has its roots in Irish colonial history but has persisted beyond it, and is best disclosed in Irish film. Irish cinema has frequently retarded awareness of the threats faced by rural ecologies as well as stymying the development of a robust national discourse on relationships to ecology and the non-human world. This can be attributed to an inability to engage meaningfully with, or criticise, national myths around patrilineal land transference and the bodily autonomy of women. Irish cinema has consistently implicitly and explicitly reinforced an overarching power structure which imperils both rural

ecologies and disempowers women by failing to dismantle hegemonic structures and systems of control.

In the West, women's sexual purity and chastity outside of marriage acted in the service of maintaining the patriarchal social order and structures of property ownership. Any act of sexual activity should take place in an isolated physical and temporal zone to prevent social contagion and the destabilisation of a hierarchical, patriarchal social order. The female body exists in a state of crisis which must be contained. Within the context of colonialism, the female body might be understood to exist in an even greater state of crisis. Writing on the British colonisation of Kenya, Christina Kenny argues that in the minds of colonial administrators there "the level of control over women's reproductive potential, labour, migration, hygiene, health and clothing became indicators of the success of the British civilising mission" (2022, 40). While not unique to colonial operations, this "civilising mission" demonstrates the intersection between patriarchy and the colonial project, wherein women's bodies are a geography to be controlled and control of these bodies is a facet of the wider system of colonial dominance.

In an Irish context, patriarchal systems of oppression (which were already extant both in the colony and in the culture of the coloniser) were conveniently mobilised by the English colonial administration as a means of controlling and terrorising a country which they deliberately feminised in culture discourses – in direct opposition

to English culture that was depicted as masculine [6] – as a means of naturalising systems of oppression, though the cultural conception of an eroticised female body requiring male (English) control. This eroticised female body became a consequence of and simultaneously served as a justification for colonial control.

Catherine Nash quotes seventeenth-century English colonial administrator to Ireland, Luke Gernon:

> This Nymph of Ireland, is at all points like a young wench that hath the green sicknes for want of occupying. She is very fayre of visage, and hath a smooth skinn of tender grasse. Indeed she is somewhat freckled (as the Irish are) some parts darker than other…. Her breasts are round hillocks of milk yeelding grasse, and that so fertile, that they contend with the vallyes. And betwixt her legs (for Ireland is full of havens), she hath an open harbour, but not much frequented…. It is nowe since she was drawn out of the womb of rebellion about sixteen years, by'r lady nineteen, and yet she wants a husband, she is not embraced, she is not hedged and ditched, there is noo quickset putt into her. (From Luke Gernon 'A Discourse of Ireland' c. 1620, quoted in Nash, 1997, 112)

In Gernon's literary depiction of Ireland, there is an explicit conflation of the potential colonial acquisition with a female body, particularly a fertile female one. As Nash notes: "In the early modern period Ireland, like other colonies or potential colonies, was figured as female in ways which naturalised colonial penetration and

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[6] It should be noted that "masculinisation" of English culture was only enacted within the colonial regime as and when colonial authority was juxtaposed with the identities of colonised peoples. These apposite depictions could be employed simultaneously by the regime. As Das notes in the nineteenth century "several visual personifications of the contemporary nation state were resurrected from previously existent female allegories" (Das, 244). Depictions and cultural conceptions of Britannia as a 'mother' to her colonies were also widespread and were used to recast colonisation as an act of kindness and compassion. Within the colony itself however, the female body as the synecdoche of control was utilised, which called for not only the control of women's bodies, but also for the entire nation to be understood as feminine and thus lesser than and requiring subjugation and control.

regulation. As mysterious and unknown territory she must be explored and made known; as wanton woman she evokes disgust and must be tamed" (1997, 112). We can clearly consider Gernon's writing as an example of propagandist literature but it is also usefully understood as writing which is indicative of the colonial mindset. Nash goes on to describe how "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonialists not only feminised Ireland but directed their attention to the characteristics of Irish women" (113). She notes that "the apparent freedom and sexual promiscuity of Irish women" was employed by colonial administrations as proof of the "barbarity of [Irish] people" (113). She then explains that these elements of women's lives, if not brought under the control of the administration by active management, oversight and punitive consequences, were believed to destabilise the colony. This undermining aberrance would likely lead to threats to the ordered unity and control of the constructed colonial space. In the post-colonial era, the association between the female body and political and social control of the nation continued along with the association between the female body and the rural space. Nash describes the evolution of Ireland's personification as female into the twentieth century, writing that "in Irish nationalist discourse and poetic traditions, geography and nature have frequently been combined to suggest that both Irish identity and femininity are eternally tied to the rural – to the land and earth" (Nash, 120).

We might usefully consider Seán Keating's painting 'An Allegory' (1924), which depicts a group of seven figures, gathered beneath a tree, in the background of which the remains of a stately home are visible. Two figures to the left of the painting, a priest and a businessman, speak to each other conspiratorially. On the right, a soldier

from the Free State Army and a member of the anti-Treaty forces dig a grave for a tricolour-draped coffin which lies haphazardly placed beside them. In the centre of the painting, sitting next to a self-portrait of Keating himself, is a young woman breast-feeding a baby. Here we can recognise "a standard symbol for the damage inflicted by both sides in wartime […] viewers of the picture would assume that the mother and child represent the suffering innocents in all wars and conflicts. The mother might also be thought to be emblematic of Mother Ireland" (Breathnach-Lynch 2008, 123). Whether we choose to read the female figure as an allegory for "suffering innocents" or "Mother Ireland", her placement within the painting and her relationship to the other characters speaks to the contemporary attitudes to women's role within Irish nationalist discourse and struggles. Her figure is poised and contained and she appears oblivious to the others. Nevertheless she is the the focal point of the image, the bright shock of white which makes up the fabric her infant is wrapped in, draws the viewer's eye towards her. The viewer understands her not as part of the action of the image but as the focus of it, the fulcrum on which it turns.

We might also consider W. B. Yeats' poem 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz' where he writes about the eponymous sisters and prominent political and cultural figures. The poem shifts temporally from past to present, praising the sisters' youth and beauty, which Yeats regards as having been sacrificed for the Irish cause. As in Keating's painting, we see the locus of the struggle for independence placed on a young female body.

Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.
But a raving autumn shears
Blossom from the summer's wreath

The comparison Yeats draws between the sisters and nature (animals and flowers) is not a casual one. Yeats perceives nature in this poem as both passive and picturesque. Its beauty invites admiration, just as the sisters' beauty offers the same invitation. But nature in this poem is subject to threat: its beauty destroyed by unstoppable change (the "raving autumn"). "For Yeats, Eva and Constance were tragic figures […] Their destruction thus stands for much more than just the destruction of two lovely young girls; it is the destruction of the Great House, of the Irish aristocracy, of tradition and beauty" (Perloff 1967, 447). Their bodies, for Yeats, serve an ideological purpose for the maintenance of colonial order and control they, like the woman in Keating's paintings, should in Yeats' view perform the role of fulcrum to nationalist discourse rather than become active agents within the struggle. Women should serve as symbols not as actors. Yeats concludes the poem with the lines:

We the great gazebo built,
They convicted us of guilt;
Bid me strike a match and blow.

These lines are mournful, as Yeats speaks to the loss of an Anglo-Irish world of which he feels that the sisters, by virtue of their gender and class, were both the emblems and guardians. His word choice here is also revealing. Marion Shaw speaks

of the significance of the gazebo imagery in the poem's final lines "which Yeats, with his passion for the equivocal, no doubt also intended" (1992, 191). Shaw cites nineteenth and twentieth-century slang use of the word gazebo as "a foolish fellow, a silly blunderer, a softy" (1992, 191). The implication that the sisters' political engagement is foolish or blundering is indicative of the wider perception of women's political engagement in the immediate aftermath of the War of Independence. Rather than being active agents, women were expected to remain symbols – caught in visual and verbal representations (of myth and tradition)–trapping them in a symbolic realm. Here they are discursively controlled and socially managed, they are not permitted to enter the 'real world' where their rights, roles, and labour can be recognised but are held in the world of representation, which is highly conservative and entirely patriarchal.

The Role of Women in the Irish Free State

The newly emergent Irish Free State was a highly conservative one. Despite the role women had played in the fight for independence, Aidan Beatty notes that W. T. Cosgrave "newly installed as President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, pined for a gendered public-private split. He felt that rather than being involved in anti-Treaty politics, women 'should have rosaries in their hands or be at home with knitting needles'" (2016, 190).

The influence of the Catholic Church on Cosgrove's politics and the politics of the country more generally, is almost impossible to overstate. As Brian Girvin argues, Ireland's

> Political independence provided the opportunity and the means to promote a comprehensive moral order based on Catholic principles. This was justified on majoritarian grounds as the society was overwhelmingly Catholic. The evidence suggests that most Catholics were devout and enthusiastic about their religion. (2018, 4)

Contemporaneous writer and Pro-Treaty Irish Republican Brotherhood member P. S. O'Hegarty, echoed Cosgrave's sentiments in his history of the independence struggle, deriding the women of Cumman na mBann stating that "woman's business in the world is with the life of things, with the things that make life; but these women busied themselves with nothing but the things of death […] these were their occupation and their delight […] cutting themselves loose from everything which their sex contributes to civilisation and social order" (1998, 39). The suggestion that women's focus be on childrearing and not politics is not incidental. Women in the newly emergent state were required to submit to patriarchal expectations of social conduct and behaviour. The break with patriarchal norms which the revolutionary period had necessitated and engendered, ultimately served not to highlight the competency of women in both political and military roles, but to engender a backlash whereby feelings of national instability were placed upon errant female bodies. The conservatism of the Free State also found ample justification for its regressive attitude within colonial discourse. If Irish women and their bodies had under colonial occupation been "wanton", then under the Free State it was their patriotic duty to be chaste.

The only acceptable alternative to a life of chastity was motherhood and confinement within the domestic sphere. This mentality was enshrined within Article 41.2 of the Constitution of Ireland which states:

> In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann - Constitution of Ireland)

The narrative of "chastity versus wantonness" was merely a new iteration of long established patriarchal control. This control had always been manifest in representational forms, but now, as a result of the efforts of political and church leaders had become central to the State's regime.

The overwhelming dominance and influence of the Catholic Church as well as the emphasis the Free State placed on conservative sexual practice as a nationalist endeavour can be best exemplified in the work of Frank Duff. Duff was a civil servant and founder of the Legion of Mary, who instigated several strategic attempts to put an end to sex work after the establishment of the Free State. Duff's attempts to prohibit sex work should be understood not as an attempt to rectify or highlight the economic and health risks faced by women who engaged in the profession, nor were his attempts underpinned by efforts to increase employment for women in other sectors, rather his efforts stemmed entirely from a rigidly Catholic and conservative belief that the work was inherently sinful and this was underpinned by, and ideologically set to inform, an inherent control over and regulation of, female bodies,

especially those connected to fertility. Duff's perception of sex work was in step with contemporary thinking. Rather than being seen as a legitimate occupation, in the highly conservative Free State sex work was seen as offering an "emotive symbol of British social and political control" (Beatty 2016, 192). The perceived immorality of sex work was indicative of a moral decline instituted by English colonial rule. It was supposed that those within the trade and, those who paid for sex were engaging in inherently anti-Catholic and by superficially exposed extension, anti-nationalist activities. Duff's mission then was to "impose standards of idealised conduct, particularly on women, that would return the nation to purity" (Beatty 2016, 195). This nominative concern for the sanctity of women's bodies (which was influenced primarily by Catholic teachings around the female body, which read it as a site both of veneration and peril) ensured that the only sanctioned form of sexual activity for women was heterosexual intercourse within marriage, where their bodies and more pertinently their reproductive rights could be strictly controlled. This sexual expression as curtailed became entwined with national identitarian logic, as notions of national righteousness were prescribed as corporeally invested in a dialectic of self-fulfilling prophesy. This control was cemented in law when in 1935 contraceptives were made illegal under Section 17 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935. This legal shift fed into an emerging rhetoric which, in a Catholic country was well placed to succeed, saw women's bodies come to represent two diametrically opposed notions. On the one hand, they were understood as inherently aberrant and subversive. While on the other, they became something that could, under the right conditions, become pure, sanctified, and venerated sites, onto which

the ideal order of the nation could be stamped as a means of compensating for the chaos of a newly emergent nation.

An idealised image of national identity was mapped onto women's bodies, particularly rural women's bodies, even more so than their urban counterparts. This conception of the female body had its roots in Ireland's colonial history where:

> Post-famine changes in patterns of landownership and practices of inheritance were closely associated with changes in attitudes to marriage and sexuality, which found support in the Catholic emphasis on sexual regulation and women's chastity and maternal role. The maintenance and improvement of small farms became a primary concern. Within this socioeconomic system, known as familism, marriages were based primarily on economic considerations and on the priority of transferring the farm intact to the son chosen as most suitable. (Nash 1997, 115)

The familist turn in post-famine socio-economic and cultural practice serves to demonstrate in a very literal way the fabricated link between the female body and the land. The health of the land and the ability of Irish people to farm it would be dependent on sexual intercourse within marriage and childbearing as the primary role and function of women within this society. This pattern of patrilineal control through property transfer, including the reification of the female body to one of commodified trade, ownership, and possession, was borrowed strategically by Free State nationalist discourses. This discursive move was convenient for a hegemonic transfer of control and went, largely, unchallenged. As P.S. O'Hegarty argues "Suffragettes used to tell us that with women in political power there would be no more war. We know better now. We know that with women in political power there

would be no more peace" (1998, 75). O'Hegarty's comments speak to a contemporary belief that if women were to play an active role in public life, the presumed 'natural order' of the world, (facilitated by their role as mothers and homemakers) would be destabilised, there could be "no more peace" if women functioned not as a symbol of national discourse but as active agents within it. The tide of public opinion was such in the post-War of Independence era any notion of gender parity in politics or public life was deemed unacceptable. The role of women was to serve as objects of veneration and property control, particularly as a means of ensuring and enshrining patriarchal land transference.

Patrilineal Land Transference and the Place of Women in the Home

This attitude has persisted into the present day. Shortall observes the "patriarchal transfer [of land] from father to son in Ireland is remarkably resilient, some might argue impervious, to change" (2017, 182). This pattern of property inheritance and transfer, specifically in the context of familial agricultural work and land management, ultimately serves to engender the idea of farming as "a male occupation and reinforces the normative understanding of farmers as men" (2017, 182). Shortall contextualises this resilience to change through her study of modern Irish farming households. In her 1987 study, in nineteen of twenty cases, the farm would be inherited by a male (and as such facilitate the idea of the profession as exclusively carried out by men), not based on aptitude or interest but purely based on gender. Throughout two consecutive studies (one in 2004 and the next in 2012) little change in practice was evident. This conception of farming as exclusively masculine had its roots in Irish nationalist discourse. Writing on the Fianna Fáil government's

political pamphlets and policy in the 1930s, Aidan Beatty notes that the narrative pushed to the public in this period was of an "Irish nation that had been emasculated by the economics of British rule [where] it was only by securing access to the land that Irish men could undo their national humiliation" (2019, 157). While primogeniture predates the Irish Free State, the new state contextualised farming and by extinction the rural space as exclusively masculine. Rural ecologies could be personified as female, it was a man's right and patriotic duty to work in them, to inhabit it and draw resources from it. Just as English colonial administrations mobilised pre-existing patriarchal structures in their regime in Ireland, the Free State used personifications of the land as female (and women as a subjugated group) to justify resource extraction and hierarchical relations to space. This depiction in turn naturalised and justified the regime, forming a cyclical relationship between culture and the establishment. If, according to representational norms and the new State's constitution, a woman's place was in the home, then a man's place by definition must be outside it. These gendered relationships to space it might have been innocently presumed could result in chaos if undermined by a transgression on the part of actors on either side of the gender binary. Men were expected to uphold and enforce patriarchy (the social norm) by their work in the world. Women, conversely would do the same by their life within the home. This binaristic conception of gender has been, widely and rigorously reflected and unchallenged in Irish cinema.

The Quiet Man and Patrilineal Land Transfer

The most widely and consistently analysed filmic example of this binaristic conception of gender takes place around John Ford's *The Quiet Man. The Quiet Man*

has been criticised for its depictions of a marriage which can be read as straightforwardly abusive. Many commentators cite the film's conclusion in which Sean Thornton drags his new wife Mary Kate across the fields in front of their community who jeer and encourage him – as indicative of this. As Díog O'Connell observes "the scenes of domestic violence are regressive, if interpreted literally, yet they often invoke laughter leading to unease, in turn prompting questions about one's apparent strongly held views and allegiances" (2009, 204). O'Connell interrogates Mary Kate's status as either feminist icon or prisoner of patriarchy, arguing that she is a character who inhabits a dual space: "her function within the film is neither one of object nor subject but combines both" (2009, 204). O'Connell ascribes this in-between state to Mary Kate's "highly individualistic struggle [which contributes to women's liberation] in a small but personal way which inevitably reverberates at some level, as is the case with the unrecorded private histories of women everywhere" (2009, 204). O'Connell's approach to analysing Mary Kate's character is useful in that instead of an analysis confined to identifying a character as "a causal agent within a scheme" (205) her analysis of Mary Kate's focalisation enables us to understand "how characters function in 'telling' the story" (2009, 205). O' Connell notes that focalisation can "reveal whether a character controls the gaze and point of view or is the object of the gaze. Using this approach O'Connell argues that the scene where Sean Thornton sees and is looked at by Mary Kate for the first time, implies visual dominance on the part of Mary Kate (2009, 207) and that this scene "sets the tone of the film" (2009, 207). However, O'Connell's reading of Mary Kate's "individualistic struggle" fails to account fully for the implications that the focalisation of non-human entities within the narrative poses. O'Connell describes a

somewhat equivocal nature of the lead characters' mutual gaze in the scene in which John Wayne's Sean Thornton encounters Mary Kate for the first time. O'Connell writes:

> The audience is shown Sean Thornton seeing and looking at Mary-Kate [*sic*] for the first time followed by her looking back, across the fields as she herds the sheep. She looks again, followed by him, followed by her looking again, again and again. In this sequence, she is visually dominant, not an unusual position for a female lead in a classical film, but she is not controlled by Thornton's gaze. Although he presents the first look, from then on there is an exchange as both reveal their interest and curiosity. (2009, 207)

She writes that "rather than suggesting dominance or subjugation, [this scene] implies parity and balance" (2009, 207). When viewed in isolation, this scene is certainly conducive to a reading that implies autonomy on the part of Mary Kate, however, the previous scene in which Sean Thornton sees his childhood home for the first time since emigrating, complicates this reading. Ultimately the juxtaposition of both establishing moments illuminates Mary Kate's role within the wider narrative. The scenes play out as follows:

Sean Thornton, being driven in a pony and trap by Micheleen Óg Flynn, alights on a humpbacked bridge, as the film's extra-diegetic musical motif 'The Isle of Innisfree' rises. Sean is quickly transfixed by something offscreen, the camera cuts, contextualising his point of view, of a whitewashed thatched cottage (we later learn that this is his family home, White O' Morn) nestled at the base of a green hill. The disembodied voice of what we presume to be Sean's mother asks: "Don't you remember Seanín and how it was?" Ford cuts back to Thornton, now utterly

enthralled. His mother's voice continues: "The road led up past the chapel" (a church bell can now be heard chiming in the distance), as Sean turns his head and the Ford cuts to a picturesque view of a small rural village. His mother's audio tour continues as she points out: "There was the field where Dan Tobin's bull chased you." Thornton turns his head to look, then turns back to look at the cottage once more as his mother concludes: "It was a lovely little house Seanín, and the roses! Well, your father used to tease me about them but he was that proud of them too." We are given a shot of a wistful Thornton before Ford cuts to Micheleen, who intones hesitantly, the much-quoted line: "Ah that's nothing but a wee humble cottage." This is followed by a close-up of Thornton who gives a slight nod to the cottage before walking out of shot as the 'The Isle of Innisfree' fades from the soundtrack.

It is worth noting that the earlier piece of music – 'The Isle of Innisfree' theme – is reprised in the later scene with Mary Kate. If we are to ignore the order in which these scenes play out, and adopt O'Connell's view that the initial meeting between Sean and Mary Kate sets the tone of the film by creating parity, then one could infer that the focalisation of White O'Morn, with its look and returned look is intended to confer a sense of agency upon the local ecology or even on disinherited diasporic communities. However, the focalisation of Mary Kate, which O'Connell considers as offering parity and balance, completely mirrors the focalisation of White O'Morn in the preceding scene, which ultimately amounts to a visual and narratological equivocation of Mary Kate with patriarchal property ownership. The visual dominance which O'Connell describes, is undermined by the psychological linking of Mary Kate with the cottage, Mary Kate with Thornton's deceased mother, and

Mary Kate with Thornton's birthright, all by formally recycling the same visual technique established in the previous scene. Nash argues that in "Irish nationalist discourse and poetic traditions, geography and nature have frequently been combined to suggest that both Irish identity and femininity are eternally tied to the rural – to the land and earth." (1997, 120). The 'first look' is part of this tradition of the longstanding socio-cultural trifecta of rural land ownership, patriarchal ideology and the female body. We can read this scene then as unequivocally denoting and authorising Thornton's right to ownership and, by inference, his right to look as a predominant mode of cinematic possession-taking, a right bolstered by the long-standing tradition of equating the female body with the rural space.

The equivalence between Sean's looks in both scenes also serves to trap Mary Kate within the symbolic realm. She ultimately (despite her characterisation as a 'feisty' woman) becomes the corporeal manifestation of Sean's relationship to property and as such, his own Irish identity. This transfer of notions surrounding property and Irish masculinity onto Mary Kate's body is sustained throughout the film, in the use and reprisal of the 'Isle of Innisfree'. This musical arrangement, (with accompanying lyrics which juxtapose the romantic poverty of Ireland with the wealth and opportunity of America) follows Mary Kate throughout the film. When she is newly settled into her marital home, she plays the song on her piano and sings a verse from it. It could be argued perhaps, that this sonic equivalence between Innisfree as a place and Mary Kate as a person is intended to inform the viewer as to the film's emotional focus and the romance between Sean and Mary Kate. However that the use and reprisal of this piece of music is an integral part of Mary Kate's

characterisation. She *is* Innisfree. To understand the significance of this, it is necessary to understand what Innisfree symbolises for Sean, which is emphatically a return to order. An escape from American lifestyle and culture to a safe, patriarchal hegemony, wherein he is facilitated to own and control property.

Consistently throughout the narrative of *The Quiet Man*, Mary Kate's relationship to personal wealth and property ownership mirrors Sean's as they both want "their dream" of generational assets: Sean aspires to the possession of his cottage because it has been passed down from father to son for generations, and Mary Kate seeks her "two hundred years of happy dreaming" in the "pewter and china and wedding veils" that her mother and grandmothers had preserved for her through the dowry system. Her entitlement to these items is consistently thwarted by her husband (whose ownership of White O'Morn has the automatic respect of the local community, over the claims made on it by his brother-in-law Will Danaher, as it follows these same rules of generational transfer). This highlights two particular points of interest. The first is that Mary Kate's desire to own her property is not a progressive one if read from a feminist perspective, given that it takes place within the context of a dowry system maintained by patriarchal ideology. Although we might read the destruction of her dowry as a break with that patriarchal tradition, Mary Kate and her dowry and indivisible from one another. While the dowry putatively assures security for future female descendants, that security is contingent on their ability to secure a marriage, that is to participate in the wider system of patrilineal land transference. The dowry, nominatively is Mary Kate's just as she is nominatively her own person, but both she and the dowry have been subsumed within the larger property management system

that is Sean Thornton, they have transformed from material agents with the power to influence the world (the dowry by its transition through time as reminder of lived female experience and Mary Kate as a human being) into resources which can be extracted from and commodified. The second point of interest is that within this context – and the context of a narrative about property and generational asset transfer – her renunciation of any future daughter's potential for social mobility cannot, and should not, be read as symbolic. While arguments have been made for this as an implicit, though admittedly romanticised, critique of capitalism, materialism and the commodification of culture, the fact remains that we can only consider it as such if we neglect to acknowledge the transformation of Mary Kate from person to object, in the 'first look' scene when through focalisation she effectively becomes the property of Sean Thornton.

The Strong Farmer and Productivist Agriculture

It is worth revisiting at this juncture the tension between the precarity of Irish masculinity under colonial rule and the need to consolidate this masculinity within a new national narrative post-independence. To do so, it is necessary to contextualise how the kind of ideological fantasies exemplified in *The Quiet* Man became part of Irish legislation, legislation which subsequently was reintegrated into fantasy. Under British colonial rule, Irish men were feminized, or 'othered' by a colonial gaze and the antidote to this in a postcolonial nation was the centralising of the "Irish farmer, as a strong family farmer, possessing and owning his own land" (Kane 2011, 140). In the wake of the Second World War, Europe experienced food scarcity and a lack of agricultural labourers. It was this scarcity which partially informed Article 38 in the

Treaty of Rome which called for a common policy for agriculture. This was supported by the belief that the maintenance of diverse national agricultural systems would lead to competition and, as such, deemed a likely impediment to trade and disparity of living standards, and wage and food costs (elements at odds with the goal of economic integration). This led to the establishment in 1962 of the Common Agricultural Policy, which was instituted to guarantee regular food supply, ensure a fair standard of living for the farming community, stabilising markets, ensuring reasonable prices for consumers and "increasing agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and the best use of labour" (Crowley 2006, 22).

> The CAP […] which has been the main influence on the Irish State since the early seventies, can be read as a modernisation manifesto. The language encountered in EEC documentation from the sixties and seventies contains many references to stages of development economic takeoff and economic modernisation. This productivist approach became the norm at this time, and as a result of this, agriculture production increased by 2.5 per cent p.a. between 1960 and 1980. The CAP therefore presented and archetypal example of a productivist development policy, with its inherent aims of expansion and intensification. (Crowley 2006, 23)

This productivist approach led to the rise of monocultural systems of agricultural production, increased dependence on chemicals and heavy farm machinery, and a rise in rural unemployment particularly among young men. The promotion of the "best use of labour" which was inculcated into Irish agricultural practice melded with the pre-existing "strong farmer" narrative that had arisen in the 1930s. This best use of labour then also came to include the policing and management of women's bodies as a resource. They would be excluded from farm labour both as proprietors of farms and casual workers in favour of more technological approaches. Their

contribution to farming would be reduced to the maintenance of the family unit, both by their work in the home and by reproduction within marriage.

Crowley has also noted:

> EU agricultural policy is based on the premise that there is only one linear path to economic progress, and that people everywhere respond to the same profit maximisation logic. EU policy-makers view the farmer as homo economicus who is free to, and does, act in the most rational manner to, maximise his or her gains. Places and people who do not meet their requirements are deemed to be backward or 'lagging behind in development'. Advocates of productivity and modernisation do not recognise that farmers may have other interests at heart besides profit maximisation, or may interact with their land and overall environment in more culture-specific ways than those dictated by dominant economic thinking. (2006, 27)

In this sense, EU and Irish farming policy and culture reward intensive, productivist approaches, and consequently disregard those who fail to fall in line with dominant thinking (that is an approach that prioritises streamlined, technological and high-yield methods of agriculture), labelling the dissenters as "regressive" or "unproductive". Crowley notes that farmers "who are slow to take up the suggestions of farm advisory bodies [such as Teagasc whose aims reflect EU's productivist agricultural policies] are 'ideologically marginalised'" (2006, 27). The gradual rise of this streamlined, profit-based relationship to agriculture, coupled with a long-standing conception of ecologies as "wanting a husband" (that is requiring a system of control which would ensure maximum output within a regime of land management, which understands ecology not as an ecosystem of which humans are a part but as a resource to be exploited) is causally related to patrilineal land transference. Within a productivist, patrilineal agricultural system, the farm must

acquiesce to productivist agricultural approaches to endure as a generational asset. To ensure a farm's survival under Ireland's productivist agricultural system was to embrace intensive, ecologically imperilling approaches which critically threaten biodiversity and to ensure the transferral of land from one son to the next. As Shortall finds, the endurance of patrilineal land transference in contemporary rural Ireland is based not on aptitude or interest but on an ideological belief that farming is the preserve of men. There is a continuity of patriarchal hegemony which stretches from the colonial past into the present. It has been variously co-opted by colonisers and the Irish State, always in service of resource extraction, be that through colonial oppression or productivist agriculture. This overarching patriarchal hegemony is reflected in Irish cinema in ways that have naturalised its presence culturally by enshrining ideas of patriarchal land transference.

Structuring Absences and the Representations of Women in Rural-based Screen Narratives

The most useful indicator of this sustained approach in Irish cinema is in the structuring absence of women in onscreen rural ecologies, it is exceedingly rare that a film set in rural Ireland will feature a woman outdoors. Richard Dyer defines structuring absences as:

> an issue, or even a set of facts or an argument, that a text cannot ignore, but which it deliberately skirts round or otherwise avoids, thus creating the biggest 'holes' in the text, fatally, revealingly misshaping the organic whole assembled with such craft. (1993, 105)

The structuring absence of women outdoors in rural-based screen narratives can be directly connected to the pervasiveness of post-Independence rhetoric around women's place in the home, the need for the female body to be controlled and the subjugation of women in Irish society more broadly. It is therefore all the more interesting and important to consider, in the light of this structuring absence of women in this context in screen representations, those few films where depictions are more comprehensive. Though few, there are revealing cinematic instances that present women outdoors, errant women, who serve as a contradiction to the rule. It would be wrong to imagine these characters as sites of rebellion. Despite deviation from a standard pattern of absence we will see they still reinforce and strengthen pre-existing ideas of sexual purity which maintain patriarchal systems of land ownership and management.

The representation of rural women in Irish cinema can be evaluated according to clear categorical characteristics. The female character is typically the wife, love interest, mother or sister of the male protagonist. (This stands in contrast to urban representations or representations where the rural location is not specifically emphasised for example: *Maeve* [1981], *Hush-a-Bye Baby* [1990] or *Agnes Brown* [1999]). She remains indoors for the majority of the narrative unless accompanied outside by her spouse or relative (but occasionally by another woman or a group of women). If she is seen outside of the house alone in a rural setting (not an interior) this will typically provide the catalyst for her death or violence against her (these texts can be seen to serve a didactical function 'women should not leave the safety of the home' or fulfil an ideological fantasy 'the outdoors are the preserve of men and

women cannot and should not expect to be safe there'). Her existence is largely incidental to the narrative although she may dispense advice or provide the catalyst for the possible resolution of a situation in the third act. She is typically happy with her lot indoors, or we are invited to assume that this is the case, as neither she nor the text criticises openly or challenges subversively the political, social and economic structures that keep her there. This is further exemplified by her abstraction from the materialities of rural ecologies. We will not see her engage in agrarian labour or acknowledge the ecological materialities of her environment psychologically or emotionally. If she goes outside alone, it is generally for one of two reasons: either she is an American and, as such, is juxtaposed contrastingly with the Irish women she encounters (we might consider Amy Adams' character Anna in *Leap Year* [2010] or Hilary Swank's character Holly in *P.S. I Love You* [2007] or Janeane Garofalo's character Marcy in *The Matchmaker* [1997]) who will typically be married homemakers and stand as markedly different from the American woman, whose narrative journey to and through Ireland is facilitated only so that she can find love there, ultimately endorsing the conservative heteronormative culture she encounters. Alternatively, and not infrequently, we are presented with a female character who is suffering from mental illness or has learning or developmental disabilities and so cannot be held responsible or considered fully cognisant of her behaviour. Her departure from the home will form a crisis point in the narrative. Her time outdoors will result in her becoming the victim of either physical or sexual violence as is the case in *Dancing at Lughnasa* [1998].

A consistent exception to this rule is the representation of female children. These are allowed to move through the rural space relatively unconstrained, and consequently take on an almost messianic or allegorical role in the text, something repeated as a trope of convenient narrative shorthand. Ostensibly, such narrative cases ensure that the young characters' pre-pubescence confers on them a sexual purity which affords them a greater degree of agency, credibility and respect than their older female counterparts: *The Secret of Roan Inish* [1994], and *Black '47* [2018] are typical examples of this. By their pre-pubescence, these female characters cannot be co-opted as symbols of national identity and are most frequently seen in narratives where their 'childlike curiosity' can be read as part of a discourse wherein adult characters rediscover a lost sense of national identity, as the child asks why old traditions have been lost or why certain cultural practices have been abandoned. Alternatively, she serves to demonstrate the future or assured continuity of Gaelic culture in the wake of its presumed demise. This approach to representation has been further problematised in recent years by the trend of adjunct, often silent or animalistic female children represented in the films created by the widely praised animation studio Cartoon Saloon (*The Secret of Kells* [2009], *Song of the Sea* [2014], and *Wolfwalkers* [2020]). In those cases, the youngster becomes a surrogate or metonymic proxy for the mature female. At the same time, the female character is displaced narratively into an alternative mythical space: one that inherently associates – and not unproblematically – Irishness and female Irish identity with pre-modern, utopian, primitive mysticism.

The Field

The Field [1990] was written and directed by Jim Sheridan and adapted from John B. Keane's play of the same name. Set in Connemara in the 1930s, it follows Bull McCabe, a man with an intense emotional attachment to the field his family has rented and farmed for generations. Bull's connection to the field stands in contrast to the indifference his son Tadhg displays for it. Tadhg only engages in maintaining the site out of fearful duty. The film opens with Bull tossing the body of a donkey, which Tadhg has killed, into a lake. It is revealed that the donkey was owned by a group of Travellers who have now demanded blood money for its killing. In addition to killing the donkey Tadhg, has also been terrorising the owner of the field, a widow who, believing that Bull has been responsible for the harassment, decides to sell the site by public auction, rather than directly to him. This enables Peter, a wealthy American, to buy the field. The foreigner (who was an English character in the original play) makes it clear that he intends to develop the site as part of his plans to build a hydroelectric plant in the area. Meanwhile, Tadhg has become entangled with a Traveller woman, Katie, and has begun to imagine a different way of life for himself, beyond maintaining the field. Bull and Tadhg eventually kill Peter in a fight. This opens the way for Bull to purchase the field. However, after the body of the donkey is discovered in the lake by a Traveller boy, Peter's body is also discovered near it. Tadhg confesses the murder to Katie and makes plans to leave the village with her, telling his father he never wanted the field, in part because it had been the cause of his brother's death. In a section of gradually revealed backstory, we learn that his brother Seamie had taken his own life when he was thirteen after Bull had told him that the field could only support one family and because Tadhg was the

younger son, he would be forced to emigrate. As a result of Seamie's death Bull and his wife Maggie have not spoken in eighteen years. Bull suffers a mental collapse at the revelation of Tadhg's intent to leave and goes to drive his cattle over the cliff. Tadhg, in an attempt to reason with his father, goes to help him but is driven over the cliff by the stampede and dies. The film ends with McCabe in the sea, trying to drive back the waves from his son's body while Katie and Maggie watch from the clifftop.

The Field derives its narrative exigency almost entirely from the ramifications of contraventions to patrilineal land transfer. This can be observed most explicitly in the relationship between Katie and Tadhg. In one scene, Bull and Tadhg visit a nearby farm where Bull derisively notes that the farmer has "the tinker working here" before walking out of shot. Katie is revealed and engaged in yard work. She stops and looks at Tadhg. The camera cuts back to Tadhg who shifts uneasily and looks away before another shot frames Katie who, operating a piece of machinery strikes up conversation, remarking that it is a nice day and commenting on "the Yank" as she works. The camera cuts back to Tadhg who again looks away in obvious discomfort. The camera returns to Katie who comments on the "big stick hidden" in the boot of the Yank's car, smiling suggestively and laughing to herself. The scene cuts away to an interior shot of the farmhouse that Bull and Tadhg are visiting where Bull is engaged in a dispute over the price of two cows he is attempting to sell. When we return to Katie and Tadhg outside, she has stopped her work and is now standing in front of Tadhg, deriding Tadhg for "following his father like a calf". Tadhg raises his stick to Katie in threat, claiming that he will use the stick across her back. Instead of backing away Katie steps closer and announces "I have a strong back", Tadhg

demurs lowers his stick and looks to the ground. Bull emerges from the farmhouse and seeing the interaction calls Tadhg away. Katie's eyes follow him out of the shot and the camera lingers on her face, her previous jollity now absent. The sequence is framed so that Tadhg is at the edge of the image. Not only does this serve to emphasise the distance between the characters physically (which Tadhg attempts to maintain) it also emphasises the degree to which Tadhg is intimidated by Katie and her presence forces him to the edge of the image. Katie dominates the image, highlighting a disparity of power between them, rooted in Tadgh's combined terror and fascination with Katie, her ability to move through the countryside unimpeded and without fear or hesitancy very specifically in contrast to the more rooted representations of his mother or the widow. This power disparity is evidenced further when we consider this scene in the context of the cinematography employed earlier in the film when Tadhg harasses the widow in her home. In this scene, Tadhg climbs onto the widow's roof, howling like a wolf, the camera cuts to the widow in her cottage visibly perturbed, before cutting back to Tadhg who places a slate over her chimney to smoke her out, as his co-conspirator and local trouble-maker, Bird, looks on from the ditch, laughing. The widow is forced out of her house and the camera cuts to Tadhg and Bird hunched like roguish childish pranksters behind a low wall, watching in amusement. While Tadhg is on the roof, the camera is placed at ground level, angled up towards him, we might consider this a reflection of Bird's point of view but it also speaks to the power dynamics inherent in the representation of both Katie and Tadhg. When Tadhg and Katie are onscreen together in the yard she dominates the *mise en scène*, whereas Tadhg is pushed to the edge of the frame. It is only when Tadhg threatens her with violence, thereby transforming her presence out

of doors into a moment of crisis, that they begin to share the screen equally. Subsequently, after Tadhg has become embroiled in Peter's death (and confessed this to Katie), demonstrating his capacity to abet and become complicit in violence, that they are given equal space in the *mise en scène* in the scenes that follow. This creates a visual link between Katie's freedom outdoors and an implicit criminality, which not only serves as a vessel for Tadhg's conduct but also the visual instigator of it.

Tadhg discovers his solution to the burden placed on him by his father, when he decides to elope with Katie. Katie and the Traveller community in the film are frequently derided (though somewhat pityingly) by Bull McCabe for their nomadic lifestyle. His claim that they lost their land during the Famine and would never get it back is intended as a reminder to Tadgh of their good fortune in having the field but also a reminder not to become involved with them, nor to give them a route into a settled life. A warning to Tadhg not to forsake the value of his territorial heritage. Nevertheless, Tadhg remains fascinated by Katie and, in contravention of, and disregard for, the warnings of his father, her nomadic identity proves to be part of her allure. He is shown to be attracted by her ability to move through the countryside unfettered (unlike his mother who is never outside the home). In an inversion of *The Quiet Man*, (where Mary Kate's connection to Innisfree is intrinsic to her appeal for Sean Thornton) Katie's lack of geographic fixity facilitates Tadhg's access to the open road and, with it, to freedom. Her perceived abstraction from the system of patrilineal land transference is seemingly inherent in her sexually-charged persona. Katie's behaviour and liberality is redolent of the kind of behaviour which Frank Duff and his contemporaries would have read as immoral, transgressive and

dangerous. Katie's transgressive potential is made all the more potent by being a member of a marginalised ethnic group with diminished access to the 'civilising' influence of a small community's morals. This perceived liberality, however, though it makes gestures to this effect is not one that problematises traditional conceptualisations of the patriarchal structures that have tied Tadhg unwittingly to the land. That Tadhg perceives a life with Katie as an escape does not symbolise a straightforward rejection of patrilineal land transference, merely an estrangement from it. Katie's identity, is, in Tadgh's view contrary to his own. Her way of life does not offer an alternative to the binary of ownership and dispossession which has dogged the narrative, she does not affirm that ecologies do not need to be owned to be engaged with, instead, her cultural, ethnic and gender identity serve as a space of imagined truancy from the dominant culture. Tadhg's choice to leave with her is not a recognition that patrilineal land transference is inherently problematic, but rather an uneasy estrangement from the system. Katie's socio-cultural and moral distance from that system does not undermine it politically, rather it serves to facilitate the tragedy of Tadhg's death. By eloping with her Tadhg only succeeds in delaying the inevitable: that is a recognition of the fact that land must be owned and passed through generations. The failure of patronal land transference in *The Field* is located not in the system, but in Tadhg's masculinity, his inability to accept the system he is a part of and in Bull's failure to communicate this effectively.

The character of Maggie also illuminates *The Field*'s conservative ideological stance on patriarchy. Maggie, Bull's wife and Tadhg's mother is mute for the majority of the film and estranged from Bull because of the death of their son. Maggie's relationship

to the film's ecology is unique within the film, as she does not appear outside the McCabe's home, until the film's conclusion where she witnesses remotely from the cliff top the death of her son and descent into madness of her husband from a clifftop. It is only at this point when she can usefully serve as a visual reminder of the scale of the tragedy that has unfolded, that we see her outdoors. The world of the diegesis has fallen into chaos and as such her place within the home (the mirror of her husband and son's place outside of it) is communicated by her visual aberrance and presence on the clifftop. Maggie's role, while unique within the diegesis of *The Field*, is not unique to Irish film. Her function within the narrative serves a similar purpose to the 'Mother' in Keating's *An Allegory*, a mute and inactive symbol of the 'correct' social order.

The Secret of Roan Inish

The Secret of Roan Inish is based on Rosalie K. Fry's book *The Secret of Ron Mor Skerry*. The film was written and directed by John Sayles, who moved the setting of the narrative from Scotland to the west coast of Ulster. The story centres on Fiona, a young girl who, after a bout of ill health brought on by city life, is sent back to the country by her widowed father to live with her grandparents and her cousin Eamon. Fiona arrives at her grandparent's home on the coast and from there begins to visit the island of Roan Inish, where she and her family once lived. Through these trips to the island and conversations with her grandparents and extended family on the mainland, Fiona learns that her family is descended from a marriage between a human and a selkie woman. In addition to this revelation, the story follows Fiona's discovery of her brother Jamie's fate. Jamie had been presumed dead because during

the family's evacuation of their island home, the cradle he was sleeping in was washed out to sea. Ultimately, it is revealed that Jamie is alive and has been raised by the selkie side of the family in the absence of his human family. Ultimately the family is reunited with Jamie and they all return to live on Roan Inish.

The story of Nuala, the selkie woman from whom Fiona's family is descended, draws on selkie folklore. In folkloric narratives, the selkie is a creature which is both and neither human and/or seal. The creatures vary between corporeal forms, but the folklore holds generally to the established principle that their time in the water is spent as seals but while on land, their seal skin can be shed to reveal a human body underneath. The most common selkie story in oral traditions is that of the 'selkie wife'. In these stories, if a man happens upon a selkie woman in her human form and steals and hides her sealskin, she is bound to him as his wife and is thereafter unable to leave him or return to the sea. These stories typically end with the selkie's human children revealing the location of the hidden skin and the sea creature retrieving it and leaving the family, never to return. *The Secret of Roan Inish* follows this narrative trajectory.

Kirsten Møllegaard notes that the local focus and geographic specificity of selkie tales "include many real-life, strikingly modern themes relating specifically to ideas about gender, power, and otherness as well as the social and economic pressure to marry and rear children in the rural subsistence economies along the North Atlantic shores" (2014, 96). In *The Secret of Roan Inish* Nuala's story is told in flashbacks, as characters recount the events of Nuala's life on the island some two hundred years

earlier. This tale is self-consciously presented to the viewer in the form of 'oral' storytelling. It is also presented as a tragic love story, the result of which is greater harmony between the people of the island and the sea. Before Nuala lived on the island, seals were hunted for their fat and meat, but following Nuala's return to the sea it becomes socially unacceptable for anyone on the island to harm a seal in case they should kill her or one of her kind. Nuala's return to the sea is seen as a sad inevitability that neither "chains of iron or chains of love" could prevent once she had found her sealskin.

In the scene when we first encounter Nuala, she is basking on a rock in her seal form, watched, unbeknownst to her by Fiona's ancestor Liam Conneally. The shots cut back and forth between Nuala's transformation from seal to woman and Liam's eager face as he removes his clothes and crawls across the beach towards her to steal her sealskin. Nuala's body is never shown in its entirety: we see a shoulder, her face, her back, and her feet, as the camera visually dissects her. Under the camera's gaze, she becomes not a woman but a collection of the composite parts, the physicality of a woman. We see the seal fat sticking to her fingers when she stretches them, and the empty sealskin by her feet when she flexes her toes. This has the effect of denying Nuala a fully human identity – thus foreshadowing a disempowerment of her agency – before her capture by Liam. It also serves to undermine the extra-diegetic agency conferred by selkie narratives where the more-than-human quality of the selkie creature allows for the exploration and discussion of women's domestic servitude, gender inequality and repressed sexual desires. The only quality established in the construction of Nuala's identity is highly eroticised and sexualised. We can read the

design of Nuala's representation in much the same way as Katie's in *The Field*. Nuala's otherness, her unsettled in-between nature, is directly linked to her freedom to move across the coastline and through her watery home and this otherness is heavily sexualised. This sexuality is ultimately depicted as contradictory to the 'correct order' of the world, given that it is her same wayward, unsettled nature which re-emerges in the family line once in every subsequent generation and is ultimately responsible for the destabilisation of the family unit caused by Jamie's disappearance. The emergence and re-emergence of a wayward quality in the Conneally family line also indicates fears around an aberrant male sexuality, one which does not ensure the futurity of the family. This may open the film to queer interpretations, nevertheless it is telling that the story ends with the return of Jamie, (that generation's aberrant) and the re-establishment of the family and the family's generational home. The radical potential of Nuala's descendants is undermined and safely contained once again within a heteronormative family unit and the system of patrilineal land transference. This is achieved through the actions of her antithetical ancestor Fiona who, as a female child, presents no threat to patriarchy in her freedom of movement and only serves to undermine further Nuala's radical potential. The radical potential of the selkie stories (stories which explicitly construct marriage and child-rearing as forms of imprisonment and ideate escape from these systems) is expunged by Fiona. Just as in *The Quiet Man*, patrilineal continuity is contingent on the acquiescence of female social participants who, unlike Nuala, accept the economic, social, and ideological system under which they live. This acceptance is endorsed by the narrative in the valorisation of the act of facilitating familial and domestic harmony.

Selkies and Patrilineal Land Transference

Like Katie in *The Field*, Nuala's unsettled nature is seen as integral to her character: she is inherently incapable of remaining on land. This characteristic ultimately forms part of her sexual allure, and even the challenge of keeping her on land by the theft of her skin is presented with unabashed eroticism. Within the wider context of films of the same period, this would appear to offer a shift away from standard representations; norms that are repeated even within *The Secret of Roan Inish* (Fiona's grandmother, for example, is never alone outdoors). However, Nuala's inability to remain on land, and the couching of her abandonment of her family as a flawed part of her nature, rather than an inevitable outcome given her forced marriage and the theft of her duality, belies and even disguises the fact she had no choice in whether she came to live her life on land or not. Møllegaard argues that

> The seal woman is a stranger, an exotic other, in the human world. She has a past history of family and kin in the ocean, which precedes the obligations imposed upon her as wife and mother on land. In this regard, seal wife tales bear witness to women's resistance to traditional gender roles as mothers and wives as well as to men's fear of the runaway wife. (2014, 95)

As Møllegaard attests seal wife stories have a radical potential, they are narratives of women's resistance and subversion of strict gender and social binaries. *The Secret of Roan Inish* is at odds with this narrative tradition. While it engages with selkie lore, it does not engage with the threat to the binaries of identity that so often characterises these stories. Instead, it subdues the selkie, who is both and neither a woman and a seal. *The Secret of Roan Inish* transforms the selkie's more-than-

human potential into a cautionary tale. Nuala, as aberrant selkie wife, serves the narrative function of centralising and normalising patriarchal fears of errant female bodies, rather than offering a nuanced feminist perspective of women's agency within patriarchal systems. The character of Jamie and his eventual reunion with his family also serves to destabilise the notional ecocentrism of the narrative. Jamie's return to his family necessitates a choice: he can remain with his seal kin or return to his human family, he cannot be both. The choice to return to the family provides the 'happy' conclusion to the narrative as it not only reunites a unit that had been fragmented by grief and displacement and the continuation of the family line but also a return to order, agents in the story world can be read as human or animal not both or neither. This establishment of binaries is also central to the promise of further patrilineal land transference as it serves as the ideological underpinning for anthropocentric dominance.

The Hole in the Ground

Lee Cronin's *The Hole in the Ground* follows Sarah O'Neill and her nine-year-old son Chris who move to rural Ireland from the city to start a new life after leaving the boy's father. It is hinted that domestic abuse is the motive for Sarah's departure, and she becomes increasingly concerned as the film progresses that her son is beginning to re-enact his father's violent behaviour towards her. Sarah and Chris are frequently at loggerheads as they adjust to their new home. At one point after a heated argument, Chris dashes into the forest behind the house and gets lost. Sarah follows and fears for her child's safety when she discovers a large sinkhole in the ground

near where the boy is headed. Chris soon reappears, seemingly unaware of the sinkhole, and the two reconcile and return home.

Sarah and Chris presently encounter Noreen, an old woman who displays an obvious but sinister interest in Chris. Sarah later attends a dinner party where we learn that Noreen killed her son: running over him with her car after an incident during which she burst into his classroom screaming before she was restrained and forcibly removed. The following night, Sarah discovers that Chris is missing from his bedroom and rushes to the forest in an unsuccessful attempt to find him. Having returned home, she calls the Gardaí but then discovers Chris mysteriously and inexplicably standing in the doorway of his bedroom. From this point on Chris' behaviour becomes more and more alarming: he eats spiders (Chris had previously been arachnophobic), shows uncharacteristic displays of strength, and seems to demonstrate preternatural knowledge of his mother and her intentions. It is subsequently revealed that the boy in Sarah's house is not her son, but a changeling. After confronting the creature it attacks her, Sarah locks it in the basement and sets about trying to recover her actual son. She returns to the forest, heading for the sinkhole. Sarah goes to the bottom of the sinkhole, crawling through underground tunnels in the earth, and eventually finds a child that looks like Chris, alive but buried deep in the ground among dozens of formless and faceless creatures. Sarah and Chris return to the house, which Sarah then sets fire to with the changeling still inside. She and the real Chris drive away to start a new life back in the city: Sarah begins to attend university, and Chris happily settles into their new home. The film ends ambiguously, deliberately withholding certainty about whether the series of

events was the result of the protagonist's delusional anxiety about her son's behaviour, or whether the situations were real, although wrought with supernatural occurrences. In either case, the ambiguity serves the larger question of addressing uncertainties about identity and self-recognition as ultimately we are denied clear assurance that Sarah can ever be sure that she is now living with her actual son and not some form of replicant.

The film draws on Irish changeling mythology, whereby a human baby is replaced with a fairy child, often one who has some form of deformity, illness, or behavioural traits deemed aberrant. The presence of this mythology serves to undermine traditional conceptions of motherhood. We might consider how motherhood and womanhood are made synonymous under patriarchal hegemony. In this context Sarah's rejection of her child as monstrous highlights not only a rejection of the cultural figure of the mother, so heavily influenced in an Irish context by Catholic ideology, but also a rejection of motherhood as 'natural', something to which all women are inherently predisposed. As Adam Lawrence observes, the changeling "held the threat of subversion, subordination, and mutation" (2018, 97). This subversion plays out in *The Hole in the Ground*, where Sarah's disgust for the 'changeling' Chris speaks not only to the uncomfortable history of changeling belief, which saw children rejected and harmed for often congenital behaviours or traits, but also raises the question of women's mental health, and the sociocultural conception of women as inherently nurturing, overshadowing the need to recognise a woman's post-natal struggles. The uncertainty around Sarah's relationship with Chris also introduces nuance to the idea of patrilinearity which we have observed in the case

studies already discussed in this chapter. Sarah's role as a mother is at odds with that of Fiona's grandmother in *The Secret of Roan Inish* and Maggie in *The Field*. However, it is telling that it is women in particular who the film's supernatural forces specifically target with violence. Noreen is killed by the changelings and Sarah narrowly escapes. Ultimately rural life is untenable and she flees back to the city.

Sitka Spruce and the Horror of Patriarchal Control

An ever-present feature of the film and the catalyst for its horror is the looming Sitka spruce plantation which backs onto Sarah's new home. It is in this plantation that the supernatural sinkhole into which her son falls appears. The forested setting of *The Hole in the Ground* is significant and to understand this it is necessary to consider the economic and ecological context of the tree's presence within the diegesis. Sitka spruce is a non-native fast-growing coniferous evergreen that dominates Ireland's afforestation programme. It can grow to a height of 100 metres and flourishes in Ireland's damp, temperate climate. Currently "about half of Ireland's trees are Sitka spruces […] They supply wood for pulp, plywood, pallets, fencing, garden furniture and building materials, much of it exported to Britain […] The trees mature in about 30 years – exponentially faster than oak – and are then felled, making way for a fresh plantation" (Carroll, 2019). The trees are typically planted on land seen as unfit for agriculture which as Mary Colwell notes "can't, by its very nature, support high densities of livestock or crops. [this land does] however, produce flowers, insects and ground-nesting birds in abundance, but none of these are money spinners in a traditional sense" (2018). of the economics of the Sitka spruce plantation she notes that "Sitka plantations guarantee a return within a few decades and they also attract

absent investors" (Colwell, 2018). However Sitka spruce poses significant threats to biodiversity. Michael Viney notes that while the trees grow well in upland areas where it has been difficult to cultivate crops "their year-round interception of polluting particles from the rain can damage the soil's microbial life and tip the chemistry of so-called 'poorly buffered' hill-streams into conditions hostile to insects and aquatic life in general" (2007). Many have been critical of the consequences of over-forestation of the Sitka spruce. Colwell argues that despite the claim that Sitka spruce can be used to sequester carbon, thereby reducing such emissions in the atmosphere, which has seen an estimated 34.5 million Sitka spruce planted across Ireland, it would be "better to reduce the emissions from the dairy industry than plant Sitka spruce on unsuitable soils" (2018). Coillte, Ireland's National Forestry service, has responded to criticism of the trees, which increase soil acidity and inhibit the development of biodiverse undergrowths, by maintaining that the tree is ideally suited to the Irish climate. One senior executive has even described the Sitka spruce as the "Friesian cow of trees" (Keena, 2019).

Sitka spruce plantations lend themselves incredibly well to the horror *mise en scène*. Jim McCaffrey a farmer from Country Leitrim and a member of the Save Leitrim activist group who works to resist the planting of Sitka in Leitrim and surrounding areas, and has described living alongside the trees in an interview with *The Guardian.* "The forest closed in bit by bit […] The trees eclipse sunlight, exude mist and block wifi and phone networks, inducing isolation" (Carroll, 2019). This eerie, uncanny quality is made evident in *The Hole in the Ground* with lingering shots of the dark tree line at the edge of Sarah's property foreshadowing the horror within.

While the violence and terror of the film are enacted by the changeling and by the monstrous creatures within the titular hole in the ground. It is the trees that communicate terror and unease most consistently throughout the narrative. The viewer understands the plantation as a threat before the supernatural threat of the film fully manifests itself. The feeling of dread that these trees engender both in the film and in actuality can be further contextualised by a comment from another Save Leitrim member, Edwina Guckian, who notes that when standing amongst the trees "It's like a wall around you, dead, darkness. It's suffocating" (Carroll, 2019). The structural, claustrophobic quality of the plantation which Guckian alludes to also appears in the film. When, during Sarah's frantic search for her son, the camera follows her among row after row of identical trees, the backdrop compounds the horror of her frantic search for a missing child in a space with no identifiable landmarks, but also highlights the eerie uniformity of the trees. In Sitka plantations, the trees are set in rows, and they are managed and destroyed in thirty-year cycles. The Sitka plantation might be understood as a place where a certain kind of nature prevails only so far as it is allowed to do so by the State and by investors. This space of presumed order, where the ecosystem is managed within systems of productivist agriculture, is where the violence and horror of *The Hole in the Ground* reside. Just as the Sitka plantation is hostile to insects, avian, and aquatic life, it is hostile to the presence of Sarah and her son. This hostility facilitates the re-emergence of the folkloric figure of the changeling, which troubles the productivist and pro-natal stance of the Irish state (and Irish cinema more broadly) by its inference that motherhood is not a sanctified condition, but one which can be fraught and beset by trauma. That the changeling behaviour recalls the behaviour of Sarah's abusive

former partner is not incidental and it suggests that it is through order and control that cycles of patriarchal violence and oppression are formed and reinvigorated. *The Hole in the Ground* reflects a representational shift, in the face of drastic environmental change and reflects the new frontier of women's spaces in rural Ireland, where the right to own property, to exist in the rural space, and to have a meaningful relationship with local ecologies is mitigated not only by the lingering horror of patriarchal power (indicated by the legacy of domestic abuse within the film) but also by the ever-present threat of environmental damage resulting from State mandated intensive agriculture.

Conclusion

The patriarchal ideologies that proliferate in Irish culture have come to enshrine patrilineal land transfer as the default method of agricultural land stewardship. This ideology, proliferated within Irish cinema's representations and narratives, has ultimately normalised the wide-scale engagement with productivist farming methods. For a farm to pass through one's male line, it needs to meet the ever-increasing demands of the modern agricultural market. This critically threatens rural Ireland's ecologies and severely curtails the collective and individual freedom of women in rural Ireland.

Chapter Four

Mapping the Edgelands: Hardy Bucks' Subversion of the Strong Farmer

Introduction

This chapter explores the intersection between Picturesque representations of ecological spaces, patriarchal structures in rural Ireland and contemporary shifts in agricultural practice. It charts how these diverse elements are reflected in Irish representations of rural masculinities. In it, I will explore several case studies from 2004 to 2015, including *Killinaskully*, *Garage*, *Pilgrim Hill* and *Hardy Bucks*, to demonstrate how, in just over a decade, a radical change has occurred in how masculinity is represented on the national screen, in the light of a rapidly evolving socio-political climate, the fallout of global economic collapse, worsening ecological crises and the increasingly precarious nature of agricultural work in areas of rural Ireland.

Picturesque aesthetics are predicated on an abstraction from ecological and socio-economic materialities. This involves specifically an abstraction from the ecosystems and labour of the land which allows spaces to be read as serving a purely aesthetic, escapist function for the picturesque visitor. They mobilise a representation of nature that is unindustrialised and unpopulated. While any representation of nature is to a greater or lesser extent a recontextualisation of material fact, the Picturesque attempts to "divorce landscape appreciation from the landscape's utility and associated material value to its inhabitants" (O'Kane 2012, 19). The temptation might be to interpret this abstraction from extractive relationships to the land as a proto-environmentalist stance, however it is only an abstraction from the work of the rural poor, whose use of the land could only be tolerated aesthetically if it did not impinge on the Picturesque aesthetics of the space. The Picturesque feigns a purity of nature by denying, suppressing, and sublimating utility. It is also inherently about transcending these bare categories with its own sublime. The role of the Picturesque in an Irish colonial context in particular saw ecologies utilised to facilitate and demonstrate images of empire as a means of control. This control which is based on abstraction from colonial realities is not dissimilar to other systems of hierarchical looking. The mechanisms of hierarchical looking are inherent to the significatory system of the Picturesque, and O'Kane notes the "conquering eye may bear some comparison to the touring eye as both are constantly in motion and engaged in the continuous evaluation of the environment through which they pass" (2012, 6). Ann Bermingham also observes an "intimate psychosexual connection between the scopophilic gaze and the Picturesque eye" (2010, 93). Inherent in the Picturesque (with the underlying ideological imperative of control) are patriarchal systems of

looking which are continually reaffirmed as they have been empowered by pre-existing hierarchical structures.

> As a connoisseur of Picturesque, a man could confirm his masculinity by displaying his specialized knowledge of painting, aesthetics, landscape, and nature, and satisfy his connoisseur's love of looking by anaesthetizing and secularizing women and impotent feminized Others – the poor, the old, the dilapidated – through a process of detached picturesque viewing. (Bermingham 2010, 93)

To be the observer, to have power over the gaze, is to place oneself at the apex of a hierarchical sceptic system. The viewing pleasure conferred by the Picturesque facilitates abstraction from ecological and socio-economic realities by presenting a world wherein the (ideal male) viewer, is unchallenged in his look through and beyond ecologies, within a system of control which facilitates his freedom alone. It should also be noted that this abstraction is an essential part also of the visitor's gaze (whether coloniser, spectator or tourist). This relationship between patriarchy and the Picturesque is not universal, but the process of creating a Picturesque involves a universalising. The ideal male viewer is one who can be abstracted from the landscape by virtue of a particular class-informed relationship to it. In other words he cannot be seen to work the land.

It is worth considering at this juncture the tension between the precarity of Irish masculinity under colonial rule, and the need to consolidate this masculinity within a new national narrative post-independence. Writing on the Fianna Fáil government's political pamphlets and policy in the 1930s, Aidan Beatty notes that the narrative pushed to the public in this period was of an "Irish nation that had been emasculated

by the economics of British rule [where] it was only by securing access to the land that Irish men could undo their national humiliation" (2019, 157). Under British colonial rule, Irish men were feminized, or 'othered' by a colonial gaze and the antidote to this in a postcolonial nation was the centralising of the "Irish farmer, as a strong family farmer, possessing and owning his own land" (Kane 2011, 140). The relationship between Irish masculinity and Irish ecology was, in a post-Independence context, deeply damaging to rural ecologies. Rather than reimagining relationships to ecologies based on reciprocity and rooted in stewardship or environmental care, the ideological systems of hierarchy enshrined under colonial rule were reappropriated to encourage an abstraction that facilitated a patriarchal relationship to land based on legacy. The state of the land in one's lifetime and the care of the land was secondary to the land's persistence through time as a trans-or intergenerational asset. This act of ownership and the patrilineal land transference it normalises necessitates and initiates ecological damage but also laid the foundations for a static, essentialist model of masculinity unable to withstand the shifting nature of rural life and agrarian industry, in an era of ecological collapse. The stereotypical image of the strong farmer persisted and demonstrably present across three texts. This is notwithstanding the fact that only one of the texts here actually features a farmer or indeed farming as a central concern. These narratives testify to the long shadow cast by this stereotype and its attendant promises, that of a proud independent nation, made possible by the efforts of men to control the land, provide for their families, and thus foster rural communities. This image has been variously challenged and accepted at the nexus of masculine and ecological representation.

Killinaskully

Killinaskully, written by and starring Pat Shortt had dominated viewing figures from its first airing in 2004 and was a fixture of RTÉ's Sunday-night programming. The series proved extremely popular with the public, averaging almost 500,000 viewers a week during its fourth season. The show accrued 825,000 viewers for its Christmas Special in 2005. The show is set in the fictional town of *Killinaskully* and was filmed in rural North Tipperary. *Killinaksully* was frequently reviled by critics who bemoaned the show's representations of rural people and perceived comedic ineptitude. An acerbic reviewer for *The Times* wrote that the show had "achieved remarkable popularity, primarily among people who evidently love cartoons but believe the animated variety are far too gritty and complex" (Fay 2006). Contemporary critics of the show also tended to view its popularity as isolated to a rural demographic. One reviewer argues that "the urban/rural divide is still very much in evidence in the success of *Killinaskully*" (Hegarty 2008). Tension pervades contemporary criticism of the show, with reviewers seeming reluctant to dismiss something which they perceive as being popular with and created for a large minority of the country's population.

Killinaskully's depictions of rural life and communities are often reductive, but to attribute the series' popularity solely to viewers' penchant for rural caricatures misunderstands the central appeal of the series. The series fosters an indivisibility between ecology and escapism in a community that plays with the ideals of country life as espoused in the 1930s. The show revolves around several locations (the local pub, the Garda station and the local school) and the link between these locations is

the lush pastoral setting of North Tipperary: rolling fields, verdant hedgerows, and full, shady deciduous trees. The show was filmed during the summer months, meaning that outdoor scenes typically featuring blue skies and bright sun, which become a constant feature of the fictional village of Killinaskully's *mise en scène.* The series' opening credits show a tractor driving through a congested urban environment and along a motorway before breaking onto winding country roads and ending on a freeze frame of road sign, set against a hedgerow reading 'Slow Through Killinaskully'. This opening sequence is a cue to audiences as to where their focus ought to be - that is on the village itself - and that this village stands in direct contrast to the urban and peri-urban landscapes beyond its borders. *Killinaskully* represents an alternate history of the country, where a 1930s' vision of a rural Ireland has persisted and thrived, a vision which; in reality, has, in the intervening decades, often proven entirely defunct. *Killinaksully* presents a rural idyll, where strong community bonds overcome surreal gaffs and circumstances, with enough credit given to some of the realities of rural life (inadequate Garda resources, alcoholism, and rural isolation) while eliding the socio-economic and environmental structures which inform and produce them. In this respect, the series is not unlike John Ford's *The Quiet Man*.

Killinaskully, ***The Quiet Man*** **and The Picturesque**

Killinaskully constructs a conscious pastiche of *The Quiet Man* in its first episode. In the series' opening scene, outsiders to the village, the German filmmaker Dieter and his assistant Hans find themselves driving in circles along winding country roads unable to locate the village of Killinaskully, where they are hoping to make a

documentary about how EU membership has impacted the Irish people. They stop at a diversion sign only to meet with a local man, Dan (Pat Shortt) who, noting that they are not locals says "Ye must be here for the fishing". When the Germans protest that this is not the case, Dan ignores them, extolling the virtues of the local fishing spots. When Dieter asks him for directions to Killinaskully, Dan gives him an almost incomprehensible set of instructions on how to reach the village, before stating that, admittedly, "If I was ye I wouldn't be inclined to start from here at all". Dan eventually hops into the van with the two men to direct them to the village, having them drive him to various locations in the parish en route as he completes a series of odd jobs. The scene's dialogue and narrative structure recall the opening scene of *The Quiet Man* where Sean Thornton alights from the train, asks for directions to Innisfree and is told about its quality as a fishing spot (even as he insists that he is not there to fish) and is given various directions. Like the German filmmakers he is advised to start his journey from another place entirely, before travelling with Michelín Óg Flynn (a local know-it-all, not dissimilar to Shortt's Dan) to various locations in and around Innisfree. While *Killinaskully* lacks the glamour and finesse of *The Quiet Man*, in many ways it offers viewers the same pastoral fantasy. The use of an 'outsider' character who is a stranger to or unfamiliar with the world of the diegesis serves several purposes here. It allows the mundane elements of rural life to be represented with whimsy, through the focalisation of the non-native observer. Narratively Dieter and Hans provide a useful exposition device, through their interactions with Dan and the other locals, the roles of different characters and locations in the community are established and contextualised. They also serve to enhance the comedic potential of self-lampooning humour. The introduction of the

‘outsider’ and the focalisation of that point of view, allows for a more outlandish, extreme self-parodying of rural Irishness. There is a suggestion that much of what is considered strange by Dieter (the procedures at the local Garda station, the sexual forwardness of his landlady) is exacerbated by his uninitiated status. It also invites two different avenues of identification, one with the locals, and the other with Dieter, who is simultaneously the subject of outsider lampooning.

Another conscious reproduction of Ford’s film takes place later in the first episode when the German filmmakers enter the bar where some locals, Dan among them, are gathered. In Ford’s film, Sean Thornton enters the premises and is met with suspicion, until he buys everyone a drink, at which point he is wholeheartedly welcomed with the song “The Wild Colonial Boy”, which is sung spontaneously by the patrons to ‘welcome him home’. In *Killinaskully* the scene plays out slightly differently with Dieter being forced to buy a drink initially offered to him by Dan (as well as a drink for Dan himself) because Dan has (conveniently) lost his wallet.In the background, in direct acknowledgement of the Ford film “The Wild Colonial Boy” plays on the radio. Dieter is then welcomed, but the construction of Dieter and Hans as outsiders is never fully abandoned. Neither of them understands the local humour, syntax, or way of life. *Killinaskully* offers up the familiar narrative of an outsider arriving in the rural fantasy space but mines its comedy with the established convention of playing with the outsider’s inability (despite his continental refinements and standards) to avoid being taken for a fool by the ‘ignorant’ locals.

These opening scenes locate the series' sometimes prosaic narrative in a familiar space of escapism, which may well have contributed significantly to its popularity. In this way, it contributes to the conservative ideology of the series. The local Priest, Fr. Philip Eno is presented as well-meaning, kindly, and morally just, and often oblivious to the occasionally underhanded (or less than legal) dealings of the locals. He is met with disingenuous respect and frequent admiration, a significant parallel to which can be found in *The Quiet Man.* Ford's film sees the meddling of local priests (both Catholic and Protestant) ultimately bring about the marriage of Mary Kate and Sean, and initiating the film's romantic conclusion. In *Killinaskully* the local TD Willie Power is presented as a 'cute hoor', as clever as he needs to be to exploit his position in the community and avoid legal ramifications for past misdemeanours. It would be a significant stretch to compare him to any particular character from *The Quiet Man* the narrative pleasure and comedic impact intended to be derived by watching him outwit and undermine those adhering to the law is mirrored in a generalised attitude towards power structures in *The Quiet Man.* This is evident in the character of Will Danaher whose underhanded tactics in property acquisition and social manipulation mark him out as the villain of the text, ultimately redeemed by the comedic exigency he provides. *Killinaskully* takes a kindly view of figures within the diegesis who had by this time come under significant critique within contemporary Irish society. The series presented church and state as benign and even positive forces in the rural community and in doing so mirrored the vision of Ireland constructed by Ford half a century earlier. While critics were quick to acknowledge the stereotypical "culchie" humour of *Killinaskully* as lazy and dull, they were unwilling or uninterested in assessing how the Fordian picturesque facilitated a

regressive ideological stance on institutions that had been instrumental in the underdevelopment and social regulation of rural Ireland. Both *The Quiet Man* and *Killinaskully* might be dismissed by critics (and not without reason) for the same failures of representation of rural communities, but in its representation of rural ecologies *Killinaskully* is indebted to a legacy of the Picturesque and the subsequent reappropriating of Picturesque notions of abstraction in the postcolonial era.

A significant point of divergence between *The Quiet Man* and *Killinaskully* is the notable absence of agriculture as well as the absence of the 'strong farmer' in a setting which should both logically and comedically be marked by his presence. In fact, after the opening credit sequence featuring a tractor, there is no reference to farming in the series. Instead, the community is supported by alternative resources and revenue generation. It becomes a typical mockery of innovation, industrious mentality, or any demonstration of 'labour'. The idea villagers become tourist visitors on their own rural escape. It is as if they had walked onto a film set and are self-consciously performing roles of "Irishness" there. There is a structuring absence around agriculture in the series. (Dyer 1993, 105) That is the absence of the farmer (in spite of the rural setting) is imbued with ideological and political significance.

If farming in *The Quiet Man* can be understood as part of Sean Thornton's "birthright" and central to his masculine identity as Kane's research suggests, then the absence of a farmer in *Killinaskully* may suggest a discomfort with this figure. A similar absence recurs in two further case studies.

Garage, *Pilgrim Hill* and the Failure of 'The Strong Farmer'

Lenny Abrahamson's *Garage* and Gerard Barrett's *Pilgrim Hill* both attempt to contest romanticised images of rural Ireland's ecologies and the role of men and masculinity in these spaces by highlighting the failure of patriarchal systems to realise the pastoral dream presented in *The Quiet Man*. *Garage* follows Josie (played by Pat Shortt) a lonely garage attendant on the margins of his community. Josie's life plays out in monotonous cycles of the day-to-day running of the garage, punctuated by his trips into the village for groceries, and his solitary pints at the local pub, where he is routinely made the butt of the local men's jokes. When teenaged David, the stepson of the garage owner, comes to work with Josie, Josie welcomes the possibility of connection and companionship. This newfound and unlikely friendship is destroyed, however, when Josie not only provides David with alcohol but also shows him pornography in the mistaken belief that he and David are peers. Josie is arrested for this act and the film concludes with Josie's taking his own life having realised the seriousness of what the charges will be.

Pilgrim Hill's narrative centres on a similarly isolated character Jimmy, a small-herd dairy farmer adrift and lonely, struggling with the monotony of his daily life as he cares for his sick father. Jimmy struggles to connect with those around him, including his nephew who frequently visits the farm. Jimmy's father is abusive in his behaviour towards his son and the pressure of caring for him has a significant impact on Jimmy's wellbeing. The film concludes with the death of Jimmy's father, and the confiscation of his cattle herd who are infected with tuberculosis.

As tragedies which befall both Josie and Jimmy, *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* examine the entrenched patriarchal structures inherent in conceptions of rural masculinity and critique these power structures and their attendant mythologies. In *Garage*, this failure manifests itself in the breakdown of communication. This is demonstrated in the inability of the community to meaningfully engage with Josie and vice versa. Josie exists at the margins of the community. He is described by Carmel, a local woman with whom he frequently tries and fails to form a bond, as "pure soft and nice". Despite this, Carmel frequently seems repulsed by Josie, as his "soft" masculinity is in opposition to more traditionally masculine characters like Breffni who actively ridicule and undermine him for his awkwardness. The two most meaningful connections which Josie succeeds in making are with David and a horse and the parallels between these relationships are central to understanding the film's perspective on rural life and the place of men in it.

Adam Drazin describes the historical centrality of the home in socialising in rural Ireland (2018, 543) as well as the cross-generational nature of this socialising. The question of whom one might socialise with was less likely to be determined by age than by the commonality of living in the same community (545). Drazin also notes that "in public, the community was manifested through a diversity of generations and genders, with many events where everyone might congregate. Church, sports, or dances might attract all ages and [...] genders" (2018, 544). This kind of socialising is not dissimilar to what we observe in David and Josie's relationship in *Garage*. Based on the commonality of proximity and a shared feeling of isolation from the wider community, David and Josie form an organic community of their own. This

extends further when Josie is invited to join the other teenagers at the train tracks where they congregate to drink and socialise. There is a tension present in these new bonds, however, as we are aware of an 'inappropriateness' in the relationships Josie is forming. These are based on disparities of power and maturity between himself and David. Although Josie is depicted as innocent and childlike — not mature and predatory. Adam Drazin writes:

> From the 1990s, social initiatives were alive [in rural Ireland] which expressed different expectations of belonging, and a changing sense of sameness and difference in what constitutes community. The new organisations implied the expectation of uni-generational sameness and were often gendered […] These changes in expectations coincided with significant economic changes […] Agriculture changed significantly and became more bureaucratic, particularly after the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic, and responding to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. (2018, 545)

The conception of Josie and David as an odd pairing is rooted in modern expectations of socialising and community. Josie's showing David pornography is based not only on a tragic naivety, but also on his misperception of David as his equal, an oversight with its foundations in older traditions of community and sociality. This contextualises why Josie views his actions as "pure innocent" and David and the rest of the community do not. The act is undoubtedly wrong, and David becomes a victim of an unintended sexual misdemeanour. But the event also serves to highlight Josie's failure to perform "correct" masculinity as defined by Irish patriarchal structures. Josie fails to observe the hierarchies intrinsic to masculinity outside of his relationship with David, only to transgress a boundary within it.

The other meaningful relationship in Josie's life is with a horse, tied up alone in a field, whom Josie regularly visits to feed and pet. After Josie's suicide, the horse is shown untethered, on a particular closing beat looking directly into the camera before the screen fades to black. We might be tempted to view the figure of the horse as allegorical like Josie has been confined and is now free, but to do so would undermine the significance of Josie's relationship to the non-human world, as well as the presence of the non-human world in the film. Josie's relationship with the horse is at odds with the wider relationship with non-human animals displayed in the community. The time Josie spends with the horse stems from loneliness, and the need to seek connection. He is ignored by the human world, but animals, existing as they do outside of the patriarchal system do not regard him in the same way. Josie brings the horse food and the horse responds by acknowledging Josie's existence. It is a transactional relationship, but one based on trust. The horse cannot form opinions on Josie beyond his role as a provider and Josie treats the horse with respect and kindness based on recognising a creature whose freedom has been curtailed and who is without companionship. Josie does not attempt to couch his relationship to the horse within a hierarchical system, which designates the horse's needs as having less value. It is a relationship in Josie's eyes of equals. Josie's relationship with the horse can be seen as central then to the film's study of masculinity, the equivalence which Josie sees between himself and David extends to other creatures, and is at odds with the hierarchical, strictly policed relationships maintained in the rest of the community.

Pilgrim Hill also addresses to rural isolation and thwarted or ineffectual communication, but it takes a distinctly social realist approach. The film is shot in a documentary style, enabling Jimmy to express his thoughts on his isolation directly to the audience. Through these candid moments, the viewer understands that Jimmy's isolation is a product not of a failure or disinclination to communicate and to form connection, but of the patriarchal land transference system and increasingly intensive agricultural practices engendered by this. This is also depicted aesthetically in the film, and Jimmy is frequently isolated within a crowded *mise en scène*. One notable incidence is in a trip to the local supermarket, where he browses the shelves and the camera seeks him out behind cardboard boxes and bottles of water. Another example occurs at the conclusion of the nightclub scene, where Jimmy stands alone against a dark wall, while bouncers move in the foreground, and music filters out from the nightclub interior. Like Josie, Jimmy is never without opportunities to connect with others: he visits the local pub and the supermarket, and he has a nephew who seems content to spend time with him. Unlike Josie, however Jimmy seems patently misanthropic: he holds a worldview informed by his nihilistic relationship to land ownership. His misanthropy is further engendered by the emotional and economic pressures of caring for his sick father and keeping up with the work of the farm. This is put to the viewer unequivocally in Jimmy's final, halting, piece to camera at the film's conclusion, when he says: "My future is thirty acres on the side of a hill in the back end of nowhere. With no prospects. Maybe a life in the pub. Grow old, like so many people I've seen with nobody. So many people who've given up. And just exist."

The film's emotional climax is the confiscation of his herd when tested positive for TB. The confiscation scene is at odds with the rest of the film, which has established a documentary aesthetic of naturalism and verisimilitude. The audience comes to understand Jimmy as a stand-in for many farmers across rural Ireland who experience isolation and loneliness as a result of a rapidly evolving, highly competitive agro-industry. The film's cinematography in this scene does not diverge significantly from anything seen previously within the diegesis, Jimmy is still framed alone within a crowded *mise en scène*, but this time to even more powerful effect as he attempts to prevent his herd being taken and with them, his livelihood, his family's heritage and his life's purpose. What differs significantly here is Barrett's decision to score the scene, which marks a significant divergence in formal approach. The film's documentary style is temporarily abandoned for something more dramatically manipulative. This generic shift highlights a hesitancy within the text ultimately and conclusively to undermine romantic notions of rural Ireland. There is no audible dialogue in the scene. Jimmy argues with the men and the guard who have come to confiscate the animals, and he is more animated than he has been. Nonetheless we hear no dialogue, Barrett provides a sweeping melodramatic piano score, emphasisesing the film's central thesis: nothing Jimmy says or does will change the outcome of events. Jimmy is powerless to defend his livelihood in a bureaucratic agro-industry and is rendered powerless by the successive generations of patrilineal land transference which have necessitated and bolstered its dominance. The choice to score the scene and to abandon a documentary style approach, ensures that it becomes a eulogy for what could have been. The mournful score leads the audience to sympathise and empathise but does not ask them to question whether this

is the first moment in which Jimmy has had a real opportunity to escape the structures of patrilineal land transference.

With his herd confiscated, Jimmy's tie to the land and the drudgery of work has been severed and he is, in theory, "free" to walk away from the life he has led so far. The fact that the scene breaks stylistically from a *verité* approach, and Barrett does not allow Jimmy's protests to be heard, coaxes the audience towards reading the confiscation as straightforward tragedy. Barrett's formal approach precludes the possibility of the audience's viewing Jimmy's decision to stay on the farm and within agricultural life as an inability to disavow the patriarchal structures that have held him captive.

Rural Ireland and Rural Masculinities in Crisis

Garage and *Pilgrim Hill* destabilised traditional narratives of the rurality and instead presented rural Ireland as a prison for those without the means or opportunity to escape. As such, there are parallels to be drawn with *Hardy Bucks*. Martin Maloney notes that in creating the series:

> It was always in my mind that we were talking for those who don't have a voice, because living in the countryside, you really don't have a voice. There are no cultural centres around Swinford. There's no skate park or place to learn an instrument. I played football with guys in Mayo who could easily have played in the Premier League. But no one was ever going to see them. When I was a kid, I always had grandiose dreams like being a race car driver or footballer. And the response was always the same: "Where are you going to do that around here?" (Maloney quoted in Brady 2013)

However, where *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* re-contextualise depictions of rural life, *Hardy Bucks*' approach is a deconstruction of the rural Ireland we anticipate. The series is underpinned by a very different ideological and aesthetic conceptualisation of the ecological space, and this results in an interrogation of rural life and masculinities which deviates significantly from long established representational approaches. *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* present alternative readings of the rural idyll not by denying its existence but by complicating it both narratively and aesthetically. Both films present rural Ireland as having reached a point of deterioration as a result of modernity. In *Garage*, Abrahamson presents a failed post-industrial rural landscape, scarred by the train tracks that bisect it, that no longer carry turf from the West Midlands. Heinz and Shmitt who describe Abrahamson's representation of rural Ireland as a "renegotiation" (2014, 78) note that *Garage*'s "landscape has fallen victim to recent sociocultural and economic developments having taken place throughout the era of the boom and its aftermath" (2014, 82). In much the same way as *Killinaskully* does, *Garage* retains the hallmarks of an idealised Irish rural community but there the spaces of local pubs, shops and picturesque green spaces are transformed by wider societal and economic shifts. Heinz and Shmitt observe that this transformation has failed to enrich rural Ireland (2014, 82) which consequently is "no longer the site of an ideal form of national identity and the bearer of cultural memory" (2014, 82). This idealised national identity, however, haunts the film and is played out primarily in the tension between Josie and his community.

If Josie's approach to socialising is rooted in an older concept of community, then his attitudes to the world around him are similarly anachronistic. He is unable or unwilling to see the condemned nature of the garage or the wider community. This is contrasted with Breffni whose "aggression and sarcasm can therefore be seen as their reaction towards their own insignificance and marginality and an expression of their self-loathing" (Heinz and Shmitt 2014, 84). Josie is at odds with the world around him because he has no place in it: his employment and living situation are subject to the whims of his employer and his naivety is a source of discomfort to a community eager to distance itself from the ideas of rural Ireland as backwards, who see an alternative version of themselves in Josie. In rural Ireland which is understood to be corrupted by the influence of modernity and the pernicious effects of economic growth outside its bounds, Josie has no place. Allison MacLeod notes:

> He is unable to engage with the men's banter or pursuit of women that are the foundation for male homosociality, and he instead emerges as a form of failed masculinity […] His inability to belong to the space of the town pub propels him to create a social space outside of the garage for him and David to drink ciders after work. However, when Josie then takes David into his home to show him the pornographic video, he transgresses normative social codes of conduct. (2015, 60)

Like Josie, Jimmy's masculinity can be similarly understood to exist in a space of tension and contention in *Pilgrim Hill*. As a small herd cattle farmer Jimmy can be understood to be a victim of what Shanagher and Brereton see as "a type of internalised patriarchal tyranny associated with an intensified private sphere, spatially and emotionally separated from the surrounding community, where sons are under the control of their fathers as they wait for the farm to be passed on" (2020,

83). Jimmy is a victim of the system and the cultural expectation of patriarchal land transference. He maintains his farm less out of a love of his work or a commitment to land stewardship than from a dogged sense of tradition and family history. *Pilgrim Hill* is haunted by the ghost of an idealised Ireland. The rise of intensive agriculture in Ireland in the twentieth century led to widespread unemployment in rural areas, as farm work became increasingly mechanised and farming an isolated profession. Shanagher and Brereton note that:

> Jimmy's largely solitary life plays out against a backdrop of an *anomie* arising from the decline of the cooperative traditions such as the *meitheal* (a word in the Irish language that describes traditional cooperative practices such as gathering for the potato harvest) that has been made redundant by mechanisation (2020, 83).

The nexus between these two films is the twentieth-century shift in farming practices. It is possible to imagine the Josie of *Garage*'s finding work, community, and some measure of fulfilment in an Ireland where rural labour requires the cooperation and remuneration of the entire community. In this space, Josie's masculinity would fail to be in contention, as an active member of the economic and social structure of the community. Similarly, we can imagine an older Ireland where Jimmy, surrounded by other men, is enabled to have meaningful leisure time in the society of others. In this climate, his identity as a landowner and subsequently an employer would potentially prove a source of pride rather than resentment. Both *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* speak compellingly about the breakdown of community structures in rural Ireland. The ghost of a rural idyll, wherein community practices of care and inclusion were of vital importance, haunts both texts. However, the idyllic

rural Ireland by which both *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* are haunted is one that never existed beyond the colonial and later national imagination. The politics of the rural idyll are inherently exclusionary and the maintenance of a pastoral fantasy is predicated on the disenfranchisement of women, disabled, queer, Traveller, and other marginalised communities. *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill* rightly point to discontent at the heart of rural Ireland and identify its source as the collapse of the old world order, but neither film meaningfully interrogates whether this world was worth maintaining or if it did in fact ever exist.

Hardy Bucks: Influences and Contexts

Hardy Bucks is a television series which chronicles the exploits of a group of young men living in the fictional rural town of Castletown, county Mayo. Forty-seven seconds into the first episode of the show, protagonist Eddie Durkin claims that he is "thinking of leaving" the town. Buzz McDonnell, Eddie's best friend, expresses utter disbelief and indignation, immediately dismissing the idea and claiming that they have everything they could ever want in Castletown. They are sitting in a fog of cigarette smoke, surrounded by empty bottles of alcohol in a ramshackle cottage in the middle of nowhere. Buzz asks, "What's better than Castletown?" to which Eddie simply declares: "Galway!" Buzz is incredulous and says: "How would you even get up there?" The scene is humorous, but this desire to leave and the dissatisfaction with staying remains a touchstone throughout the series. *Hardy Bucks*, a mockumentary comedy series, began life as a college project by writer and director Chris Tordoff. The series went on to win RTÉ's Storyland competition in 2009, resulting in its being commissioned for television by the broadcaster.

The fact that the show was in many ways a break with what RTÉ had previously commissioned as representative of rural life was not lost on the more perceptive critics. In 2015 during the airing of the show's third series, *Irish Times* reviewer Ian O'Doherty wrote:

> That *Hardy Bucks* started off as a web-based jape is evident in the show. That's not because of any obvious budget deficits; instead, there's just no way anyone who is a graduate of the RTE school of safe comedy would ever dream of coming up with some of the disgraceful, moronic, scandalous, and extremely funny ideas that burst forth with joyous, profligate abandon (O' Doherty, 2015).

O' Doherty's positive review of the series was in step with public opinion in 2015, but during its lifetime the series left many critics baffled by what they saw as a "parody [of] small-town life" (O' Doherty, 2015)**.** One reviewer failed even to geolocate the show's setting accurately and suggested that the western county of Mayo was in the midlands (Brady, 2013). An incredulous tone pervades contemporary reviews of the series, a disbelief that something so transgressive could come from a group of young men from Mayo. Tara Brady even seemed to baulk at Martin Maloney's (Eddie Durkin) insistence that the show functions as "legitimate social critique" (Brady, 2013). Various reviewers' incredulity points to what critics and audiences had been primed to expect from a comedy set in rural Ireland, particularly one centred on a group of men.

Hardy Bucks provides a significant deviation in representational tendencies of rural Ireland and its ecologies as it destabilises romantic myths about the West by those

who stood to lose most from their existence. In contrast to the formalised sitcom approach taken by *Killinaskully*, it adopts a mockumentary style that echoes both the emerging contemporary proliferation of low-quality aesthetics of phone cameras into mainstream media, as well as the bitterness and anger felt by a generation utterly disenfranchised by the collapse of the country's economy. *Hardy Bucks* focuses the narrative on the fictional Castletown (a stand-in for Swinford, Co. Mayo) through the conceit of a film crew arriving in the locality to profile the youth.

It should be noted that while the aesthetic, ideological and comedic approaches of *Killinaskully* and *Hardy Bucks* are drastically different, the series display interesting similarities. In fact a contemporary reviewer described *Hardy Bucks* as "*Killinaskully* on steroids" (O' Doherty, 2015). The series diverge on several points, particularly in their focus on and approach to representing rural masculinities. Both shows centre on a group of alcoholic men, though admittedly the alcoholism in *Killinaskully* is far more endearingly portrayed. Both series' highlight the State's failure to provide adequate representation and resourcing to local communities. They also share a focus on the inconsistent nature of work in rural Ireland (*Killinaskully*'s Dan and the *Hardy Bucks* are seen engaging in various odd jobs, typically in construction). It is also hugely significant that both shows use the conceit of having the story mediated by the outsider (filmmaker).

This mediation allows the sense that an external intervention is required: that Irish perceptions of self are unreliable. It also has a long-established tradition (usually negative) of performing for – and being owned visually by – the outsider, tourist,

coloniser, visitor: the agency of Irish characters on screen is always reduced. Irish characters are always performing themselves rather than being themselves. It highlights a problematic inability to be self determining. It also allows for a critical exposure of how neocolonialism can work. It foregrounds the state as a complicit performer in being "recolonised" for neocolonial, capitalist, and corporate exploitation.

A significant point of deviation between the two texts however, is that while there is never any sense in *Killinaskully* that Dan 'works', this is never highlighted as being a source of emotional, social or even economic distress, conversely, unemployment or the pursuit of work is a core narrative and thematic focus of *Hardy Bucks*. There are also parallels to be drawn between *Hardy Bucks, Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill*. *Hardy Bucks* is also interested in interrogating the socio-economic and emotional experiences of men living in a rural Ireland changed by modernising agricultural practice. The approach taken in *Hardy Bucks* however sees a total recasting of the rural space which is in complete opposition to the shadowy romanticism seen in *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill*.

Hardy Bucks frequently presents characters attempting to escape the rural space, albeit only cognitively, even romantically, through reconstructing it as 'elsewhere'. These short-lived, Mittyesque and always unsuccessful attempts typically take the form of Ibiza-inspired 'foam' parties or motorsport events such as the Mitsi Turbo Cup. The motivation for these events stems partly from a lack of alternative ways to pass the time in Castletown, but equally from a sense that their lives and the lives of

their friends sit at an intersection between two competing visions of the West. Eddie and Buzz live in a small cottage in the countryside, but its 1950s' furnishings contrast utterly with the techno music the men play there, the ecstasy they take, and the arrival of 'the internet' in an episode from series two. Castletown is populated by characters such as Kofi (an African police officer working in Castletown as part of an Irish-African, Garda Exchange Program) Cowboy, Stateside, Boris (a Russian drug dealer) Boo (a martial arts 'expert'), and a Chinese Triad gang. In contrast to the cosmopolitanism of their social group and the hedonism of their lifestyle, the Bucks frequently congregate on disused train tracks, broken-down tractors and traditional dry-stone walls images more readily associated with rural Ireland. They speak in thick Mayo accents and attend traditional removals and weddings. The juxtaposition of these radically opposed elements and the ineffectuality of the Bucks' attempts to create haphazard 'elsewheres' generates much of the series comedy, but it is the irreverent presentation of these elements through the adoption of low-quality aesthetics which is intrinsic to the show's radical deconstruction of the kind of rural representation seen in *Killinaskully* and elsewhere.

The Aesthetics of Subversion

A frequent visual motif of the series is the 'Strength of a Woman' statue. A sculpture on the main street of Swinford erected in recognition of the women of the community and women like them across Mayo who remained in Ireland during the 1950s, when their husbands and male relatives were forced abroad to seek work. Even a historical "masculinity" – of doing the honourable thing – is implied here, in contrast with the Bucks' apathetic immobility and idleness. The positioning of the

statue within the *mise en scène* is remarkable for the approach used. Most often it is present in the background of shots, becoming noteworthy only through its repeated appearance within the *mise en scène*. Rather than centralising the statue in sincere homage to what it represents, or removing it entirely from the *mise en scène*, the re-appearance of the statue throughout the series – shot from odd angles that partially obscure it or throw its proportions off to comedic effect – disrupts the intended reception of the structure. While the statue has grown in profile because of the series, to the community of Swinford and the surrounding townlands the piece acts as an actual reminder of an accepted local history of emigration, which aligned with a wider national narrative. *Hardy Bucks* irreverently highlights and refracts this history through the awkward shots of the statue it presents. This serves to undermine the desired effect of and intended reaction to the sculpture, which is reverence for the men who went abroad to find work and the women who stayed behind. The image of a poised, steadfast woman, clutching her child to her as she waves farewell should invite sympathy, pride, and valorisation. Through *Hardy Bucks*' presentation of the statue this recommended interpretation is significantly undermined, the piece becomes an unwitting element of a wider destabilisation of rural Ireland and its attendant patriarchal mythologies. This particular element of the staging is indicative of the wider aesthetic approach employed throughout the series.

The amateur nature of the show's production design is also indicative of its transgressive qualities. *Hardy Bucks* began as a no-budget college assignment. It was less focused on representing Swinford, or indeed the West as aesthetically pleasing, and more intent on capturing the improvised banter between Maloney and the rest of

the cast. Their frequently unscripted performances are central to the series. This improvised banter takes place in an environment that would inspire shock or confusion in audiences expecting a more traditional image of the West. The inclusion of the statue, dry stone walls, disused train tracks, and barbed wire fences form part of a concerted effort to disrupt the Picturesque and represent a world in which it has no place. In direct contravention of concepts of abstraction enshrined by the 'strong Irish farmer' ideal, stressing the fact that the Bucks identify the rural space as one of utility, a space that can provide for them, not as a romantic ideal but as a cultural and economic actuality.

The *mise en scène* of *Hardy Bucks* is frequently designed so that shots of landscapes are crowded or obscured. The obstruction is formed either by the Bucks themselves, by car windows, or by angles that disrupt Picturesque settings either by their exclusion of Picturesque motifs or by their inclusion of drab local buildings. It is also achieved through the inclusion of comedic elements which highlight the Bucks depravity or stupidity. In episode five of series two, a landscape of rolling hills and green fields extends behind the character French Toast as he drinks from an iron-stained, rusting bath left in a field for livestock. The displacement of the utility of the object however, should not be understood as accidental. In this same episode, Eddie walks along a country road, surrounded by green fields of grazing cattle, trees in verdant leaf, and hills in the distance. As the camera moves with him, a series of metal gates comes into the frame before a handmade sign spray-painted with the words "Keep Out" comes into view. The programme t cuts to a farmyard – a judiciously marked agricultural setting – where the Bucks, incongruously dressed in

Dashiki shirts and high on ecstasy, are drinking and dancing to techno music at an impromptu Stag party for the character Salmon. The following episode opens with Eddie and Salmon sitting at a picnic table. The choice to disrupt the Picturesque deliberately again evident. Rolling hills are visible in the distance, but the town of Swinford sits in the middle ground, its buildings dishevelled and grey. The foreground is dominated by ivy-choked trees and a telephone pole. Even the interior and exterior of Eddie and Buzz's home serve to destabilise the pastoral fantasy. They live in a cottage that conjures Ford's emblematic thatched whitewashed cottage with a green door. Eddie and Buzz's home, however, is ramshackle and filthy: empty beer bottles and kegs clutter the space and the air is always thick with cigarette smoke. This approach to representation can be understood as an attempt to deconstruct the Picturesque. This deconstruction is enacted by populating the space with young men for whom, the socio-economic status, the hierarchical, scopophilic promise which is latent in the aesthetics of the Picturesque is absent.

Caitríona Ní Laoire writes:

> There is a discourse around migration versus staying which de-values staying. Why do we use the term 'to stay behind'? This implies being left behind, while the world carries on somewhere else. Implicit in this term is a modernist discourse of rurality, which opposes a traditional, backward rurality to a modern and progressive urbanism. (2001, 224)

The experience of being left behind, of populating a place from which men have historically been forced to leave in search of work, is intrinsic to the Bucks' experience of space and place. The idea of being left behind also has the the connotation of their not going anywhere (or failure to do so) themselves. However it

also has the connotation of being abandoned, let down or dropped from the race. The Bucks' remaining in Castletown does not offer any affirmation of increased opportunities for young men in rural Ireland, it is indicative of stasis. The series' focus on the 'Strength of a Woman' statue again becomes relevant. A male exodus from the West has been valorised both locally and nationally, as a hardship undertaken for the benefit of the families and communities who remained. The women who remained were equally valorised as stalwart and courageous for keeping the home fires burning. Of course, the ideological implication of this myth is that this exodus was a tragedy and that although people would have been materially impacted if the men had remained, they would have been happier. In *Hardy Bucks*, this narrative comes under intense scrutiny. The Bucks, rather than being forced to leave, are forced to stay and no one is better off as a result, certainly not the women in their lives, who are invariably disappointed with them. It indicates a growing sense that there is no place for young men in rural Ireland. Research on men's farm employment in rural Ireland shows that "since the previous census of 2010, the number of farms in Mayo has fallen from 12,458 to 11,920, a decrease of 4.5% [...] The average farmer age is 59-years-old" (Meehan 2022). These figures reveal that there is patently no space for young men in the agro-economy of rural Ireland. The myth of the Strong Farmer, which remains so central to conceptions of rural masculinity, has instead become a taunting presence in the face of exclusion from the farming profession. In this context, The 'Strength of a Woman' takes on a darker, more haunting meaning. Her presence is not one of a woman waving goodbye, waving off men who were hailed as heroes, but instead, it is indicative of a

community sending away, or consigning to limbo a generation who they cannot afford to facilitate.

We see a similar representation of masculinity in *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill.* What differs in *Hardy Bucks* is not only a dejection at the lack of opportunity in Castletown but also a sense of frustration at being unable to change the community materially, and to remould it into a place where they might have some purpose. The failed 'elsewheres' of the Misti Turbo Cup and Zambezi Nights provide an outlet for these desires to change Castletown, and to make it into a place where the Bucks might belong, but derive their comedic exigency from their failure and impossibility. However, this should not be understood as an essentialist representation of rural Ireland which argues for an agricultural life, or one that adheres to traditional patriarchal values as being the only ones that can survive there. Rather it is the failure of both options that has left the Bucks adrift. In the first episode of the web series, when asked what it is like to live in Castletown, both Buzz and Eddie are emphatic: "Shite." The sentiment recalls a similar expression in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting,* where another group of disenfranchised young men engage in hedonistic behaviours, as they chafe against conceptions of national identity in the wake of colonialism. The motivation to escape Castletown through substance abuse or the reimagining it as elsewhere derives solely from the lack of opportunity faced by these young men, who in the depths of a recession find themselves without qualifications, without social mobility, and without work. The Bucks' failure to reinvent Castletown and the farcical quality of their approach, points to the fallibility of romantic notions of place, which promise an escape from everyday experience.

The degree to which these imaginary escapes from Castletown inform the Bucks' worldview is very much an inversion of the common trope of Ireland as an escape for the exhausted contemporary neoliberal traveller. It demonstrates the extent to which rural ecologies are understood as pressure valves for a neoliberal hegemony and highlights the fallacy of this. For the Bucks, the romantic escape of the mythical West is a prison. It should be noted that it is not only the Bucks' attempt to reimagine Castletown for escapism that fails. The golf course run by Aloysius Lavin becomes a useful site for the Bucks to harvest 'Magic Mushrooms' and Lavin's fantasies of becoming a property magnate are overshadowed by the underwhelming reach of his power. The process of transformation (acquiring foam machines, zebras, drugs), while haphazard, is not the barrier to escapism, rather it is the ecological and social realities of Castletown which prevent the Bucks from escaping.

In their article about mortgage patterns in rural Ireland pre and post-Celtic Tiger Enda Murphy and Mark Scott write.

> For example, towns with a population of 5000–9999 people witnessed a 24.2% increase in population between 1996 and 2002 and towns of 1500–2999 people saw a 19% increase over the same period (Scott et al., 2005). The greatest concentration of these developments has taken place in the extended commuter belts of the primary urban centres, particularly in counties in the outer commuter belt of Dublin (McCarthy et al., 2003; NESC, 2004). Research by Mahon (2007) suggests that, although residential development in these fringe locations is often driven by nearby urban centres, the representation of rurality is central in the conceptualization of place by homeowners, who interpret and experience fringe areas as broadly rural places. (2013, 38)

The Celtic Tiger saw vast swathes of the population renegotiate cultural and environmental definitions of rurality, often within commuting distance of large cities, where they could access cultural and social amenities. This conception of rurality meant a new generation was unable to understand, and certainly less willing to believe, that rural life could be both impractical and utterly miserable. *Hardy Bucks* represents the anger and disillusionment felt by young men who have been intentionally left behind by a rapidly changing society, who have been given the unwanted role of custodians of a culture and place to which they feel no meaningful connection, and from which they can derive no meaningful livelihood. The series ultimately shows not only the failure of a hierarchical, nationalistic dream of land ownership and the often-devastating fallout it incurred, but it also questions whether that dream ever had any real place in the culture, any real value beyond the institution of hierarchies which cause environmental collapse and systemic oppression.

Foregrounding Edgelands

This desire for utility and action is eloquently expressed in the aesthetic foregrounding of edgelands throughout the series. A term coined by Marion Shoard, edgelands describes the "undervalued and overlooked fringe between city and country". We might imagine, as Shoard does, areas

> characterised by rubbish tips and warehouses, superstores and derelict industrial plants, office parks and gypsy encampments, golf courses, allotments and fragmented, frequently scruffy, farmland. All these heterogeneous elements are arranged in an unruly and often apparently chaotic fashion against a background of

> unkempt wasteland frequently swathed in riotous growths of colourful plants, both native and exotic. (2002)

We might also consider waste ground at the edge of motorways, urban and peri-urban waterways and coastlines, and 'green spaces' between housing developments within the same designation. Poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts describe edgelands as "a complex landscape; a debatable zone, constantly reinventing themselves as economic and social tides come in and out" (Farley & Symmons Roberts, 2011) Edgelands are, as Shoard observes, constantly under threat because of their discursive fluidity. They are frequently remade or 'tidied up' to fall more neatly in line with anthropocentric conceptions of landscape aesthetics. They are also sites of vital biodiversity and ecological richness in areas that have not been co-opted by industry and, by their lack of obvious aesthetic appeal, are not co-opted as sites of natural beauty. They are sites of ecological worth that occur in the spaces between environmental disruption. The foregrounding of these spaces in *Hardy Bucks* are most notable in the pieces of direct addresses to the camera. In these interviews that the Bucks give sitting on Swinford's disused railway tracks, where wildflowers and grasses sprout up around them unbidden, we are offered a glimpse of ecological spaces that have not been romanticised on screen. These spaces cannot be romanticised by the constantly shifting parameters of their definition. They cannot be understood as Picturesque not only because of their intimate connection to industry – which is always visible in the space – but also because of the deliberate deconstructing and de-aestheticising of the colonial notion of the Picturesque which takes place on screen. Rather than presenting an image of pristine, untouched wilderness or a pastoral idyll, the edgelands of *Hardy Bucks* create a microcosmic

portrait of the West, as a place indelibly marked by the influence of industry but equally by its absence. The West is emphatically presented as a place defined by systems of culture, labour, and ecology.

Deconstructing Romantic notions of the West

If *Hardy Bucks* refuses to represent the West as a picturesque space, how then is it represented? Or more accurately: how is the West presented as experienced by disenfranchised young men? The use of low-quality aesthetic approaches provides an antidote to pastoral escapism. Further to this, there is an attempt to highlight the unique cultural touchstones of these young men through the aesthetics of the series. This foregrounding of the Bucks' unique interests and worldview validates their experience by giving a voice to those who are often left without one (as Maloney observes) but it also serves a comedic purpose. The foregrounding of certain cultural references disrupts expectations of the social and cultural lives of young men in a place associated with traditional culture and values. This is evident in the series' use of "idents". The episodes of the web series and the first television series of *Hardy Bucks* featured idents at regular intervals throughout the episodes. These idents are used when showing the passage of time or as the narrative moves from one location to another. They feature techno music, such as remixes of Blue (Da Ba Dee) by Eiffel 65, and quick successions of images, sometimes relating to, but often disconnected from the previous scene. The first webisode features an ident which flashes between stock images (a John Deere tractor, a can of Dutch Gold, and a cannabis leaf) in quick succession. The idents make formalised use of low-quality aesthetics, the images used appear to be pulled straight from a web search and are

often letterboxed, or poorly aligned within the aspect ratio. Another ident used in the first episode of the TV series, which is used after the introduction of Eddie's girlfriend Noreen and serves some narrative function, features a series of several photos of Eddie and Noreen standing next to his car, in the middle of an argument, while the phrase "Couldn't care less" flashes above them.

The images used in the idents feature cultural references central to the Bucks' lives, alcohol, drugs, and a relationship to machinery couched less in its viability for agricultural use than in its sex appeal. In the episode which features the above "Couldn't care less" ident, the crux of Eddie and Noreen's argument stems from Eddie's almost fetishistic obsession with his car, which he describes as having quite literally "the power of seven hundred horses". These images move the parameters of viewers' expectations of country life. The idents also perform, like liminal narratives, almost cinematic edgelands, wherein the content in these sections cannot be commodified, fully defined or controlled. Instead of the sincere engagement with the cultural traditions of the West to which Sean Thornton submits in *The Quiet Man*, or the knowing repetition of cultural expectations in *Killinaskully*, or even these same traditions which are reused and recast in *Garage* and *Pilgrim Hill*, *Hardy Bucks* abandons them entirely. The Bucks' love of house music, hardcore drugs and sexual hedonism, all serve to enforce not only their assertion that living in Castletown is "shite" (and requires some form of escapism to make bearable) but also that the cultural and social world which they long for and which they engage with is one we might more readily associate with urban environments. Ní Laoire writes:

> Unemployed men have restricted access to the pub through lack of disposable income, and literature suggests that the urban street then becomes an alternative space of social interaction. […] Restriction of access to the pub may have similar effects in rural contexts, but the alternative street space is not equally available. This suggests that rural unemployed/underemployed men do not have the same opportunities for interaction with each other as their urban counterparts and therefore for developing discursive strategies to cope with the impact of unemployment. (2001, 230)

Ní Laoire's research suggests another self-conscious layer of nuance to a disruption of the pastoral idyll and contextualises most events in the series taking place not against scenic backdrops but in Castletown itself. The Bucks are expressing a longing for an urban environment, already imagining that they live in one. In episode one, Buzz is introduced to us during a piece to camera where he announces, "Twenty-one years I've been on the streets". He points to the main street of the town below. In reality Swinford (the real-life Castletown) has a population of just over 1,000 people: it is categorically not an urban centre, but the Bucks aim to present themselves as savvy urbanites at every opportunity. The work that the Bucks engage in is also indicative of this. Since the 1990s, rural Ireland has seen a shift in employment patterns and subsequently a diversification of the rural economy which is increasingly geared towards rural tourism, with farming becoming a part-time or adjunct employment for many. Employment and social patterns have changed drastically enough in rural Ireland that the Bucks consider themselves outside of the agricultural system. They will never work on farms and, as such, the farm is a place which does not intrude on their psychogeographic perception of Castletown. This demonstrates a renegotiation of Irish masculine relationships with rural ecologies as

well as the changing nature of these ecologies. Because of this socio-economic shift, they engage in a process of wish-fulfilment, where they choose to perceive Castletown as more urban than it is. Eddie initially works as a 'taxi driver' and Buzz as a 'bouncer'. Neither of them has the qualifications or relevant permits to carry out this work. They take it on informally and subsequently abandon the roles when faced with a lack of demand for their services. In contrast, in the scene where Big Mick (Eddie's uncle) reminisces about 'the old days', he is given a wide shot, with the landscape behind him. He leans on his shovel and talks about how houses were built 'back then' and how diggers would not have the skill required to do it now before he sings a traditional song. *Hardy Bucks* accepts that the dream of the 'strong farmer' may have been a possibility for an earlier generation but is adamant that it is not a lack of skill which has seen it fall away, but an ecological crisis and an agro-industrial mindset. There has, since the 1990s, been "an increased push towards transforming the Irish countryside from a predominantly working agricultural one to a tourism landscape where Irish history can be retailed to the overseas visitor and local" (Johnson 1999, 191). This economic shift, coupled with a decline in the viability of maintaining and working a farm in the West (as evidenced by the steeply inclining average age of farmers there), has seen farming become a profession that is the preserve of an older generation and also, equally telling is that it is perceived as such.

The effect of demonstrating the urban appeal and the peripheral, often nonexistent, presence of traditional culture, within the diegesis is twofold. Firstly, it undermines the narrative of the West as a repository of national identity and culture, a place

which has not experienced change. It highlights the fact that the West has experienced change, although as exemplified by the Bucks' lack of opportunity that change has not been positive. Secondly, it undermines the popular trope of the emigrant longing for his rural home which has been frequently repeated in music, literature, art, and cinema. When Eddie is offered the opportunity to leave Castletown for America, he takes it. His last-minute decision to remain is not motivated by a romanticised view of place, but by the connections he has with the other Bucks. An argument could be made that Eddie holds a romanticised view of these relationships, given that they are at their core deeply co-dependent and dysfunctional, however, this argument fails to account for the break in representational traditions that Eddie's choice represents. Narratives of male friendship in Irish tradition are frequently expressed in hindsight or from a geographic or temporal distance. We might consider works within Irish ballad traditions, such as "Mount Massey the Flower of Macroom", or "Spancil Hill". These recount the dreams of an emigrant visiting friends and loved ones, or recalling his youth in Ireland. The choice to leave is what permits these feelings to be expressed, the distance instituted from the subject of the longing is what allows the subject to be romanticised. In direct contravention of this tradition Eddie chooses to stay, undermining and refuting a romantic conclusion to the Bucks' narrative.

Conclusion

Ultimately *Hardy Bucks* performs a destabilisation of romantic myths about the West staged by a generation of young men negatively impacted by these myths. Allowing the West to serve as a cultural repository not only normalises but also further

engenders cycles of deprivation, poverty, and lack of access to opportunity. *Hardy Bucks* gives voice to a generation of men who know the pastoral fantasy of the West to be a myth, but nevertheless experience the negative impact of its proliferation, in their lack of access to cultural centres, education, and employment. After four seasons and two films, *Hardy Bucks* ended in 2015. The final series deviated drastically from what came before in terms of aesthetic approach, losing much of the transgressive qualities which had been intrinsic to the early aesthetics of the series. Among other formal revisions, the idents and improvisation were gone. By its conclusion, there was far less interest in exploring the character's relationship to place or even to each other, devolving instead into a selection of set pieces featuring the then well-established personalities of the Bucks, thrown into situations where they found themselves out of their depth. There was also a shift towards the style of self-lampooning comedy of *Killinaskully*, where rustic naiveté becomes the butt of the joke.

As a series commissioned by the national broadcaster by public vote, *Hardy Bucks* attests to a willingness on the part of viewers to see a representation of rural Ireland that stepped away from dominant contemporary trends. The West in *Hardy Bucks* is a transgressive one which did not invoke heritage or Picturesque aesthetics. The series created a space for a representation of masculinity which undermined accepted patriarchal systems in the West by demonstrating the failure of these systems as well as questioning the value of traits historically associated with 'correct' masculinity in Irish culture. In ecological terms, this questioning of patriarchal systems allowed for a framing of the West that displaced the role of agriculture in narrative in the same

way it has been displaced economically, it questions the wider cultural expectation of land stewardship as a point of pride or even an aspiration. It situates the West not as a place adjunct to a wider Irish narrative, a place which is an afterthought or an escape at best, but as a place undermined and affected by these conceptions. Ultimately the lack of opportunity faced by the Bucks was placed at the feet of administrations that had consistently marginalised them, and at a culture which had championed damaging patriarchal ideologies as integral to Irish men's understanding of masculinity, ecology, and the value of their lives and labour in rural Ireland.

Chapter Five
Ondine, Arracht, and Subversive Polyvocality

Introduction

This chapter explores representations of rural Ireland's ecologies which offer alternative approaches to kin-making, land stewardship and environmental care. It sets out the argument that the representations of rural spaces in a select number of films, provide a unique and potent staging ground for positive cultural change and ecological posterity. These representations do so by subverting narrow, long-established conceptions of gender and sexuality. We have seen the impact of patriarchal systems, productivist agricultural systems, and colonial and heritage aesthetics (demonstrating their inherently limiting and negative impacts) on both the representations and care of rural ecologies. Earlier case studies have analysed how we come to know and are affected by hegemonic systems through representations. However there exist several case studies that through acts of representations of rural Ireland foster an alternative relationship to ecology and gender through a decentralising of heteronormative and patriarchal narratives and anthropocentric views of ecology. By decentralising heteronormative and patriarchal narratives, the power structures which have been culturally accepted as the default human

relationship to ecologies are called into question. The decentralising of heteronormative and patriarchal narratives also allows for a polyvocal diegesis that invites alternative perspectives on the global biodiversity and climate crises. The films discussed in this section typically complicate heteronormative and patriarchal narratives by decentralising hegemonic narratives and project a world in a state of failure or collapse, where through diverse factors, patriarchal power structures are no longer a source of social and economic regulation.

Collapse forms the, socio-economic, and environmental backdrop of each of these narratives and it is through this collapse that new ways of being are imagined. In each of these films, collapse is foundational to both the thematic focus of the narrative, as well as the representation of rural ecologies within their *mise en scène*. In these films, collapse is not something to be avoided or undone, it is beyond the power of the film's human protagonists to evade the disasters with which they are confronted. They are only called upon to navigate their circumstances. Donna Haraway speaks about "learning to inherit without denial and [staying] with the trouble of damaged worlds" (2016, 150). In the films discussed in this chapter, the characters "compost" (Haraway 2016, 138) failure, and failure becomes a part of living and being in the world. Anna Tsing writes:

> When its singular asset can no longer be produced, a place can be abandoned. […] Global landscapes today are strewn with this kind of ruin. Still, these places can be lively despite announcements of their death; abandoned asset fields sometimes yield new multi-species and multicultural life. In a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin. (2021, 6)

Tsing's comments address the need to reevaluate dominant cultural ideas around ecologies. She argues that in the Anthropocene there is no real escape from ecological disaster. To imagine otherwise is to engage with carefully constructed narratives which problematically elide the reality of our life among the "ruins" of Earth's ecologies, and further exacerbate climate and ecological breakdown. Tsing's revelatory statement should bring about an abandonment of previously accepted narratives about human life on this planet: most presciently hierarchical relationships to the non-human world that have facilitated a relationship to ecologies based not on equality but resource extraction. This relationship is mirrored and replicated within human culture, most notably within patriarchal and colonial ideologies which place similarly exploited individuals or groups of individuals deemed to be of less value and deliberately and discursively constructed as such. Haraway offers the slogan "make kin, not babies" (2016, 5) to indicate the importance of decentralising heteronormative, patriarchal conceptions of family, by focusing instead on ideas of kin-making which extend beyond biological connection to include diverse human communities and the non-human world. It is precisely the kin-focused response that *Ondine* and *Arracht* consider. Neither text seeks to avoid or undo collapse, nor to fully preserve lineage or the order of things as they are, but to build something new and better from what remains. The models of kinship and ecology presented in these films demonstrate the reconfiguration of society not within patriarchal value systems but within systems that disrupt traditional conceptions of family, gender, and ecological viability. These films also serve as more ecologically aware and responsible representations of the environment. They promote motivations for care which transcend aesthetic, cultural or economic factors, instead encouraging viewers towards a practice of social and environmental care that recognises the inherent need

for borderless multi-species connection. This borderless connection undermines the hierarchical relationships to nature which have been enforced culturally and societally. This non-hierarchical approach deviates significantly from films previously considered in this work. The case studies explored in this chapter each "look for life in [the] ruins", and each of them discovers it in relation to gender, sexuality, society, and ecology in a way that deviates significantly from the hierarchical precedents which underpinned Irish society from the formation of the state onwards.

Ondine

When asked in an interview with *Cineaste* magazine whether the story of *Ondine* began with "Syracuse or the Ondine folktale", screen writer Jordan replied.

> I just had this image of a fisherman finding a woman in his nets and taking her out of the water. And I didn't know whether she would be alive, or whether she would be dead. I began to write it out that she comes back to life. That's the way it started. (Jordan, quoted by McGuirk in *Cineaste*, 2010)

Also directed by Neil Jordan, *Ondine* begins with life amid and after death. The film's protagonist Syracuse, a recovering alcoholic, is separated from his alcoholic wife Maura. His livelihood as a fisherman is tenuous and his coastal community is reeling from the impacts of the 2008 financial crisis. His daughter Annie is undergoing dialysis while she awaits a kidney transplant. Syracuse is an unwilling outsider, the subject of derision and mockery in his community. Into this grim space of failure and collapse comes the eponymous Ondine, whom Syracuse pulls half-drowned from the sea. Ondine refuses to visit the hospital, eager to keep her

presence in the area a secret. She is, however, willing to stay at Syracuse's late mother's house where she immediately engages in domestic tasks. Syracuse is utterly and immediately enamoured with the beautiful and mysterious stranger and comes to suspect she may be a selkie, a supernatural creature. Later in the narrative when she asks Syracuse how long he will allow her to stay, he mumbles: "If it depends on me, you can stay forever, happily ever after, once upon a time." This comment from Syracuse foregrounds the central tension of the story, that is the push and pull between fairytale and reality. The story oscillates between the two forms both narratively and visually. Jordan has spoken about this internal tension stating, "I'm telling a story that at first seems to be a fairytale but that in the end turns out not to be" (Jordan, quoted by McGuirk in *Cineaste*, 2010).

This fluctuation between fairytale and reality to which Jordan draws attention finds a direct parallel in selkie folklore, where the mystical and enchanting nature of these supernatural beings is complicated and undermined by the harsh realities of their subjugation on land, and the tragedy and trauma of their eventual escape and return to the sea. It is worth revisiting selkie folklore here within the context of essentialist attitudes towards gender, as well as interactions between human and non-human animals. The selkie, "silkie" or "selchie" is a supernatural creature who is both/neither human and/or seal. Selkies are free to move between their human and seal bodies at will, by removing their sealskin coat. If this coat is stolen, however, the selkie remains trapped in her human form. The theft of the sealskin coat is a central element of selkie lore. This coat is typically stolen by a man who, upon discovering the selkie in her human form, steals and hides the coat in order to keep the selkie trapped in her human form usually to keep her as his wife. Once the coat is stolen by

the man, the selkie has no choice but to become his wife. Tales of selkie wives are part of broader mythologies around animal brides which, as Kirsten Møllegaard notes, "interrogate women's cultural role as other in relation to man [...] the animal bride crystallises conflicts and tensions arising from men's hegemonic power over women and the way marriage as a patriarchal institution, enforces men's rights to control women's sexuality" (2014, 93). She also observes that "animal bride tales destabilise the validity of male hegemony by emphasising through various plots involving trickery, violence, forced marriage, domestic drudgery, escape, and orphaned children that male control over women is ultimately doomed to fail" (94). The selkie narrative is an inherently subversive tale. Like the selkie creature, it is both and neither. Selkie stories are simultaneously tales of female agency and stories of female subjugation, as well as the tragedy of abandoned children. Selkie narratives demonstrate a polyvocality in their articulation of diverse aspects of female experience while simultaneously describing an experience that is non-human and fantastical. In this sense the selkie mythology at the heart of *Ondine* indicates usefully how we might begin to understand the film's relationship to patriarchy and heteronormative family structures. Just as the film oscillates between a "grungy" (Jordan, quoted by McGuirk in *Cineaste*) aesthetic and fairytale sensibilities, it is both and neither a narrative of female subjugation and a disavowal of patriarchal institutions.

After hiding Ondine in his mother's house, Syracuse brings his daughter to her dialysis treatment where he tells her a story of a fisherman who pulls a woman from the sea in his nets. Significantly he admits he does not know how the story ends. Annie admonishes him for telling a "shit" story but suggests that the woman in the

story (and by extension Ondine) may be a selkie. This act of narration is recurrent throughout *Ondine*, with Syracuse, Ondine also known as Johanna, and Annie each taking turns telling a story about a selkie wife finding happiness with a landsman. This collaborative storytelling is another element of the polyvocality of *Ondine*. Syracuse, Ondine, and Annie each exist in states of precarity and uncertainty. They all share a desire for safety and security. Syracuse longs for a reprieve from the fear of alcoholic relapse, from social exclusion, from his precarious employment and its resulting financial pressures. Annie seeks safety from the uncertainty of her illness and her family situation. Ondine wishes to live without the precarity of her illegal immigrant status. The narrative presents the construction of a new family unit, composed of these three characters as a route to this safety and security. However, this safety is made tenuous by the conflicting belief systems and power disparities of the three individuals (most notably in Johanna/Ondine because of the way her identity will be negotiated narratively). The polyvocality of the film precludes the possibility of resolution on this identitarian front. It can only offer the fantasy of the selkie tale as told by three individuals weaving it together in an attempt to construct a cohesive, traditional love story.

Describing *Ondine*'s coastal setting, Paul McGuirk states that Jordan paints it as "a cosmopolitan place: it pays little heed to 'strangers,' to 'foreigners'" (2010, 243). McGuirk notes however that this cosmopolitanism can be partially attributed to the characterisation of Ondine as 'the right kind' of foreigner. He notes that she 'is quiet, refined, European; unlike the West Africans that the politically-bankrupt, centre-right Irish government is particularly eager to deport" (2010, 243). In presenting a stranger that is not perceived as threatening, Jordan usefully avoids the

uncomfortable realities of the strangers experiences in an Irish fishing village. Research on experiences of non-EEA workers in the Irish fishing industry troubles Jordan's representation of the community as “cosmopolitan”.

Border Crossing and Migrant Identities

In an interview conducted with twenty-four men, the research found that racist discrimination and exploitative working conditions were commonplace on Irish boats. Ten workers described being paid less than others on the boat performing the same work, particularly Irish and EU citizens [and] less than half of the interviewees recalled boats being inspected by the WRC or anyone else asking about work-related issues. Over half of the participants were subjected to racial and verbal abuse on fishing vessels and described working conditions as “miserable”. Additionally, over two-thirds of the participants observed that they could work between fifteen and twenty hours a day. The study also found that failure to pay the national minimum wage is common. One interviewee described his experience as follows: “No violence, but. . . always like threatening me about if you don’t work I will cancel your permit, so kind of threats in a different way” (Murphy *et al*., 2023) McGuirk observes that Jordan does little to fetishise the fishing community he represents, avoiding the kind of aesthetics that are typically associated with Fáilte Ireland advertising in favour of an industrialised, gritty aesthetic. There is, however, fetishisation of a different sort in the film. McGuirk notes that Ondine’s presence does not “represent any sort of threat to either Syracuse or his daughter, Annie. She is quiet, refined, European” (2010, 243). She is a migrant woman who will by the film’s conclusion be entitled to remain in the country because of her marriage to Syracuse. She has effectively proved herself to be the ‘right sort of immigrant’

because of her femininity. Ondine's fluidity enables her to navigate the socio-cultural environment in which she finds herself, but once a place has been established for her in that environment, her fluidity must be given up in exchange for security. Her ability to transgress, or to cross borders, would in her new home be perceived as a threat; like the errant selkie women who abandon their land-bound children. Ondine's identity is fluid until it is not.

Once she is revealed not to be a selkie, but in reality a Romanian woman named Johanna who has been forced into drug trafficking, her identity takes on a different kind of stasis, and her ability to cross borders both literal and supernatural is curtailed. Møllegaard identifies borders and the crossing of them as a core thematic element of *Ondine* (2014, 106), contextualising this thematic interest within the wider narrative structure of selkie mythology, wherein the shoreline as a site of transformation and capture becomes

> invested with territorial markings and performances where meaning about the female stranger, doubling as foreigner and other, is continuously produced and interpreted in terms of territorial dominance and national identity. (2014, 107)

The establishment and enforcement of binaries are central to popular conceptions of borders. A binary construction of peoples as 'legal' or 'illegal' migrants, as 'refugees' or 'expats', fails to allow for a complex and shifting ecosystem of human movement across a rapidly changing planet. These binaries necessarily become hierarchical in service of their survival, with agents on each side of the binary understood in comparison to agents on the other. The binary, hierarchical structures of borders which allow some to exist in safety and others to live in states of precarity and

vulnerability is enforced by Draconian ideas of 'the migrant' even though "borders are always being breached […] Hence the watery metaphors – the 'deluge,' 'waves,' or 'floods' of migrants – surpassed only by the animalising language of 'swarms'" (De Noronha & Bradley 2022, 7). Here the selkie myth becomes central to Ondine's identity again. If she is a 'human' woman and an illegal migrant she is under threat from a system that does not allow for an assessment of her that is anything other than a 'categorically discreet' problem. The migrant can only be understood as an outsider, and must only be understood as possessing an inherent threat to those within the confines of the State's borders, otherwise, the border itself can be called into question. Bradley and De Noronha argue that

> Immigration controls are seen as merely enforcing coherent legal and spatial distinctions between national populations, through such bureaucratic devices as visas, passports, border checks, and agreements between states. Borders between nation-states are seen to be vital for democracy: they demarcate the necessarily bounded demos. (2022, 8)

Ondine's immigrant status requires a similarly 'coherent' categorisation of her as a bounded entity. The border cannot allow for the way in which multiple overlapping qualities inflect a human identity and trouble the border's existence: this requires, rather "a deep historical amnesia about colonialism, and an unwillingness to consider ongoing relations of economic domination" (Bradley & De Noronha 2022, 8). If Ondine is a selkie, however, the precarity of her presence on land (and in Ireland) is undermined only by the lingering presence of a 'seal husband', exemplified by Syracuses' drunken assertion that she go back to the sea where she belongs before he abandons her on Seal Rock.

It is worth noting that the prevalence of selkies within Irish mythology is minimal. This is the case particularly when compared to the wealth of selkie stories within Scottish folklore. The idea is something that the film addresses, when Maura's Scottish partner Alex, insists that selkie's are "Scottish thing". The de-territorialised, boundary-less quality of the myth is something which stands in contrast to the more xenophobic undertones of the film's conclusion. McGuirk highlights the racist undertones of the film in the representation of Vladic, an eastern European drug trafficker, who has pursued Ondine menacingly throughout the film and whom Annie has referred to as Ondine's "seal husband". McGuirk argues that "Jordan's story is told for the most part from Syracuse's point of view, Ondine's otherness is never fully explored [...] Despite this, Vladic remains a peripheral character, a cypher, a hollow signifier of otherness and criminality" (2010, 245). Vladic is ultimately pushed from Syracuse's boat by Ondine and drowns. His death is understood as synonymous with Ondine's freedom, even though following this event she is made resident in a direct provision centre, losing freedom of movement and entering a state of political limbo. Freedom for Ondine (as understood by Syracuse and, by extension the viewer) is freedom to marry and escape the violence and criminality of her society of origin. Møllegaard notes that "the underlying perception of Eastern Europe [in the film] as violent, primitive and dangerous is confirmed in a representation of the West as the subject of desire and the geographical site of Ondine's happy-ever-after" (2014, 110). This perception of Eastern Europe is evidenced by the brutish, menacing presentation of Vladic, who is placed in opposition to Syracuse as the well-meaning, if imperfect, hero. There is a resonance between *Ondine* and Haraway's argument that "the earth is full of refugees, human

and not, without refuge" but *Ondine* is disinclined to consider all of them as equally worthy of protection. The film functions as a crucible for the kinds of refugees — human and non-human — who are facilitated to survive and thrive in its contemporary setting. Jordan writes Ondine's continued presence in the lives of Syracuse and Annie and her eventual marriage to Syracuse as a romance, a matter of choice. Møllegaard suggests that this choice is based on a certain degree of pragmatism on Ondine's part (2014, 100), however, it is worth considering this within the wider context of European migration. In her research on the effects of how European border policies increase the vulnerability of migrants, Iole Fontana notes:

> Walls, fences and security checkpoints in the EU should be regarded not only in terms of physical barriers that serve the purpose of deterring crossings and keeping people 'outside' the border. They are also mechanisms to contain vulnerable people 'inside,' supporting the processes of confinement engendered by the hotspot approach and the Dublin Regulation, which force registered/fingerprinted people to remain 'locked in' the country of arrival. (2022, 479)

Once he divests her of her selkie identity, Jordan does not permit Ondine to retain any of that creature's subversive potentiality. Instead, the enforcement of the Dublin Regulation becomes a symbolic stolen sealskin coat. There is no longer fluidity in her relationship to land, to sea, or her sexuality: there is only a return to what she left in Romania or her marriage to the landsman.

The phrase "happily ever after" and its pursuit by characters within the narrative is something which would seem to be at odds with selkie mythology which, as Jordan notes, is typically "tragic". The director states that:

> The irony is that if it had turned out to be a fairy tale, it would have had to end tragically. It would have had to end with somebody drowning or Ondine going back to the sea. The fact that it is a misunderstanding means that it can end happily. (Neil Jordan, quoted by McGuirk in *Cineaste*, 2010)

Ondine and Polyvocality

Ultimately Jordan narratively divests Ondine of her trans-species polyvocality. The "misunderstanding" he mentions refers to the film's revelation that Ondine is not supernatural but a drug mule and a victim of international drug smuggling. Her 'otherness' can be understood in geographic terms, unlike a selkie whose otherness is that of a trans-species creature who subverts and transgresses the boundaries between human and non-human worlds, troubling the definitions of each. As a selkie, Ondine is capable of supernatural feats, singing fish into nets, breathing underwater, and granting wishes. As a woman Johanna is defined by her lack of agency (as an illegal immigrant, as an outsider to the community and as a woman) which can only be resolved through marriage to Syracuse: an act that does not promise freedom but rather a consolidation of her otherness within the container of his normalcy. The narrative loss of her selkie identity in favour of the happy ending Jordan pursues would seem to undermine the transgressive potentiality of the film's poly-vocal framework, however, we might read the genre-crossing quality of the film — the way it moves from fairytale to realist narrative — as another example of defying categorisation or strict binary labels. This narrative fluidity breaks with the constructed generic conventions of the selkie story and allows it to retain some of the transgressive qualities established in the film's first act. This generic fluidity however comes at the cost of female agency. The selkie bride, by virtue of its trans-species nature, its refusal to exist within binary divisions, and its refusal to obey or assent to

patriarchal standards of behaviour, carries meaningful potentiality as a more than human being. This potentiality is undermined by *Ondine*'s narrative structure and by Jordan's choice to resolve the narrative of Syracuse's journey within a framework which sees the heteronormative, traditional family unit re-established by the film's conclusion. Understanding Ondine as a migrant and an unwitting victim of European migration policy, that sees her detained at a direct provision centre before her eventual reunion with Syracuse and Annie, forces us to question the validity of this happy ending. Her freedom has become dependent on her ability to perform femininity in a way that aligns with heteronormative patriarchal conceptions as well as to be willing to take on the traditionally feminine role of caregiver to a child. While this is mitigated to a degree by the 'blended' nature of the family (a quality not oppositional to the sentiments espoused by Haraway in her "Make Kin, not Babies" slogan), it is certainly at odds with the idea that "it matters how kin generate kin" (2016, 103). If the selkie's escape in selkie mythology serves (as Møllegaard argues) to "destabilise the validity of male hegemony" we see the opposite play out in *Ondine* where Ondine's sealskin coat, her agency, her freedom, her right to dissent are taken away in favour of a narrative that champions heteronormativity and patriarchal dominance. This is relayed to us emphatically by the film, most notably in what Møllegaard describes as the "valorised" (2014, 101) way in which Johanna is seen to shed her ethnic and cultural identity in favour of Syracuse and Ireland. There is no world in which she will be allowed to retain both. Certainly, she can continue to be eroticised and othered, but her otherness is sanitised within a framework of whiteness and willing domesticity.

> The underlying perception of Eastern Europe as violent, primitive, and dangerous is […] confirmed in a representation of the West as the subject of desire and the geographical site of Ondine/Johanna's happy-ever-after. (108)

I began this analysis of *Ondine* by describing its ideological affinity with Tsing's assertion that "we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin" (2021, 6). *Ondine* certainly concludes as much. Both aesthetically and narratively it presents a world in which the worst has already happened and strives to show how life can adjust and new connections can be forged in this space of disaster, revitalising community and people. *Ondine* is less interested in presenting this world as one where new life can be understood as truly "multicultural and multi-species" (Haraway 2016, 106). Rather it relies on the same hegemonic patriarchal and anthropocentric structures to create a narrative stasis in service of the false comfort of a happy ending. This is tempered however when we consider *Ondine* in the context of how Irish cinema has historically dealt with female agency and the mythology of the female body. As has been previously considered in this research, the female figure in Irish cinema is a domestic figure who exists in service of masculine narrative arcs and who, in exercising her sexuality, invites derision from the narrative. In *Ondine*, Joanna's marriage to Syracuse at the film's conclusion would seem to align wholly with these precast tropes. However, it is worth considering that this too is a form of collapse. Ondine/Joanna's freedom within the narrative and her ability to move through the environment is contingent on a belief that she was part of it, a more-than-human extension of the natural world. The revelation that she is not in fact a selkie but a human woman casts this liberty in a new light. She has moved through the environment unhindered (with the exception of Vladic's pursuit) despite the fixed gender roles of Irish cinema. The revelation of

her human femininity asks the viewer to consider if her relationship to ecologies is not a mystical one, might it not then be a human one? Despite the conservatism of the film's heteronormative conclusion, the very fact that Ondine/Johanna has not been punished for her time out of doors, or been labelled as errant for her rich, complex relationship to the ecologies she encounters marks the film as a significant deviation from representational tropes outlined elsewhere in this research.

Arracht

Arracht tells the personal story of Colmán Sharkey a fisherman and tenant farmer living in Connemara in 1845. Colmán is a respected figure in the local community and, consequently, when asked by the local priest, he agrees to hire Patsy Kelly, a man who recently arrived in the area having left the Royal Navy as a farmhand. When the famine reaches Colmán's community, the local landlord raises rents and after a confrontation with rent collectors, Colmán, his brother Séan, and Patsy visit the local landlord to ask him to relent. During this visit, Patsy murders the landlord's household, (save for one young girl) and in the ensuing confrontation with the Sharkey brothers, Séan is also killed by Patsy. Colmán attacks Patsy in retaliation and leaves him for dead. Colmán is framed for the murders and is forced to go into hiding in a coastal where his wife and child die of sickness and starvation. Two years later he discovers Kitty, the young girl who survived Patsy's attack, to whom he becomes a surrogate father. During one of the pair's visits to the mainland, it is revealed that Patsy survived the attack and has allied with a British agent and police countable to track Colmán down and arrest him. Colmán ultimately kills Patsy and the film ends with Colmán and Kitty embracing in the ruins of Colmán's family home.

Border Crossing and the Dissolution of Binaries in *Arracht*

Arracht opens with a shot of ripples moving across the surface of a dark sea while a disembodied voice (later revealed to be that of the film's protagonist, Colmán Sharkey) opines in Irish: "God up there, do you pity me now as I am? A desolate waif scarce seeing the light of day? A drop up there, on high, from the rocky roof, Falls into my ear… and the waves sound at my heels". The piece was written by the seventeenth-century Irish poet and clan chieftain Piaras Feiritéar. Feiritéar was involved in the 1641 rebellion and, as a result, was forced to flee to the Blasket Islands and hide in a cave. It was here he is said to have composed the lines. Máirtín Ó Mhurcú notes that: "In oral tradition, Feiritéar became a folk hero who protected his people against iniquitous rent [and] cunningly eluded his pursuers" (2004). Parallels between Feiritár the folk hero and Colmán are consistently drawn throughout the narrative. As the voice speaks against the sound of the ocean – as heard from beneath the waves – a low rhythmic rumbling is heard. When Colmán speaks, the image shifts from the ocean's surface to a young child sitting on the prow of a rowboat at night. The child looks over her shoulder to camera, before we cut to an emaciated Colmán, standing waist-deep in water in a deep rocky cove. Aside from the provenance of the text, and its allusions to forced displacement under colonial power, the presentation of the piece establishes a pattern of decentralised human perspective which continues throughout the film. In *Staying With the Trouble* Donna Haraway writes that the Chthulucene, as she defines it

> entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages – including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman and human-as-humus. (2016, 101)

The use of a disembodied voice in the opening scene of Arracht, juxtaposed with Feiritéar's prose and the disjointed imagery, creates uncertainty as to whose perspective is being focalised. The opening line – "God up there, do you pity me now as I am" – spoken over a shot of the sea, might suggest that this perspective is an entirely human one, a conversation between a human entity and a creator looking down upon it. However, the following line — "A desolate waif scarce seeing the light of day" — complicates this reading. The description of a life defined by an absence of sunlight, coupled with images of the sea, might require the spectator to ask if this is the voice of a deep sea creature. The final lines of the poem coupled with the appearance of Colmán and the child within the *mise en scène*, clarify things somewhat. The next line confirms it presenting an anthropocentric perspective: "A drop up there, on high, from the rocky roof, Falls into my ear… and the waves sound at my heels." However the certainty of this perspective as human is tenuous. The speaker is in a cave with "waves at their heels", they have ears and feet, but they are desolate, they have none of the comforts or trappings of humanity. They are at a remove from society, even from the sun which they scarcely see. The wave at their heels suggests a rhythmic push forward, deeper and deeper into the cave, a retreat further from humanity both as a construct and an identity.

After this opening montage, we see the cave again although now we understand that the less-than-human experience of it which has been articulated is yet to come. Colmán sits outside it, dressed and comfortable a whiskey still with his brother

nearby. But the viewer understands that this society, this human identity, will ultimately reach a point of crisis in the narrative and this foreknowledge haunts the film.

Although the film's English title has been widely translated as "monster" another translation exists for the word "arracht". The word is derived from Old Irish where it can mean "spectre", but more often "idol" or "false image". If we are to take the translation of "arracht" as "monster", then its use as a title might be somewhat supported by the narrative. The film produces two convincing villains: Patsy Kelly, a violent man, whose murder of Colmán's brother, the local landlord and the landlord's household throws Colmán's life into ruin. We might also consider the landlord — simply referred to as "Lieutenant" — a villain, given his assertion that rent will be raised despite the devastation caused by the potato blight. We might possibly suggest that Colmán himself becomes a monster or, at the very least, monstrous, given his total rejection of humanity after the deaths of his wife and child. This easy cause-and-effect condemnation of characters, however, would seem to ignore the wider world of experience which *Arracht* presents. The film is far more interested in a nuanced view of history, disaster, and human and non-human experiences than in drawing a didactic moral line. The film is not interested in binary definitions, but much more inlined towards spectral, haunting representations; be they human, animal, or pathogen.

Phytophthora infestans and Systemic Injustice

This is most powerfully expressed in the film's characterisation of the potato blight pathogen *Phytophthora infestans*. The characters and Colmán in particular have begun to anticipate the effects of the blight before it arrives. Pasty has forewarned

Colmán having seen the devastation it had already begun to wreak before he arrived in Connemara. The arrival of the blight, Patsy explains, will be accompanied by a sweet smell. One evening as Patsy and several other neighbours are gathered in Colmán's house, Colmán sniffs the air, then stands outside the cottage. Patsy follows and confirms Colmán's suspicion that it is the blight. A shot of diseased potatoes in Colmán's hand removes all doubt. This scene, however, is another example of the decentralised human perspective at work. The camera enters the room, taking in the assembled people before Colmán walks past it, through the door that the camera has just entered. Patsy looks over his shoulder and follows Colmán. Outside the two men step into a shot in the doorway of the cottage. The camera has followed the same route as the potato blight, discernible only to those who know, or are anticipating its scent. The focus on scent in this scene is also of interest because of the formal border crossing it presents. Scent in cinema remains unpresentable and extra-diegetic. It can only be communicated to the viewer through visual or other formal cues which highlight its presence within the diegesis, even as the viewer experiences its absence in reality. Scent in *Arracht* must be communicated visually. This trans-sensory presentation is indicative of *Arracht*'s wider disregard for strict borders. The formal and aesthetic factors at play within the diegesis are used to express a host of experiences beyond what can be neatly delineated as visual, aural, or olfactory.

In the next scene, we see Colmán crouched among the lazy beds, lifting a diseased potato out of the soil, the camera approaches him at ground level moving through the furrows before looking over his shoulder at his hands and the rotten tuber. The extrasensory representation of the pathogen highlights not only its immediate effects on plant life but also its wide-ranging effects on human life. Its representation on

screen embodies the idiosyncratic byproduct of its lifecycle, (that is, the rot it engenders in plants, which produces odour and, as a fungus, which survives within the soil). It serves to identify *Phytophthora infestans* not just as The Potato Blight, but as a living pathogen. This characterisation of an ecological actor is intrinsic to *Arracht*'s ideological stance on the famine and the wider structure of colonial rule in Ireland. As Colmán remarks later in the film "This didn't happen to us, it was done to us". This distinction is prescient. The pathogen has no political motive. Rather it is the choices made by humans and the structure of human society which determine the fallout of this pathogen's effects. The potato blight is a neutral agent, not a villain and not a monster and it moves through the *mise en scène* of *Arracht* ghostlike, discernible only to those who are attuned to its presence. Writing about the communication practices of plants, Haraway observes that

> plants are consummate communicators in a vast terran array of modalities, making and exchanging meanings among and between an astonishing galaxy of associates across the taxa of living beings. (2016, 122)

Phytophthora infestans is understood in the film not as an event, nor as an abiotic phenomenon but as part of a complex web of organic processes, of which human creatures are only one part. This recognition of the pathogen not only highlights how the resulting famine was exacerbated by contemporary colonial systems but also serves to highlight the interdependent and inter-affected, multi-species nature of life on Earth. As such *Phytophthora infestans* is a biotic phenomenon which is distinct from colonial regimes that establish hierarchies between coloniser and colonised as a controlling mechanism. After its introduction, this aesthetic presentation of the blight does not occur again. Once Colmán is forced to flee his land – the field where the

blight has taken hold – we do not encounter the blight again. This reaffirms the film's assertion that everything that follows – the ensuing destruction and desolation – is a result of systemic injustice.

Kin-Making in *Arracht*

To return to the connection between Colmán and Piarais Feiritéar, parallel between the pair is their place of habitation. Describing Irish caves, Patrick McCafferty writes:

> In general, Irish caves are cold and damp and are not particularly appealing [...] In Ireland, air temperature rarely drops below freezing or rises above 20 degrees Celsius, so caves rarely provide refuge from extreme temperatures. Some caves in Ireland do show evidence of temporary inhabitation, although it must be stressed that this was in the entrance to caves, in the light zone. Irish caves were not homes for the living. (2013, 451)

Like Feiritéar, Colmán has taken refuge in a cave in the wake (unwittingly in Colmán's case) of becoming embroiled in an act of violence. Like the folk hero Feiritéar, Colmán has attempted to protect his community from a rise in rent and, like Feiritéar, he has succeeded in evading the law that now pursues him. Unlike Feiritéar, the borders between Colmán and the cave are less clearly delineated. In Feiritéar's poem, the speaker's separation from society, his desolation at being forced to flee and hide in the cave, and his sense of entrapment, inform the reader that the speaker feels he belongs elsewhere. The cave in Feiritéar's prose is not a "home for the living". Hiding there, fearing for his safety, Feiritéar stands on the threshold of death. Colmán, however, is tied to the cave in ways that extend beyond its suitability as a location for an illegal whiskey still and later the necessity of evading the law.

His relationship with the cave is inextricably linked to his relationship to death, both the deaths of his family and the half-life that he lives.

Colmán is frequently presented in the water that laps against the mouth of the cave. We understand that these shots depict events both before and after Colmán's uncompleted suicide attempt following the deaths of his wife and child. The repetition of these shots in the first act of the film, before Colmán's return to the mainland and his meeting with Kitty, not only highlights the emotional weight of the time spent in the cave but also the role of the cave as an emotional container. The cave functions as an emotional vessel both for Colmán's grief and later his tentative joy in his newfound kinship with Kitty. In the cave, we watch as Colmán fills his son's jumper with stones and rests his head against it as if the boy were inside. We are shown him staring vacantly while the audio track repeats the moments of his family's deaths. We see their graves above the cave mouth. Colmán (and later Kitty) lives and mourns in this space of death. This ideologically expansive representation of the cave, extends its narrative function beyond that of a backdrop to symbolise Colmán's individualised suffering, and become a place which holds the memories both biotic and abiotic of all who pass through it. The cave can be understood as indicative of the process of collective multi-species memory, Colmán remembers his family and remembers *Phytophthora infestans*. Just as the soil above the cave will hold a biological memory of Colmán's family and in the same way the invocations of Feiritéar and Colmán run parallel to each other, so too do representations of the potato blight and the cave. "Plants, along with bacteria and fungi are [...] animal's lifelines to communication with the abiotic world, from sun to gas to rock" (Haraway 2016, 122). As they are represented by Feiritéar caves are lonely,

comfortless receptacles for human experience. In *Arracht*, the cave is populated not just by Colmán and Kitty. It is also populated by Colmán's memories of his deceased family members and by the sea. The use of underwater sound during the opening scenes of *Arracht*, which can be heard in conjunction with Feiritéar's prose, reminds us that the ocean, like Feiritéar, communicates and this communication is of equal value. Mooney *et al*. note that the study of the passive acoustics of a given marine area can effectively relay information about the biodiversity of that area. These acoustics communicate information about the life and health of marine spaces, with noisier oceans generally being read as an indicator of greater biodiversity and marine health. That *Arracht* places these acoustics alongside Feiritéar's prose as well as images of Colmán informs the viewer that this non-human communication is of equal importance, and that it is equally valid and inseparable from the film's narrative.

The practice of "kin-making" is central to *Arracht*'s anti-colonial position. This is exemplified in the relationship between Colmán and Kitty, to whom Colmán becomes a surrogate parent figure. This kin-making extends beyond the parameters of traditional family patterns to include Áine and her daughter Máire: members of Colmán's former community displaced by the famine with whom Colmán, at Kitty's insistence, agrees to share food and allows to seek shelter in his former home. This favour is repaid when Áine agrees to care for Kitty once Colmán returns her to the mainland for the winter (a separation which ultimately never occurs).

Arracht highlights the interconnectedness of human and non-human life and the threat posed to this interconnectivity by the enforced hierarchies which seek to

control or limit the ability for symbiosis. It suggests that blame for The Great Famine lies with the contemporary British Government and with the hierarchical mechanisms of colonialism. *Arracht* attempts to communicate the anger, desolation, and death experienced by contemporary victims of the famine, without presenting the ecologies which formed the locus of the event as inert biological subjects in revolt. It proposes that the potato blight has as much a right to exist as Colmán and his family, but that hierarchical power structures which fail to allow individuals to work within a biosphere which accommodates the existence of *Phytophthora infestans* are accountable for the deaths that occur within its society as a result. *Arracht* offers a way of considering our contemporary ecological crisis which does not implicate human individuals or nature, but rather the regimes which set them at odds to exploit both.

Conclusion

The case studies explored in this chapter each present ecological spaces intertwined with collapse; whether societal or cultural. In each of these films, dissolution cannot be avoided: only confronted. These films are chiefly concerned with how humans ought best to navigate the world in the wake of a potentially devastating collapse. This should not be understood as a fatalistic reading of these films but rather as a realistic reading of the world we inhabit. We are already living and dying through environmental collapse, the damage of the Capitalocene and Anthropocene cannot now be undone. Neither should this be understood as a nihilistic statement. Rather the opportunities these films offer are to confront a world made imperfect by human actions and to make from it what Haraway calls “a much hotter compost pile for still

possible pasts, presents and futures" (2016, 57). This is the only avenue that now remains open to our species in fighting the environmental catastrophes to come.

The varying approaches taken in each of these films in confronting collapse highlight the diversity of "hard histories" we as a species are now required to face to achieve multi-species justice. They also foreground the specific sticking points within the Irish cultural landscape. Where *Ondine* succeeds in presenting Chthonic possibilities that subvert and disempower patrilineal narratives, the failure of this selkie story to move beyond the patriarchal resolution and, by extension, the systems of patriarchal land transference endemic to rural Ireland call attention to the work yet to be done in destabilising not only the idea of patriarchy but of land ownership and "the family line" itself. The film considers "kin making" briefly as a multifaceted prospect not limited by genealogy (or even species) but ultimately presents a heteronormative narrative that is resolved in marriage and the suggestion (if not the assurance) of regeneration. Haraway's assertion that one ought to 'Make Kin Not Babies' is useful in the context of *Ondine* as it allows us to imagine what it might mean to extend one's ability to make kin, to recognise worth, agency, and humanity in the non-human. As such, the culmination of the text in a wedding, a happy ending, necessitates the failure of Ondine's selkie identity and her Chthonic potentiality, however, the text remains a worthwhile, if flawed, exploration of multi-species care. *Arracht* pursues kin-making by presenting a world in which kin are already present and made. Acknowledged or unacknowledged by characters within the diegesis, pathogens and abiotic entities invade the *mise en scène* demanding to be seen, heard, and smelled. *Arracht* then effectively argues that we confront collapse in a world populated by human and non-human entities alike, that it is not only a human way of

life that is threatened but all life. The film also affords a consciousness, a living and acting quality to Irish ecologies which historically have been presented as picturesque backdrops, lending them a voice made audible by cinematic apparatus.

This chapter has argued for the radical potential of films that break with representational norms of rural Ireland, as a Picturesque place of nationalistic longing or alternately an anti-modern no-man's land trapped within national mythologies. The films present rural Ireland as *the* place in which the ideologies that have engendered and accelerated climate collapse and biodiversity loss since the establishment of the state must be confronted.

Concluding Remarks

This argument has followed a teleological evolution charting representations of Ireland's rural ecologies through the colonial past, the Free State era and the neocolonial present. This thesis has found that the greatest barrier to eco-social justice in Ireland is the influence of the neocolonial neoliberal capitalist entities and the complicit State actors who facilitate their actions. This thesis has found that representations of Ireland's rural ecologies onscreen, far from being quaint or even benign, are an incredibly potent staging ground for the uncovering of national histories relating to human and environmental justice.

Having begun by grounding this research in the most recent contemporary framework, the project illustrated the shocking ease with which the cultural resonances of the neocolonial operation translate to any and every geo-global site. The ecologies and cultures of small nations are the most vulnerable to the kind of

neocolonial film productions discussed in chapter one. The impacts of these neo-colonial productions are wide-ranging and extend outwards, to their immediate effect on ecologies to communities, audiences, and state bodies. In addition to this, the rebranding of ecological sites as fantasy spaces – where these spaces are decontextualised and divorced from their socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental materialities to market them as products in a global capitalist hegemony – comes at the cost of robust and sustainable indigenous film production and effective care and management of critically threatened ecological sites.

I considered the birth of the Picturesque and examined the visual discourse as a weapon of colonial violence. I drew a connection between historic violence in Ireland and America to analyse the remarkable perseverance of Picturesque aesthetics in contemporary representations of Irish ecologies. In neocolonial discourses, these aesthetics legitimise the commodification of rural ecologies as products within the global capitalist neoliberal hegemony. I argued that this commodification of rural Ireland on a global scale ultimately increases Ireland's reliance on direct investment from large multinational corporations, by eliding their ecological and social impact on the West of Ireland.

Having considered the colonial and neocolonial frameworks which dominate representations of and relationships to Ireland's rural ecologies, gender, and the relationships between individuals and the environment within the visually controlled site of the Picturesque are then examined, I argued that the postcolonial and neocolonial discursive strategies as outlined in the previous chapters are essential to

the maintenance of a patriarchal structure. I argued that in Ireland's fraught postcolonial cultural and economic climate the control of women's bodies became central to practices of land management, as well as to the construction of a new, distinct national identity. In the postcolonial era, women become symbolic and their autonomy is drastically comprised. I have demonstrated the extent to which this conception of the "woman as a symbol" has been adopted in Irish cinema, and went on to consider the structuring absence of women outside the home and the punishments handed down to transgressive female characters in identified narratives. I also considered the representations of men in texts set in rural Ireland, before charting the evolution of these same factors from the other side of early twentieth-century Ireland's strict gender binary to interrogate how and why Ireland's rural ecologies have been invested with patriarchal significance. I investigated the degree to which the perennial presence of codified patriarchal masculinity in Irish culture is inseparable from broader cultural conceptions of rural Ireland's ecologies, and I argue of the patriarchal, hierarchal relationship to, and representation of, rural ecologies which has persisted in Ireland since the establishment of the Free State has impacted not only rural ecologies but the lives and wellbeing of men across the West of Ireland in particular.

Finally, I proposed possibilities of hope for future representations of Ireland's rural ecologies. I stressed the potential of polyvocal screen representations to undermine not only the strict hierarchies which have upheld neoliberal and capitalist systems, but have also engendered further abstraction from these ecologies on cultural, personal, and societal levels. The case studies in this chapter exemplify border-

crossing, binary dissolving connections between the human and more-than-human worlds, foregrounding the interconnectedness of life on this planet. These films speak to the potential of film and media to empower society and to call for the kind of ecosophical justice that Félix Guattari aspired to in *The Three Ecologies* (1989).

The approach taken across these five chapters serves to forge a vital connection across three prescient topics; the representation of rural Ireland's ecologies and communities, the social, economic and cultural implications of Irish film production and postcolonial and ecosophical relationships to Irish culture in a time of global environmental collapse. There has also been a concerted effort to draw attention to works which have received very little or no critical engagement within media studies, such as *Arracht*, and *Hardy Bucks.* These interventions in particular will hopefully pave the way for further academic engagement with these culturally significant, though critically neglected texts.

This thesis has been primarily concerned with highlighting the dominant trends in ecological representation in Irish films and media. Films and media texts which fall outside these parameters have been for the most part excluded. One notable exclusion is the works of Pat Collins. Collins' exclusion speaks not to a lack of ecological engagement in his work, but rather to a profound ecological consciousness across his cinematic oeuvre. Films such as Silence, Song of Granite and That They May Face the Rising Sun, consistently foreground rural ecologies. Collins does not use these settings as backdrops to human dramas, but rather as the impetus of human action.

Pat Collins' biographical drama *Song of Granite* (2017), which follows the life of sean-nós singer Joseph Heaney, works contrary to the trends outlined in this thesis. In an early scene of the film, a young Joseph Heaney's family are visited by a folk song collector, who makes a recording of Joseph's father singing. Joseph, his mother and members of the local community are gathered outside the Heaney family home. They watch as Joseph's father sings a traditional sean-nós song into a recording apparatus. After Joseph's father has finished, the collector asks Joseph if he will sing a song for the recording. The mise-en-scène is composed of iconography synonymous with highly identifiable (and as has been discussed in the preceding chapters, highly marketable) Irish heritage. The scene brings together a thatched cottage, a rural location, the Irish language, the family home, and a small close-knit community. However, Joseph refuses the collector's request, saying (despite the fact they are standing outside his family's house) that he "only sings at home". The bemused folklore collector seems not to understand Joseph's comment.

The scene recounts a moment of frenetic cultural activity in Ireland when to develop a cohesive national identity in the wake of colonisation, independence, and civil war, old traditions and folkways were relied upon to generate a uniquely Irish identity. In 1935 the Irish Government established the Irish Folklore Commission. The Commission aimed to study and preserve elements of Irish folklore which were under threat of extinction. The establishment of the commission made official the work of folk collectors, such as the Commission's first director Séamus Ó Duilearga,

who had for decades been striving to collect and study Irish folklore practices before they vanished entirely. The Commission achieved monumental success in the collection and preservation of Irish folklore however, their work was not without its detractors.

Among them was the writer Máirtín Ó Cadhain, who saw the process of collecting old traditions as detrimental to the thriving of new Irish language writing and as exploitative of the communities it gathered from. (Briody, 60) Ó Cadhain saw the work of the Commission and folklorists as "trying to extend the life of the old world that was dead or almost dead" (Briody, 61). Folklorists were in Ó Cadhain's opinion "'embalmers and entombers' of tradition" (Ó Cadhain, quoted in Briody, 61) fixing traditions in place and rendering them immobile and irrelevant in the process. When we consider the young Joseph's refusal in this context of embalmment, what we perceive in this moment of folklore collection is resistance against an unwitting attempt to nullify and devitalise a living creative process, inspired by and predicated on meaningful engagement with local communities and ecologies.

Collins gives the young Heaney the task of defending the vernacular against the best impulses of the wider culture of post-independence Ireland, Joseph does not want the practice of singing, which for him is living culture, a folklore of the present rooted in his love of place, archived and relegated to pastness. This embalming is further subverted by Collins' choice to present a dual portrayal of Heaney in the film.

Collins not only presents Heaney through the actor Micheál Ó Confhaola but also blends archive footage of the real Joseph Heaney. This duality ensures that we can neither accept neither Micheál's performance nor the archive footage of the 'real' Joseph as the authoritative version. Collins also includes interviews with Joseph's children, who highlight his absenteeism during their childhood and his failure to create a meaningful relationship with anyone or anything apart from his music. These interviews undermine the archive footage, which invariably presents Joseph as a master of his craft, by highlighting the human cost of his work. Collins's approach does not admit the possibility of considering Joseph outside of his music or the context of its production, it forces us to consider Joseph's work as a living, human and evolving folkloric practice influenced by society, economics and ecology.

Later in the film, the adult Heaney describes his childhood in Carna as being one where he "listened to the World's song" and "felt there could be no greater happiness than to return to that song". Heaney's relationship to Carna is indivisible from his relationship to his art. His refusal to allow his singing to be recorded as a child is echoed in the film's representation of ecology. This is perhaps best exemplified in one of the final scenes of *Song of Granite*. The camera lingers on a blade of grass, to which the young Joseph Heaney had tied a strand of sheep's wool. It is rediscovered in this scene by an older, dying Joseph, transported in his dreams back to Carna. This shot of the sheep's wool in the unchanged landscape could be interpreted as the persistence of Heaney's love for Carna's ecology, but an alternative interpretation is possible. Carna remembers Heaney's impact. This moment speaks to an interplay between the human and the non-human which presents rural Ireland's ecologies not

as a stage upon which drama plays out but as the source of all stories, the place from which Heaney, both the mythic figure and the man emerges from and owes a debt of co-collaboration to.

The ecosophical politics presented in the films of Pat Collins might usefully be understood as a roadmap towards the kind of productions which best serve Ireland's rural ecologies in our contemporary environmental crisis. These films which understand ecologies as entities with rights and influence, not merely as resources, speak to a potentiality in Irish cultural production to revolutionise how our ecologies are presented on screen.

There can be no meaningful change in our collective care of Ireland's rural ecologies until the collective imagining of these spaces is divorced from the signs and syntax of neocolonial and capitalist agendas. We must begin to pursue "subjectivity" (Guattari 2000, 69), an ability to cultivate representations of and relationships to Ireland's rural ecologies that recognises the interconnectedness of the human and non-human world. This is evidently one that sees ecologies not only as backdrops and resources but also as entities in their own right. This is the critical time in which the "gradual reforging and renewal" (2000, 69) that Guattari calls for in *The Three Ecologies* must take place. As we stand at the precipice of total environmental collapse, we must begin to question our collective cultural fantasies about ecologies, if we are to imagine a world beyond this point of total destruction.

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