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Tomáš Kejmar

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Analýza reprezentace významných událostí a osobností irských dějin v období 1916-1923 v irském filmu

An analysis of representation of significant events and personalities of Irish history in the period from 1916-1923 in Irish film.

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vedoucí práce: Clare Wallace, Ph.D.

Děkuji tímto vedoucí své práce, Clare Wallace, Ph.D., za pomoc, cenné rady, ochotu a svatou trpělivost.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu. Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned. I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

V Praze dne

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1. Introduction

This work is going to focus on significant personalities and also partially events of Irish history in the period from 1916 to 1923, i.e. the period commencing with Easter Rising and concluding with the end of the Irish Civil War, and their representation in three full-feature historical films produced in the last two decades. The films analyzed will be as follows: Jonathan Lewis' *The Treaty* (1992), Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) and Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006).

The analysis will focus primarily on the authors' mis/interpretation of history and the divergences arising when the films are juxtaposed with interpretations generally preferred by modern historians. To provide an example, one of the subjects for analysis will be the conflicting ways in which the leaders of Irish Independence War, i.e. predominantly Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins and their actions are represented.

Secondly, the thesis will attempt to interpret the parallels that link together the stories and characters of *Michael Collins* and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, films that describe the same historic period and partially the very same events but see them from completely different point of view. The relationships and destinies of Jordan's leaders of the IRA's high command and Loach's members of a grass-roots IRA cell carry striking similarities although their positions in life and nationalist struggle are thoroughly different. We encounter a surprisingly similar pattern where two characters that initially have a rather close relationship are forced to assume positions at the opposite sides of the barricade due to their diverging opinions. This applies to both the relationship of Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera and of Damien and Teddy, the main characters of *Wind that Shakes the Barley*. Lewis' *The Treaty* here provides a handy contrastive view of the relationship of the former pair, which is, due to the obvious directorial intention, much closer to the general historical consensus than the mythicised version presented by Neil Jordan.

The Wind That Shakes the Barley, when juxtaposed to *Michael Collins* and *The Treaty*, stands out as representation of rather different, or even completely opposite approach of understanding the history of the Irish Independence and Civil War and perhaps also of the history in general. Loach's film does not put one particular individual or a narrow group of individuals into the position of leaders and heroes. The contrast is between the view that it is strong individuals that actually write the history through their actions and the contrasting concept that makes ideas and ideologies responsible rather than the people that eventually

came to embody them in the history schoolbooks. Here the main focus will fall on the contrast of from what background the leaders of the struggle are recruited and with what intentions they enter the conflict. Loach's character Damien, who is at first reluctant to even join the conflict, is a good example. It is the circumstances that push him into participating in the war and then it is his faith in the principles he signed up for that drives him forward so powerfully that he is in the end willing to sacrifice much more than just his life for the cause. He is not in any way the originator of the struggle or of the ideological background, yet becomes a militant fighter for the cause. Michael Collins and de Valera, on the other hand, are examples of professional revolutionaries that directly start and escalate the conflict.

Finally, on a less prominent level, the work will also scrutinize the visualization of inner tensions within the nationalist movement and Irish society as well as the process of opening and widening of the ideological gap that led effectively to denouncement of the Anglo-Irish treaty by the more radicalized part of the society and to the outbreak of the Irish Civil War. Roles and testaments of ideological leaders, such as James Connolly, will be also considered. This is more or less related to the second part of the analysis as the tendencies that worked on the general level are epitomized and embodied in the stories of the main characters. The ways in which this affects Loach's characters of Damien and Teddy will be viewed in contrast of the ideological dispute between both Jordan's version of Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera and their portrayals by historians.

2. Chapter I: History in Celluloid

[T]he familiar, solid world of history on the page and the equally familiar but more ephemeral world of history on the screen are similar in at least two ways: they refer to actual events, moments, and movements from the past, and at the same time they partake of the unreal and the fictional, since both are made out of sets of conventions we have developed for talking about where we human beings have come from (and also where we are and where we think we are going, though this is something most people concerned with the past don't always admit).¹

In this formulation of the central idea of *History on Film/Film on History*, Robert Rosenstone opens his discussion of the relationship of two media, writing and film, and their shared point of reference, i.e. things that have occurred in the past and now constitute what is generally understood as history. He points out two facts that are not necessarily apparent at first but that link the historical writing and historical film. The first relativizes the position of historical writing as the often unquestioned and somehow automatically authoritative version of historic truth, and points out that both textual and filmic representations of the past are to certain degree “unreal and fictional.”² He later re-formulates it, claiming that “all history, including the written history, is a construction, not reflection.”³ The obvious implication being that it is specifically the degree of fictionalization that, apart from the means used to represent history, constitutes the main difference between the historical works, regardless of the type of media used. The historical film and historical writing are thus to be understood as two media operating within boundaries of a shared scale of fictionalization of past reality, which starts with objective fact, on one side, and ends with complete fiction on the other. The realm of hard and fast facts, from which film is commonly repudiated, is therefore not reserved only for the written accounts, and should not be seen as such.

The second important notion that Rosenstone mentions is that historical works, be they books or films, are not solely representations of the past, but that the means and attitudes inherent in their portrayals of the past are equally expressive of the mind-set of the period, in which they were created, and of their authors. In other words, the historical narrative might, in the way it is being narrated, reveal as much about the narrator, as it attempts to convey about its subject. It is already the fact, that a certain history is being narrated at all, that shows its relevance to the period it is being remembered in. Pragmatic and economic considerations

¹ Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006) 2.

² Rosenstone 2.

³ Quoted in Raita Merivirta, *The Gun and Irish Politics*, (Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2009) 9.

apply especially to historical film. “Films are expensive to make [...] and in order for a film to be funded it needs to be about a topic that has current relevance or that can be used to make current points through analogies.”⁴ Historical films are therefore “seldom only about the past.”⁵

The importance of historical film as a genre is heightened by its immense popularity, convenience and accessibility. Its allure, the visual and auditory life-like experience of the past events on the screen, is at the same time its downfall, as dramatic representation that would be attractive to the audience demands different modes of narration that are not always compatible with what historical accuracy would command. In the phrase “historical film,” it is the ‘historical’ that occasionally limits the ‘film’ component and vice versa. Rosenstone bids us to bear in mind that genres have their limitations and that “a film will never be able to do precisely what a book can do, and vice versa. [...] [H]istory presented in these two different media would ultimately have to be judged by different criteria.”⁶ And as Raita Merivirta suggests “it is more fruitful to examine the ends [the historical] inaccuracies serve and the broader claims historical films make,”⁷ than to limit the criticism to mere pointing out of historical inconsistencies. This work will attempt to illuminate and explain the choices made by Neil Jordan (*Michael Collins*), Ken Loach (*The Wind that Shakes the Barley*) and Jonathan Lewis (*The Treaty*) whilst making their respective historical feature films, and the implicit meanings of their representations of the Irish history.

Despite the undoubtedly valid claims of auteur-theorists that “a film is always collective, polyphonic, work and that it is important to distinguish who is talking in the film,”⁸ this work shall, for the sake of brevity, refer to the films as if produced solely by their directors. Nevertheless, the authorial imprints of scriptwriters, producers and actors are implied whenever the authorship of the films is discussed. *Michael Collins*, directed and written by Neil Jordan, is slightly different case than the Lewis’ and Loach’s films because Jordan’s authorial voice stands out markedly in the film. Even the film’s producer Stephen Woolley suggested that “[w]hat is in the film is what Neil Jordan finds interesting in Collins’s life.”⁹

⁴ Merivirta 8.

⁵ Merivirta 8.

⁶ Rosenstone 7.

⁷ Merivirta 6.

⁸ Merivirta 5.

⁹ Merivirta 5.

2.1. Michael Collins

Michael Collins undoubtedly qualifies as an important, if not as the most vital, historical figure of Irish history of the beginning of the twentieth century. The sheer scope of roles he performed simultaneously during the 1917-1922 period suggests that his abilities alone were wide-ranging:

Collins ran Finance; the I.R.B. [...]; the famous Squad or A.S.U.; [...], Intelligence, which was practically shouldering the whole war; while through his agents in the ports and on the ships he practically controlled all activities abroad. [...] almost every gun, every pound of ammunition, every ton of coke for the bomb factories, had passed through Collins' hands. Yet this does not by any means exhaust the total of his activities.¹⁰

Due to his versatility, far-reaching consequences of his actions, and his ability to translate “his indispensability into political or military dominance,”¹¹ his portrayals are condemned to be inevitably either voluminous or selective. Given the spatial limitations of the film genre, this division applies to the filmic representations even more so than to the historical or biographical writings. Collins appears as the main protagonist in Jordan's biopic as well as in Lewis' *The Treaty*. Collins' historical importance, and especially his role in the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, ensures his actions are felt also in Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, although is not physically represented as a character. He appears only in a documentary newsreel that Loach uses to break the news of the Treaty to his characters, and later on, reportedly, in their subsequent discussion of it where he is either revered as a hero, or condemned as a sell-out.¹² If a film should present a consistent representation of the political turmoil of the 1916-1922 period and argue the case of one of the conflicting parties, then it is specifically the treatment of Michael Collins as a character and his role in history, or of those who were sympathetic to him and his policies, that decides through what optic the whole revolutionary period and the roles of other leaders of the revolution will be portrayed. Let us first deal with the differing portrayals offered by Jordan and Lewis.

¹⁰ Frank O'Connor, *The Big Fellow* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1965) 93.

¹¹ David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland's Irish Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003) VII.

¹² *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, prod. Matador Pictures, dir. Ken Loach, 2006, 35 mm, 86min.

2.1.1. Michael Collins in *Michael Collins*

There are several aspects of the character of Michael Collins appearing in Jordan's *Michael Collins* that deserve closer consideration. Each of the aspects will be treated in separate section as follows.

2.1.1.1. A Mystical Character

Michael Collins is an outstanding example of a successful historical film. Yet the commercial, box office success, is certainly not the highest achievement of the film. Although the sheer number of viewers *Michael Collins* has drawn would on its own be a sufficient reason for discussing its treatment of history, its main merit that recommends the film for further discussion is the “incredible amount of criticism and commentary that Jordan’s film has excited.”¹³ This implies that Jordan’s filmic contribution to the public discussions of the Irish history, Irishness and also of contemporary events was significant and controversial enough to provoke such a massive reaction. Even this work is, in fact, also a continuation of the discussion of Jordan’s representation of the 1916-1922 period of Irish history and its leading characters.

Jordan’s first in-depth encounter with the story of Michael Collins, as he himself testifies in his *Michael Collins: Screenplay & Film Diary*, came about in 1982 in the shape of Frank O’Connor’s biography of Collins titled, ostentatiously, *The Big Fella*.¹⁴ Despite the fact that he considered O’Connor’s book as probably the best biography available at the time, it “did not entirely attract [him] to the character.”¹⁵ The thing that, however, did draw Jordan to Collins was his realization that “[t]hrough this single character, Michael Collins, one could tell the story of the most pivotal period in Irish history.”¹⁶ One could, indeed, as it is precisely what Frank O’Connor did and Neil Jordan attempted to do in his feature film a decade later. Given the occasion of Jordan’s first encounter with Collin’s story, it then is not surprising that in temporal reference Jordan frames his screenplay in a manner very similar to O’Connor’s biography. Both O’Connor’s and Jordan’s versions of Collins’ story begin in 1916. The former opens with his arrival from London to participate in the nationalist struggle; the latter

¹³ Brian McIlroy, “History Without Borders,” *Contemporary Irish Cinema: From The Quiet Man to Dancing at Lughanasa*, ed. James MacKillop (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 22.

¹⁴ Neil Jordan, *Michael Collins: Film Diary & Screenplay* (London: Vintage, 1996) 2.

¹⁵ Neil Jordan 2.

¹⁶ Neil Jordan 2.

introduces him already as a uniformed soldier fighting a lost battle of 1916 Easter Rising. Whilst O'Connor then retreats to recount at least briefly his formative years and his stay in London, Jordan provides the audience with no background information on Collins, as if the character has no past apart from being a "yob from West Cork."¹⁷ This suggests that Jordan's desire to tell the story of the period occasionally subjugates his intention to narrate Collins' story as of a real historic character. Formation of his character and his early experiences do not seem to be of vital importance to Jordan. Merivirta, accentuates in her book, by conferring that, due to Jordan's use of "the point of view of an absent narrator"¹⁸, *Michael Collins* is

perhaps less exploration and interrogation of the man himself, of his beliefs, thinking or psychology, than examination of the years he was actively involved in the Irish independence movement and politics. Collins' character and personality are conveyed on the screen, but the film does not ask why or how this particular man came to be the mastermind of the guerrilla war, nor does it portray the psychological complexities of its title character. Collins is a man of action and as such, his actions speak louder than words even if he agonizes over them, so that the film focuses on the historical situation and the larger social and psychological implications this had on the Irish.¹⁹

Jordan, however, inseparably bounds the history of the period to Collins' story already in the prologue of the film. Seen as a culmination of seven hundred years of "attempts at rebellion and revolution, all of which ended in failure,"²⁰ Collins is introduced as a military and intelligence leader that was to mark a changing point in history. Up until this point, the veracity of the account is not at stake. The problem occurs in the pompous formulation that Collins' "life and death defined the period, in its triumph, terror and tragedy."²¹ Although it is already highly problematic to see a historic period as being thoroughly defined by actions of one single individual, it is, however, by all means clear that Collins' historical importance is here purposefully exaggerated. This is, of course, a dramatic device used in order to draw and keep the viewers attention. It introduces the sympathetic or even adoring mode in which Collins is about to be portrayed throughout the film. This prologue opens a string of sequences and scenes where Jordan's Collins amounts to "what Northrop Frye would call 'The Hero of Myth.'²² He is a hero "superior in kind both to men and environment; [...] a divine being."²³ To give an example, it is already Joe O'Reilly's opening speech addressed to

¹⁷ *Michael Collins*, prod. Warner Bros. Pictures and Geffen Pictures, dir. Neil Jordan, 1996, 35 mm, 77 min.

¹⁸ Merivirta, Raita. *The Gun and Irish Politics*, p.37

¹⁹ Merivirta 37.

²⁰ *Michael Collins*, 1 min.

²¹ *Michael Collins*, 1 min.

²² Carole Zucker, *The Cinema of Neil Jordan: Dark Carnival* (Brighton: Wallflower press, 2008) 12.

²³ Quoted in Zucker, 12.

Kitty Kiernan, who mourns Collins' death, which quickly descends from earthly realism towards deification.

You got to think of him. The way he was. [...] Some people have greatness flowing through them. They're what the times demanded. And life without them seems impossible. But he's dead. And life is possible. He made it possible.²⁴

While the O'Reilly's words can be understood as a hyperbole of Collins' historical importance, yet the choice of words suggests much more than reverence and respect. As Carole Zucker has it, "the imputation of omnipotence and god-like powers to Collins reinforces access to an alternative world of consciousness; one that is removed from historical fact."²⁵ The overall outcome of Jordan's portrayal is nevertheless not thoroughly deifying mainly due to Jordan's skillful use of strategies that humanize Collins, so that the portrayal of the main protagonist does not seem utterly exaggerated.

2.1.1.2. **Lover's Rock**

The chief device Jordan uses to humanize Collins is the inclusion, at least partial, of his love life and a wider, non-exclusive, ability to love. Nonetheless, the opinions on Jordan's inclusion of and representation of Collins' romance with Kitty Kiernan differ widely. Carol Zucker suggests that "[t]he main reservation about the film expressed on both sides of Atlantic was the perception that the love story [...] represented an insipid and unnecessary distraction from the quintessential story of men, guns and politics."²⁶ Yet at the same time Eogan Harris, an author of another script on Collins, which never got into the production stage,²⁷ claimed that "Jordan's script dehumanizes Collins, largely by repudiating his sexuality, and his image as a sort of Irish Don Juan."²⁸ And added that "Collins without a sex life is nothing but a murderous seminarian."²⁹ According to Harris, Collins' biographers and their narrow Catholic views are to blame.³⁰ In case of O'Connor, Harris' charge is based on truth. O'Connor in his biography not only avoids mentioning anything about now commonly recognized love affair between Collins and Lady Hazel Lavery that took place during the

²⁴ Jordan 91.

²⁵ Zucker 14.

²⁶ Zucker 11.

²⁷ Merivirta 24.

²⁸ Zucker 10.

²⁹ Zucker 10.

³⁰ Zucker 10.

negotiations of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, but he also fails to even mention the existence of Kitty Kiernan, Collins' fiancée. While being legitimate in the case of Frank O'Connor, the charge of portraying Collins as sexless seminarian could not possibly hold against Tim Pat Coogan's biography of Collins. Coogan analyses and accounts for, possibly all, love affairs and romantic relationships Collins has been in during his short life. And while Jordan mentions his biography of Collins as remarkable in his *Film Diary*³¹, it is also apparent that advice and consultation of either Coogan or his biography of Collins shaped the way Jordan narrates the story of the romantic triangle between Michael Collins, Kitty Kiernan and Harry Boland.

Unfortunately for the romantically inclined, Neil Jordan did not follow Tim Pat Coogan's example fully and his portrayal of Michael Collins as a lover stops in midcourse. Through including only single romantic subplot, albeit complicated with the rivalry with Harry Boland, he shows Collins as a faithful and single-minded man without capability for infidelity or fickleness. The omission of all other affairs Collins probably had appears to be purposeful. On one hand, full inclusion of his love life would undermine the chance that the audience would sympathize with him, as he certainly was not a role model of Christian purity in this matter. On the other hand, it would most likely be very complicated to contain Collins' love life in its entirety as well as all other important events within the limited space of a full-length feature film. In his notes, Jordan discloses that he took the decision not to follow Collins to London early in the production process due to the fact that all the events and complications of his London stay "are so complex that they would need another movie all to themselves."³² He is aware of the implications of this exclusion and apparently sorry about limits it sets on the story.

[It] means Lady Lavery [...] will not make it into the film. And the popular romantic image of Collins as an Irish Don Juan among the English upper classes won't make it either. I don't say it didn't happen. But since we don't take him into London, we don't see it.³³

2.1.1.3. Godless Humanist

In connection with question of Collins' private life and of his moral integrity, it is important to note that Jordan does not render Collins a religious man. There is hardly any reference to

³¹ Jordan 18.

³² Jordan 9.

³³ Jordan 9.

faith, prayer or religious practice on his part throughout the film, despite, for example, Coogan's claim that Collins was "deeply religious,"³⁴ which he supports with evidence from his correspondence with Kitty Kiernan that "contains several references to prayer and attendance at Mass and Communion."³⁵ O'Connor suggests that whilst initially Collins was not much of a believer, reportedly stating "if there is a God, I defy him,"³⁶ later on a change occurred in his character. During his stay in London in 1921, "each morning he was also out to Mass," which was a "sign that the Big Fellow was giving place to something much more formidable of character."³⁷

In the context of Ireland, and of the historical period, being agnostic or atheist was certainly unusual and Jordan's image of Collins as an irreligious man only strengthens his extraordinariness and exceptionality. The purpose of this secularizing depiction is utilized clearly in order to contrast with zealously catholic Éamon de Valera and will therefore be also discussed in the section dealing with the way Jordan portrays de Valera.

It is however important to note, that while Jordan suppresses the religious side of Collins' character, he is anxious to substitute for it through emphasizing his wholehearted humanism and humor. There was no need for Jordan to invent this as O'Connor and Tim Pat Coogan alone offer enough material for him to use. It is the little jokes, generosity and occasionally even tenderness of the Big Fella that are there to show his sensitive side. His sensitivity is at display especially when juxtaposed to his ability for executing violence. The scene where the Squad, a special column formed by Collins to eliminate the British intelligence officers, is sent out, on the eve of what became known as the Bloody Sunday, to shoot down the members of the Cairo Gang is intercut with Collins nervously pacing and agonizing over the result of his decision. Kitty voices the reason for his nervousness and unearths his sensitivity underneath the layer of ostentatiously hardened shell. She inquires:

You have sent your boys out, haven't you? It is written on your face. Every step they take. Like so many valentines. Delivering bouquets. [...] Do they deliver a love note, Mick? With the flowers? What does it say?³⁸

To this he replies, "[i]t says give us our future. We've had enough of your past. Give us our country back. To live in. To grow in. To Love."³⁹ Indeed, there is love in this guttersnipe

³⁴ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: The Man Who Made Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 283.

³⁵ Coogan 283.

³⁶ O'Connor 4.

³⁷ O'Connor 133.

³⁸ Jordan 122.

³⁹ Jordan 123.

Collins,⁴⁰ as he mockingly designates himself elsewhere. Appropriately, his first inquiry in the following scene is whether there were any casualties. The burden of responsibility for the lives of his men is manifestly heavy on his shoulders.

Collins' sensitivity and humanism mixes with loyalty to his former fellow fighters in the sequence dealing with the escalation of the Treaty debates, beginning of the Civil War, which finds its climax in the scene of Harry Boland's death. The reluctance of Collins, the peacemaker, to "go to war over a form of words,"⁴¹ is only intensified into universal humanism and offer of self-sacrifice as he pleads in the Dail to have his name blackened if it should be the price of peace and freedom.⁴² The climatic scene, where Harry Boland's dead body is drawn from the river and hangs suspended from a crane, marks the breaking point of Collins' strengths. He is shattered, close to tears and on the verge of nervous breakdown. Boland, both in the realm of historical fact and in Jordan's version of the story, was Collins' closest friend and despite them being separated by their political opinions Collins was nevertheless deeply attached to him. The way this loss must have hit him could hardly be imagined. Especially, in the context of O'Connor's claim that Collins wept even when he heard the news of the death of Cathal Brugha,⁴³ who despite being his colleague in the Irish Republic's cabinet prior to 1921, was at the same time one of his most ardent rivals in the Treaty debates and hated him bitterly for years. Jordan thus truly leads Liam Neeson to live up to his moniker of Gentle Giant, which he acquired for starring as Oskar Schindler in Spielberg's celebrated *Schindler's List*, three years prior to filming of *Michael Collins*.

2.1.1.4. Minister of General Mayhem

The minister for Intelligence, Gunrunning, General Mayhem and Jailbreaks is the full list of mock-official titles Jordan entitles Collins to use. It is not surprising that Jordan chose not to complicate the picture of a man of action, whom his Collins undoubtedly is, by attempting to present an exhaustive list of roles the historical Collins had performed. The exclusion of his various other functions such as Secretary of the Irish Volunteers' Dependants Fund, Minister of Home Affairs or Minister of Finance has number of implications. First of all, the image of Collins as a bookkeeper, albeit a successful and effective one, does not fit the Collins'

⁴⁰ Jordan 90.

⁴¹ Jordan 137.

⁴² Jordan 141.

⁴³ O'Connor 180.

likeness preferred by Jordan. He is a passionate leader, perhaps a gangster really good at bloody mayhem,⁴⁴ but still “no good at talk,”⁴⁵ and therefore no politician. This role is reserved exclusively for de Valera, and it is specifically for the sake of contrast between these two characters that Jordan strips Collins of any association with manipulative reality of politics.

Secondly, Collins, the accountant, does not enter the picture because Jordan is inevitably limited by the scope and focus of the film. He already lowers the number of characters presented as active participants in the nationalist struggle so much that the only actual fighting against the British amounts to one raid on the police barracks, assassinations carried out by The Squad and an indirect reference to the assault on the Customs House. In the second half of the film, when the inner tensions within the independence movement are in the fore, this dramatic reductionism escalates up to the point where the whole Civil War seems to be fought between Collins and de Valera and their supporters. Any extended portrayal of Collins therefore logically could not have been sustained. As a self-defense for taking liberties with historical material Jordan writes: “there are so many [characters], drifting though various parts of the story that the audience would end up in utter confusion.”⁴⁶

Last but not least, *Michael Collins* was after all backed by a Hollywood production, and as such, there had to be amends made to accommodate the world-wide audiences. Brian McIlroy paraphrases the outline of Hollywood filmic conventions as outlined by David Bordwell and notes that, according to the unofficial set of conventions, to which the majority of the Hollywood cinema conforms, a Hollywood-produced commercial feature film should have only anemic politics.⁴⁷ One has to agree with McIlroy that “if anything, the film is about politics,”⁴⁸ and that “within the confines of classical Hollywood film it is difficult to deal effectively with historical and biographical material when actions and dramatic pacing must be constantly sought out.”⁴⁹ Yet an agreement is not automatically guaranteed if the question whether or not are these politics anemic is to be discussed.

McIlroy claims that they are not and that “the weakness of the heterosexual romance, in terms of extended screen time, also helps to direct the audience’s attention to the political

⁴⁴ Jordan 104.

⁴⁵ Jordan 134.

⁴⁶ Jordan 9.

⁴⁷ McIlroy 23.

⁴⁸ McIlroy 24.

⁴⁹ McIlroy 24.

issues involved.”⁵⁰ Perhaps it is going to war over form of words but if it should imply that the politics of the period are presented anyhow thoroughly, I find it difficult to agree. When contrasted to historical sources available, i.e. both Collin’s biographies and historical accounts by David Fitzpatrick, Roy Foster or Richard English⁵¹ or even in comparison to Lewis’ and Loach’s films, the version of revolutionary movement and its politics presented by Jordan is distinctly simplified.

Based on Jordan’s version of the political relations, number of misleading assumptions can easily be made. Ideological divisions and tensions between pragmatic and radical fractions within the republican movement are only hinted at and the Irish Republican Brotherhood is almost a non-existent entity. It can therefore be erroneously surmised that there was a fully unified nationalist front in existence prior to the split within the republican movement over the issue of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The reduction of the number of characters results in the misapprehension that the conflict that ensued after the ratification of The Treaty was fought only between Collins on one side and de Valera and Boland on the other. Whether or not was Boland’s bitterness that sprang from the outcome of the love triangle between him, Kitty and Collins, the chief impulse that led him to join the ranks of the anti-Treaties is a matter for further research. The way Jordan puts it, however, can be interpreted that it was personal, rather than ideological, issues that put Boland in opposition of Collins.

Further problem is the treatment of the situation in the North, which is, as Jordan admits, “one issue [his] script doesn’t deal with at all.” His argument that it would have been difficult to introduce seems plausible. The way the question is handled in the film, nevertheless, suggests that the Northern Ireland as a state was created by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in the December 1921 and not a whole year earlier. At least mentioning of the existence of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 would have shone a different light on the republican protestations voiced by Boland and Brugha that the Treaty “gives up the North,”⁵² showing them as what they largely were, idealistic appeals for something the British cabinet could not possibly afford to offer them.⁵³

In general, the problem with Jordan’s take on the historical period is that he was trying to accommodate both the description of Collins as a character and the wide array of the

⁵⁰ McIlroy 24.

⁵¹ For reference see David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands 1912-1939* (Oxford: Opus, 1998); Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1989); Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan Books, 2003).

⁵² *Michael Collins*, 81 min.

⁵³ Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1989) 506-507.

political events of the period. He was forced, for the lack of screen time and other pragmatic reasons, to make the politics simple enough to be digestible for the foreign audiences, while hoping that the Irish audience with a general knowledge of the period will connect the dots themselves. The compromise in the depth of politics described was probably made due to the fact that a production on such a scale could have hardly been sustained on the profits from the Irish cinemas alone. In his diary, Jordan seems painfully aware of this, noting: “[f]or us the divisions within the island are as fascinating as those across the Irish Sea. The wider world, though, wants to see it in more simplistic terms.”⁵⁴ The result of his ambition to combine multiple perspectives while devoting perhaps more than enough screen time to develop the romantic subplot, is that Collins’s character is presented as a sufficiently round character, yet not nearly as round as the biographies would present him. The secondary outcome is that the narration of the political background is rather selective and poor in detail. We can, however, give Jordan the credit for being aware of the fact that this will be one of the points of the critics of the film.⁵⁵

2.1.1.5. The Death of the Hero

Given the historical nature of the material he was working with, Jordan knew that the Irish audiences would know immediately that Collins was going to be killed as the conclusion of the story. What he seemingly did not realize until the preview screenings was that “[American] audience has no prior knowledge of the character, and [...] doesn’t know he has to die.”⁵⁶ Taking advice from Stanley Kubrick and David Geffen, Jordan then introduced the framing of the movie, added scene where Kitty learns about Collins’ death and few minor scenes concerned with the love triangle. The opening scene and coda, presented as Joe O’Reilly’s attempt to comfort the bereaved Kitty, not only disclose to the viewers that the Collins’ story is inevitably going to end in tragedy, but also heightens the emotional importance of the romantic subplot. Framed like this, the body of the film is then enacted as a continuous flashback of impersonalized narrator. Notwithstanding Joe’s urging to “think of him the way as he was,”⁵⁷ the story then takes the viewer places neither Joe nor Kitty could have gone and therefore transcends their personal memory of Collins. On the other hand, the

⁵⁴ Jordan 4.

⁵⁵ Jordan 61.

⁵⁶ Jordan 62.

⁵⁷ Jordan 71.

viewer is not invited to share Collins' inner thought and feelings. This impersonal approach to narration allows Jordan both uplift the myth of Collins and tear it down at the same time. The deification implied in the introduction and discussed above is in stark contrast to the way his death is screened. He is shot on a trip to Cork, to his home country, made because there was a suggestion of possible negotiations and agreement that might have changed the course of Civil War. Jordan, while visiting Béal na mBláth notes the place is

special only in its air of non-consequence. So [Collins'] life ends in nondescript absurdity, in an ambush that was almost called off, the possibility of an encounter that never occurred. A metaphor for most relationships on this island.⁵⁸

In a similar manner the assassination is portrayed on the screen. A handful of anonymous assassins ambush a convoy and a stray bullet, as if by a mere chance, sends the mighty leader down. He is killed instantly. The camera shows the moment from great distance without lingering on the body of the fallen hero. Confident of his vision, Jordan, claims that "any glorious death, in a manner of *Platoon*, say, would be inappropriate."⁵⁹ The intention, not to emphasize the moment the hero is slain, corresponds to the form the scene is constructed. The intercutting between scene of the ambush and one where Kitty is trying on her bridal veil is designed to heighten the emotional side of the tragedy, not to portray it as a demise of a god. Here, the personal is given preference over the national. Collins might have lived and fought like a mythical leader, yet in Jordan's account he dies a regular mortal man.

Yet the film does not actually end with the scene of assassination. After the rather unsatisfactory climax, there is a coda present, in the shape of period newsreel from Collins' funeral with captions. This reel once again reinstates Collins as a late national hero dying tragically in his prime and whose funeral was attended by half a million, both his supporters and his enemies, who were as Jordan has it "temporarily united in grief."⁶⁰ His greatness and importance therefore surpassed even the conflict he was involved in. The memory of the man is here shown to have been at the moment more important than the ideologies the war was fought over. Collins' role of a peacemaker is once and for all emphasized by the claim that "he died, paradoxically, in an attempt to finally remove the gun from Irish politics."⁶¹ Despite being true to the fact, because Michael Collins has indeed died in an attempt to bring about a change from military to constitutional politics, the wording of the statement has raised a

⁵⁸ Jordan 17.

⁵⁹ Jordan 58.

⁶⁰ *Michael Collins*, 120 min.

⁶¹ *Michael Collins*, 120 min.

debate. The line is an actual parallel to words uttered by contemporary Northern Irish politician Gerry Adams, which at the time was seen as an attempt at outright political commentary on the part of Jordan. References to the Northern conflict in *Michael Collins* in the following chapters allow possible alternative readings of several scenes in the film. These readings suggest that the whole film could be interpreted as a commentary on the Northern conflict in the second half of the 20th century. Yet even in these the reconciliatory tone of the statement must be inevitably felt.

The last caption of the film is an infamous quote of Eamon de Valera, which reads: “It is my considered opinion that in the fullness of time history will record the greatness of Michael Collins, and it will be recorded at my expense.”⁶² We have here shown in what ways does Jordan records the greatness of Michael Collins, in a section dedicated to his portrayal of de Valera, the degree to which it is at his expense will be discussed.

2.1.2. *The Treaty with Collins*

The Treaty, directed by Jonathan Lewis, narrates the events surrounding the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. While not aiming at being a worldwide blockbuster, the film achieves much higher historical precision than either of the two other films discussed in this work. The narrow historical focus allowed Lewis to include nuances, which both Jordan and Loach could not have possibly dreamed of incorporating. On the other hand, constraints of the lower budget limit the film as far as the viewer-pleasing spectacular scenes and casting of expensive stars are concerned. Jordan and Loach both seem to be aiming at living up to the set conventions of Hollywood cinema by making their films read like

*Rosenstone’s characterisation of the conventions of mainstream historical film, which ‘personalizes, dramatizes and emotionalises the past. It gives us history as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering and heroism. All the special capabilities of the medium – colour and movement, music and sound effect, the close-up of the human face, the juxtaposition of images – are utilized to create the feeling that we are not watching events, but experiencing them.’*⁶³

While Jordan and Loach seem to be thus engaged, Lewis sets out to dramatize but document at the same time. It is, of course, impossible to avoid personalization and emotionalisation of the past, if a historical feature film, and not a documentary, is the desired outcome. However,

⁶² *Michael Collins*, 120 min.

⁶³ Quoted in Merivirta 33.

Lewis does employ both strategies to much lesser degree than Jordan or Loach, and deals with his topic in much more matter-of-fact way.

Lewis's portrayal of Collins diverges in multiple ways from Jordan's but conforms to similar trends at the same time. Collins is not deified and mythologized as in Jordan. His personal love life is not emphasized so strongly and certain aspects of his identity are pointed out, which Jordan either omits or downplays.

The very beginning of the film shows Michael Collins ordering a killing. At that very point he is the guerilla mastermind, the man behind the intelligence operations. The contrast with the prolog given to Collins in *Michael Collins* is apparent. No deification takes place; no larger than life picture is being presented. It is important to note, that since Lewis does not go to show Collins being murdered, he does not have to deal with introducing him as a hero doomed from the start, which is what Jordan was forced to do after the film was first previewed.⁶⁴ Lewis's Collins is down-to-earth man, pragmatist in every inch, whom the Field Marshall Wilson sees as "not a simple gunman."⁶⁵ Wilson also credits him with "destroying our intelligence network with impunity"⁶⁶ and highlights his position by erroneously explaining to Lloyd George that "when de Valera was in America, Collins took over his duties as President."⁶⁷ He is mistaken in the fact, that Collins did not in fact become president, but the gist of the utterance is valid. Collins did indeed become a major leading figure.

This extraordinary praise for his enemy is uttered by Wilson right after the scene, where Collins is shown avoiding search at a roadblock by simply walking out towards the officer in charge, offering him cigarette and starting a conversation about the ambushes and the rebel activity that makes such precautionary measures necessary. This scene, based on the situational irony of a real historical event⁶⁸, shows Collins' daring character and his grasp on human psychology. This scene also confirms the claim that Collins' identity was virtually unknown. Another scene, however, where a waitress in a cafe recognizes Collins, goes right against that trend. He gets treated as a well-known celebrity. It is true that fame stuck to his name, but his face remained largely in the shadow. This scene provides context for the sweeping claim of Jordan's Collins that "all these years no one knew what [he] look[ed]

⁶⁴ Jordan 62.

⁶⁵ *The Treaty*, prod. RTÉ, dir. Jonathan Lewis, 35mm, 9min.

⁶⁶ *The Treaty*, 9min.

⁶⁷ *The Treaty*, 9min.

⁶⁸ Coogan 42.

like.”⁶⁹ In the light of this contrast, Lewis could be arguably credited with dealing with Collins’ renown with more caution because he manages to presents both sides of the coin.

Lewis and Jordan similarly differ in the portrayal of Collins’s love life. Since he is not willing to deal with the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Jordan comfortably chooses not to take the story to London, and therefore also does not have to deal with Collins’s affair with Lady Lavery. Lewis does exactly the same from the opposite direction. As most of the story acts out in London, it seems as if the only woman in Collins’s life is the charming Lady Lavery, even though the existence of that relationship is only hinted at. Kitty Kiernan is, to be safe, never mentioned at all. Despite the Coogan’s claim that “[I]t is certain that by the time the Treaty negotiations began, insofar as women in Ireland were concerned, everyone else [...] had faded from the center of Collins’s affections in favor of Kitty Kiernan.”⁷⁰ Kitty even visited Collins in London whilst he was engaged in the talks.⁷¹ Lewis chooses not to include this side of Collins and not to go into the debate whether or not was a womanizer, hypocrite keeping two women at the same time, and so forth. Yet Lewis’s Collins is not sexless. He is, in fact, far from that, and though not much beyond a flirtatious sentence or two is ever shown Brendan Gleeson manages to embody Collins with the underlying sexual drive the real character reportedly possessed.

Lewis also diverges from Jordan’s portrayal of Collins in that he demonstrates the cultural and highly educated side of Collins and reveals some, though very limited, information about his past. In one of the film conversations at Lavery’s, Hazel Lavery is credited with helping G.B. Shaw to write the *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, which leads Collins to disclose his thorough knowledge of Shaw’s work and the fact that he regularly attended his plays during the nine years he spend living and working in London. All this is news to the Laverys as it would be to a viewer with no previous knowledge of Michael Collins other than Jordan’s film. Jordan, in contrast to Lewis, gives no information on the characters past apart from his being from the West Cork. Lewis also provides very little background but whilst doing so manages to shed a light on the side of the character Jordan does not deal with, and presents Collins as a cosmopolitan theatergoer and a well-read culture appreciator. As Collins himself jokes in *The Treaty*: “You can take a man out of the West Cork but you can never take West Cork out of a man.”⁷² As far as cultural

⁶⁹ *Michael Collins*, 88min.

⁷⁰ Coogan 280.

⁷¹ Coogan 277.

⁷² *The Treaty*, 63 min.

side of the character is concerned, Jordan either did not have the space to do so or simply never attempted to, metaphorically speaking, to take Collins out of the West Cork.

2.2. De Valera Dichotomy

Michael Hopkins notes that “considerable majority of books written on the period from 1910 to 1923 [...] placed a heavy stress on the contribution of so-called great men, and often revealed a bias towards one or other of them.”⁷³ Both Jordan’s *Michael Collins* and Lewis’s *The Treaty* contribute to this tradition, as their films present the opposition of two important personalities of the period, Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins. Yet whereas the first film is brazenly siding with the latter, the second is not so obviously biased and Éamon de Valera is given much less space than in *Michael Collins*. Both, however, place Michael Collins in the centre of the stage right in the spotlight, focusing on his actions and their consequences, with de Valera either one or two steps in the background.

2.2.1. Rivers of Blood

Contemplating his main protagonist’s personality Jordan comes to the conclusion that “[t]he hero and the villain in this piece are merged into one. For the problem always in movies of this type is that the central character often ends up characterless. Goodness is essentially undramatic. [...] In Michael Collins [Liam Neeson] can embody both principles.”⁷⁴ Neeson is an appropriate choice to play that part since, according to Jordan, he has an air of an “immutable likeability.”⁷⁵ The director felt that “[Neeson] could bury his grandmother in concrete and you would still sympathize with him.”⁷⁶ While it is true that Collins showcases ability for both political pragmatism and violence and thus embodies opposing traditions within the Irish revolutionary republicanism, this claim, however, fails to acknowledge the negative role ascribed to Éamon De Valera. De Valera is seen critically by both Jordan and Lewis. Yet as the quote suggests, Jordan is not willing to declare De Valera an outright negative character. Even though he is not seen as a completely villainous character, he is a

⁷³ Quoted in Merivirta 4.

⁷⁴ Jordan 16.

⁷⁵ Jordan 17.

⁷⁶ Jordan 17.

likely candidate for the least likeable and most despicable character of Jordan's film. In the case of Lewis' film, the British negotiators (i.e. namely Winston Churchill) and venomous Cathal Brugha supply much needed antagonism but in Jordan's film all the burden of the villainy falls on the head of De Valera and few minor characters working for the British. Despite this difference in approach of both directors, it is ultimately Lewis's portrayal of de Valera that shows him in worse coloring. This might be due to the fact, that Jordan, after all, believed that Collins could at least partially be his own antagonist and did not, for dramatic purposes, need to malign de Valera to such extent.

One explanation for vilifying De Valera is utilization of his negative portrayal as a backdrop to contrast Collins with. Because only in contrast to the villain, do the positive qualities of the main protagonist stand out. Jordan forms the image of de Valera on the basis of his personal experience of the political climate of Ireland, of which de Valera has been for a very long time a main representative. Cultural isolationism, economical protectionism and excessive power of Catholic Church over the Irish population, were the features of the rule of de Valera's governments from 1932 up until 1959⁷⁷. The negativity of his portrayal is then based not only on qualities of his character but also on additional layers of negative connotations of the values he promoted and represented. What Jordan depicts is a picture of a younger man, with reflection of his older self and his public image, embodying the evil aspects of his own worldview.

As it has been noted while discussing the roles Collins is allowed to perform in Jordan's film, there is precious little room given to Collins, the politician, this role being solely reserved for the president of the Irish Republic de Valera. The contrast is meant both to highlight the romantic appeal of the heroic revolutionary and to point out the Machiavellian nature of his "Chief." It is in Lewis's film, that de Valera's realpolitik machinations stand out more vividly. If Tim Pat Coogan's account of de Valera is to be deemed somewhat closer to the real character, the representation in Jordan's film is then not so far from the mark. In various places, Coogan points out that de Valera was "adept at concealing his motives from public view,"⁷⁸ manipulating his image through his biographers, and suggests that he indeed was a copious student of Machiavellian doctrines.⁷⁹ This only supports the modern stereotype of corrupted and manipulative politician, which de Valera is obviously supposed to embody, and thus to add yet more negativity to the character. This view of the character is also

⁷⁷ Merivirta 1.

⁷⁸ Coogan 250.

⁷⁹ Coogan 68.

supported by actual corruption suspicions that have been voiced concerning his handling of funds raised for the Irish cause in America in 1920s.⁸⁰ Therefore, for those familiar with the real persona of Éamon de Valera, or at least with his reputation, i.e. especially the Irish viewers, the character functions on more subtle levels than what is directly presented on the screen.

The contrastive dichotomy between the protagonist and antagonist is in case of Jordan's film rather self-serving and artificial. Both characters, Collins (as has been explored above) and de Valera, are stripped of particular qualities as to make their contrast more vivid. Similarly as in the case of political (non)involvement of both, Collins's military role is emphasized whereas de Valera's own military record is downplayed. For example, the opening scene of Easter Rising surrender of 1916 in front of the GPO, shows de Valera surrendering among the ranks of other revolutionaries, while in fact he was stationed elsewhere and after the failure of the uprising "emerged a hero, the last commandant to surrender during Easter Week."⁸¹ Jordan is willingly omitting this. Of course, he would plead his defense on the grounds of dramatic necessity, stating perhaps that he was obliged to introduce all the main characters in the beginning of the film. It would seem passable, if it was not for the emphasis he puts on de Valera's role in the attack on the Four Courts, which Collins opposed and which ended an utter failure. This proved "Collins right and de Valera out of touch with the realities of war."⁸² Jordan's version of De Valera is thus not only an utter civilian politician but a miserable leader when it comes to military planning as well. Once again, this creates further sympathy for Michael Collins, who becomes effectively the main military man of the film who fought and won the war.

The comparison of the main characters, however, must be made on multiple levels, contrasting not only political and military aspects but the religious and ideological aspects as well. Considering religion, it is necessary to explore the symbolic meaning of the representation of de Valera's piety when contrasted with Collins's apparent secularity. In Jordan's film, "de Valera is presented as a scheming man who nevertheless sticks to traditional values and the Catholic Church, in direct contrast to the seemingly more modern Collins who [...] is not portrayed as a religious man."⁸³ As has been mentioned above, Collins was a man of faith, and his portrayal as irreligious character undoubtedly serves a

⁸⁰ Coogan 188.

⁸¹ Coogan 42.

⁸² Quoted in Merivirta 95.

⁸³ Merivirta 90.

premeditated end. The contrast this bipolarity is meant to serve is symbolic of the contrast of traditions the two men represent. The opposition of Catholic Nationalism, which imagined Ireland as “a rural utopia inhabited by simple but moral people [and] also formed the core of Éamon de Valera’s idea of Ireland,”⁸⁴ to secular cultural Nationalism, is personified in the opposition of the two main characters. The latter is obviously preferred, as the tradition of cultural Nationalism more thoroughly corresponds to the contemporary mindset of Irish identity, i.e. it is closer to the tradition Jordan embraces and reciprocally replicates in his film. It could be argued that in this preference Jordan promulgates his own particular preference of secular nationalism as to suit his own preferred version of Irishness.

Correspondingly, a similar comparison can be drawn on the level of ideological radicalism and dogmatism, as embodied by de Valera, the pragmatism, incarnated in Collins. Yet, this contrast does not stand out until the second half of the film, and is clearly apparent only after the truce has been declared, when de Valera is shown demanding its repudiation. Collins is a pragmatist from the very start but towards the end of the film, “‘the ruthless man of action, the mastermind behind the guerilla war, the self-appointed gun-running, daylight robbery and general mayhem’ of the first part of the film has become a man who ‘won’t go to war over a form of words.’”⁸⁵ In other words, from an aggressive military man, Collins turned a compromising peacemaker. On the other hand, the calculating professor, and statesman de Valera, becomes the one preaching on the platform about the necessity to keep the ideals pristine, and if necessary “wade in the rivers of blood.”⁸⁶ Both the characters thus undergo development in opposite directions. Collins, the militant pragmatist, becomes a peaceful one, whilst de Valera, the politician, turns into a radical idealist and “a self-assertive strategist, an egomaniac, who for all we know probably did set Collins up,” when he sent him to negotiate for the Irish Republic, which was unattainable, as they both must have at least suspected. It is important to stress, that in reality, de Valera was far from being this radical in the ideological sense. R.F. Foster confirms this as well as the idea that it was personal reasons rather than political that lead to the rivalry between him and Collins.

De Valera’s endorsement of the anti-Treaty side placed him in odd company: the argument that it was better to go on failing and being martyred, than to settle for anything less than a republic was essentially alien to him. Like Collins, he was painted

⁸⁴ Merivirta 19.

⁸⁵ Merivirta 104.

⁸⁶ *Michael Collins*, 93 min.

into a corner; it is hard no to think that the rivalry and antipathy between the two men had been a major cause in bringing [the split] about.⁸⁷

The final caption of the film, reads as follows: “It is my considered opinion that in the fullness of time history will record the greatness of Michael Collins and it will be recorded at my expense.”⁸⁸ This often mentioned quote of de Valera, quite accurately sums up what Jordan is manifestly attempting to produce during the whole movie, i.e. it points out that he is consciously following the clue given by de Valera, by recording the greatness of one character in contrast to the lowness of the other. De Valera’s image, in general, is therefore not to be thought as a serious attempt at representation of the historical character per se but must be understood as a character that is based on the historical but distorted by the dramatic authorial intention. The intention of author, whose focus is unmistakably on promoting the cultural concepts and traditions that are embodied by Michael Collins and downplaying the values represented by Éamon de Valera. The authorial voice is thus the overriding force that shapes the actual outcome to higher degree than the available historical sources. It is clear that, in the aspects discussed, Jordan alters the story in a way he would have it happen, and that in glorifying the cultural tradition that did not emerge victorious from the aftermath of the Irish Civil War, he expresses his wish for alternative reading of history.

2.2.2. “Picking up mercury with a fork”

Lewis’s version of Éamon de Valera is different and yet similar to Jordan’s portrayal of the same character. They are different takes on one personality, and therefore share similar aspects, which their authors both choose to include, yet differ in the aspects they approached in unique way. As has already been noted above, de Valera is not so central character in *The Treaty* in the sense that he is not present as much as Jordan’s version of the character in his film. However, despite taking less screen time, the importance and reference to the character is present throughout the film, partially letting de Valera become what he apparently attempted to become – the unseen, yet important, *éminence grise*. The role of de Valera is mainly stressed in the first half of the film. The latter part shifts focus to Collins and the delegation of plenipotentiaries, even more so, as the tensions surrounding the negotiations escalate.

⁸⁷ Foster 510.

⁸⁸ Coogan 432.

Lewis introduces De Valera first in reference. Lloyd George is discussing the possible candidates for peace talks in Ireland and de Valera is classified as a man, whom the British public opinion would find an acceptable partner for negotiating. Collins, on the other hand, is deemed to be unacceptable, because “the press paints him as leader of the bunch of assassins.”⁸⁹ De Valera is thus sent a letter of invitation, even though the question if “de Valera [can] reach any agreement without the consent of Collins”⁹⁰ is answered negatively with the suggestion that this is an internal problem of the Irish. In other words, de Valera is deemed to be a person of enough importance for the English to actually consider talking to him at the same time dependant on Collins in the essential decisions. Right after this discussion, is de Valera arrested, only to be let go after interference. After all, he was, at the moment, the only man the British thought they could negotiate with,⁹¹ which was, as Lloyd George himself later found out, bordering on the impossible because, as the prime minister famously put it, “negotiating with de Valera is like trying to pick up mercury with a fork.”⁹²

De Valera’s character is, in Lewis’ take, openly domineering and manipulative. Far from being a people’s leader, he dismisses the general public by offhandedly commenting: “people are bit like sheep.”⁹³ His Machiavellian and elitist nature is shown in vivid colors. Similar manifestation of his manipulative nature is presented when a letter asking for no compromise, as far as recognition of the Irish Republic is concerned, is sent to the plenipotentiaries in London, only to be completely denied and dismissed as a mere personal note when he is pressed to explain the contents of letter in person to Collins. His insistence on controlling the course of events is attested to in Collins’s complaint that “Dev had put together a divided team.”⁹⁴ Forster only supports the claim made on screen. Foster writes: “[de Valera’s] intention was to balance the delegation to a point where it was almost paralyzed. It was certain the case that whoever went to London would have to compromise ‘the Republic.’ Significantly, he did not entertain the idea of going himself.”⁹⁵ Lewis’s representation of the events corresponds with this account. Even though it is crystal clear to him, and Collins raises this concern at several occasions, that such thing as full, undivided, Irish Republic is simply not on offer, he presses the Irish delegation towards this aim, and

⁸⁹ *The Treaty*, 12min

⁹⁰ *The Treaty*, 12min.

⁹¹ *The Treaty*, 13min.

⁹² *The Treaty*, 18 min.

⁹³ *The Treaty*, 31min.

⁹⁴ *The Treaty*, 21 min.

⁹⁵ Forster 505.

when the Anglo-Treaty is signed he opposes it. This only confirms all the suspicions about his character, as in the final credits of the film he is said to have eventually got to “taking the oath and taking up a high office.”⁹⁶ Apart from his hypocritical nature, these events exemplify that de Valera, both the real man and the character in Lewis’s film, had no real grasp on the British inner political situation, which resulted in severe misapprehension of the situation and eventually led to the Civil War.

⁹⁶ *The Treaty*, 93 min.

3. Chapter II: Connecting the Dots

The contemplation of treatment of historical material caught on film, which was discussed in the opening part of the previous chapter, is bound with actual correspondence of written accounts of history to the filmic ones. Yet in the world of film, there is always room for historical fiction, which, no matter how closely based on historical account, is always to be regarded as fiction, if it is not presented as an account based on a true story. Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* is such a case. A story, which is shaped on historically traceable events and places, acted out by fictional characters, who might have been inspired by real characters, yet they are not presented as being real. The landscape and the events of the story are similarly familiar to what the history books presents as the past reality, yet they are not said to have actually happened. This fact, that *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* does not present any historical characters directly and only refers to several historical events, prohibits us from analysing it in the same way as Jordan's and Lewis's films above, i.e. we cannot consider the treatment of the historical characters to explore the purpose their representation serves and cannot guess on what the intentions of such representations were. Loach's film, however, allows for number of parallels that can be made with the two other films, from which number of conclusions can be drawn. The parallels exist on multiple levels, including structural, narrative and political, and the following sections will deal with different aspects these juxtapositions make apparent.

3.1. Leaders and Followers

The Wind That Shakes the Barley represents a completely different mode of narrating history than *Michael Collins* and *The Treaty*. While the two latter film centre on two or more well-known characters firmly set in timeline of historical events, the former one prefers general portrayal of the atmosphere of the era, which is merely illustrated by a story sourced on events and characters that were typical of the period. First major structural difference lies in the fact that it is ideologies rather than individuals that are seen as the factors fuelling the change by Loach. There certainly are leading figures, who carry more of the authority than their fellow Volunteers, but the role they are ascribed is more of steersmen of the revolution rather than the driving impetus of the movement. None of the characters has the power to overcome the rest on the basis his/her personal allure as to make them forget their ideals and

blindly follow. They create a movement only due to their shared convictions, and they cease to be a cohesive movement at the very moment this ideological cohesion is destroyed. The divergence in this point being that in Lewis's and Jordan's, especially in the latter, the energy of the republican movement is as if emanating from the leaders and then transposed onto everyone else. Those persons, moved by the heroism of the leaders, then join the cause and remain enthusiastic because they are inspired by the leading figures. In opposition to this, Loach has it, that it is the ideals that make these men carry on the fight.

Closely related to this is then the logic behind the split, which resulted in the Irish Civil War. In *Michael Collins* it is the political and personal rivalry between de Valera and Collins and mostly personal falling out between Collins and Boland that are the apparent reasons for the commencement of the Civil War. The power struggle, clash of egos and jealousy seemingly cause the conflict. In Loach's film, the reasons are much more practical and anchored in ideological disputes. One of the chief problems is the faithfulness of the character to the ideals the republicans thought they are fighting for. The vows and oaths they took while joining the IRA or voting for the Sinn Fein's Democratic Programme were felt as bounding them to pursue the ideals delineated in those rather grandiloquent pieces of rhetoric. The debate that follows signature and the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty evolves about the question of whether they should compromise or raise arms against their former co-fighters and friends in attempting to live up to the ideals they swore to uphold. In Loach's film it is thus the desire for consistency and for moral integrity that clashes with the pragmatism and realism of the pro-Treaty characters, not the desire for power and obsessive pedantry, as is the case of Jordan's de Valera. The problem with this kind of noble radicalism, which is characterised by Damien and other main protagonists, is that while the ideas were firmly impressed upon the minds of the members of the IRA, their grasp on reality was rather feeble. As Forster puts it: "Cathartic action was substituted for methodological debate; ideal types replaced reality; symbols took on real powers. The Irish Republic, 'virtually established', would not now go away, yet it could never exist – not, at any rate, as the 'noble house' of Pearse's thought."¹

The structure of the cast of character also plays a role in shaping the way the stories of the films are narrated. As has been discussed above, *Michael Collins* though not specifically aiming at being much more than a biography of Michael Collins at the same time attempts to capture the revolutionary period and occasionally this secondary aim even takes over the

¹ Forster 487.

primary goal. The character of Collins is thus primary concern, and only his closest associates and the persons very vital to the story are introduced with any significant depth. *The Treaty* is focused on the negotiations of the Anglo-Irish treaty and thus all the Irish plenipotentiaries are introduced and given their voice, Collins is again prioritised, yet not to such degree as in Jordan. The British characters, especially Lloyd George and Lord Birkenhead are also portrayed with some depth, as to make the negotiations understandable for the viewer, who without the knowledge of the reasoning of the British side could not hope to comprehend the position the Irish negotiators were in. This parallel on the side of Jordan and Lewis is not followed in Loach's film, who decides to tell a story not of the political and military leaders of the revolution, but of the people at the other end of the hierarchy. The contrast of the political and military elite both in action and at the table to the actions and fates of men in a flying column is strikingly apparent. The outcome of this approach is that there are less major characters in Loach's film. Of course, there are central characters around which the narration evolves. However, the cast of characters who are introduced and allowed to voice their opinions in the several debates that take place during the film is quite high, standing out especially in contrast to *Michael Collins*.

The contrast of the elite with the grassroots is also interesting in that the regular Volunteers do not seem to be looking up for guidance to their elites but are presented as thinking for themselves and fighting the War of Independence only because they share the opinions the war is ostensibly fought for. The speed with which some of them change their allegiance when the purity of the struggle is destroyed only proves that, according to Loach, it was not loyalty to their leadership but the shared conviction that kept the republican movement cohesive and functional. It is disputable whether this was the general rule, or whether it is just a product of Loach's idealized reading of the past aimed at glorifying of the rank-n-file Volunteers, who persisted in fighting for the pristine ideals despite the apparent hopelessness of such conduct.

3.2. Family values

Blindly requesting something they could not possibly get, the radicals posing against any compromise threatened the fragile equilibrium of the post-Treaty situation in Ireland, and had they won the Civil War, it is not improbable that the British administration would have stepped in and took over Ireland once again. While this is only speculation, both Jordan and

Lewis, the first openly, the second implicitly, side with the pragmatic and down-to-earth side of the pro-Treaty forces, i.e. with the side that was, in their view, the one going in the more sensible direction. Loach is evidently of a differing opinion, since he has his heroes take up the other side of the barricade, defending the anti-Treaty sentiments and celebrating the ideological stubbornness that led to the civil war. Both Jordan and Loach portray the pain of one group of the Irish driven by consequences into a conflict with another part of the Irish society. The question: “What is it like to kill a fellow countryman?” is voiced in both the cases, despite the fact that each of the directors is portraying the civil conflict from the point of view of the other side. In the end, it is not only “a fellow countryman” but a friend, former co-fighter, or in the extreme case of Damien and Teddy, one’s own brother.

As Forster puts it, “the civil war created a caesura across Irish history, separating parties, interests and even families, and creating the rationale for political divisions that endured.”² The number of casualties of the Irish Civil War was high on both sides, “800 from the Free State army, and far more republicans.”³ There is therefore little doubt as to the fact that the conflict caused long lasting bitterness in the general Irish public, the echo of which could still be felt in the films discussed. Examples of personal conflicts resulting in violence are the integral part of both *Michael Collins* and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* as most of the main characters either experience a loss of their close friend or a relation or are themselves killed in the conflict.

In the case of *Michael Collins* the loss is felt especially in two cases. Collins, who is strongly bound to Harry Boland, weeps when he finds his body hung on a crane after it has been extracted from the river Liffey. Collins has lost Boland as a friend earlier due ideological disputes and the fact that Kitty Kiernan choose to get engaged with himself rather than with Boland, yet it is ultimately Boland’s death that forces him to face the fact that these disputes could now be never remedied. Talking to his dead body the loss becomes permanent part of the character. The second case is, of course, the bereavement of Kitty Kiernan, who is naturally overcome by grief and unwilling to communicate after she learns about Collins’s demise. Her loss is straightforwardly paralleled by the loss experienced by Sinead, who mourns for Damien, in Loach’s film. Although the parallel between Kitty and Sinead is a simple one, there are much more complex parallels available in the case of Collins and Boland, who are in some aspects mirrored by Damien and Teddy.

² Forster 511.

³ Forster 512.

Loach's two main protagonists experience an ideological falling out, which eventually drives them to man the opposing barricades. Both the characters are stubborn enough to let their ideological differences ruin their relationship, and in the end Teddy is given no option than to witness his brother being executed. It could be argued that Damien is in some aspects similar to both Boland and de Valera. They all joined the anti-Treaty forces and were unwilling to settle for a compromise the Treaty offered and the newly created Free State enforced. Yet while the disputes between Collins, Boland and de Valera are based on their approach to radicalism and on personal issues, be it rivalry in love, or ego and power struggle, in case of Damien and Teddy the dispute is purely ideological. The ideological aspect is complicated by the fact, that while Collins and Boland embody only the conflict of pragmatic nationalism with its radical counterpart, Damien personalizes the mix of radical socialist ideology and hard-line nationalism, which is something his brother, a pragmatic nationalist not unlike Collins, can hardly accept.

As far as their political radicalism is concerned, Damien is closer to Boland or de Valera, but his approach to the use of violence is somewhat more akin to Collins's attitude. At one point in the film, Boland credits Collins with being "pretty good a bloody mayhem"⁴ but later on, as their paths start to diverge, Collins uses the same phrase to reason with Boland not to enter into the conflict with him. He says: "For the first time in my life I am scared [...] 'cause once I start there will be no stopping me."⁵ He is suggesting that once he got into the conflict, he won't be able to end it. Damien, who originally did not intend to take part in the struggle, planning to leave to study medicine in one of the London hospitals, confesses: "I've crossed the line, Sinead. I can't feel anything." Later adding, "I tried not to get into this war, and did, and now I am trying to get out and can't." His hands are too stained with blood for him to be able to withdraw and embrace the arguments of the pragmatic pro-Treaty side. Both Collins and Damien are therefore sharing the same outlook. They are both depicted as violent men but at the same time they are seen as victims of the circumstances. Their violent behavior is not something they are personally responsible for. They were just driven to such conduct and they are not to be blamed for it. Whether this is meant as a device to justify the use of violence in the hands of the main protagonists or to gain further sympathy for them as for the peacefully and romantically inclined revolutionaries who are simply given no choice than to slaughter, is then left purely on the judgment of the spectator.

⁴ *Michael Collins*, 38 min.

⁵ *Michael Collins*, 98 min.

The reasons for the split and the Civil War were numerous but one of the prominent was the lack of clarity as to the goals pursued by the armed struggle.

The intransigence of Sinn Féin rhetoric masked a basic unsureness about identifying the enemy. [...] The intervention of the British army obligingly provided an identifiable enemy, and the heroics of the Anglo-Irish war provided a self-sufficient cause. But when a settlement came to be decided, in 1921, the focus would shift uncomfortably back to the fundamental uncertainty about what was being fought for⁶.

This uncertainty is apparent in the films, though not in the main characters. As the ideological uncertainty would probably have disadvantaged the character in the eyes of the viewer, especially so in case of films so centrally concerned with politics, this trend is therefore only represented in the minor characters. The main characters are clear on what it is they are fighting for, yet they diverge in what they imagine the revolution should bring. Loach portrays the uncertainty in discussions of the members of the IRA. Already the fact that there was a need for such discussions to take place suggests the discord in the ranks of the revolutionaries. The arguments voiced, however, prove that even the leadership of this particular company is not unified on major questions and that the impending split is indeed inevitable, which is neatly paralleled in both Jordan's and Lewis's portrayal of the elites of the revolution.

3.3. Thermidor moments

Every revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has had to face the specter of a Thermidor, that is, a moment when some one-time revolutionaries themselves turn against the revolution, breaking its spirit.⁷

After the inevitable split in the revolutionary platform and the start of the Irish Civil War, the revolutionary process was bound to go through a so-called thermidor phase. Thermidor is a term frequently used in connection with revolutionary changes in society. One apt definition of the concept is as follows:

In Marxist thought, Thermidor stands for counterrevolution. The anti-Jacobin coup in France in 1794 was a classic example. Most Marxists and other "leftist" authors use the term to qualify bourgeois interference in popular revolutions. [...] The non-Marxists literature interprets Thermidor differently. The term denotes the appropriation of the results of a revolution as well as the concentration and

⁶ Forster 492.

⁷ François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 400.

consolidation of economic and political power in the hands of new elites. Thermidor displays both rupture and continuity with a revolution and its results favor elite interests.⁸

In the case of the Irish Civil War, events that could be interpreted as examples of the thermidor phase occurred as a part of the desperate attempts of the newly established Irish Free State to retain control and survive the armed opposition of the anti-Treaty forces. It is interesting to point out number of parallels in the ways these moments get represented in Jordan's and Loach's films. Lewis's *The Treaty* ends with the signature of the Treaty, i.e. before such events could have occurred, and therefore logically contains none that could be assessed. Siding with the pro-Treaty forces, it is only logical that Jordan attempted to omit as much as he could as to avoid portraying the atrocities of the civil war. The bombardment of the Four Courts and subsequent Battle of Dublin are shown as actions taken unwillingly, as something the new government could not prevent from happening. An argument in the cabinet, about the necessity to face the anarchy in the streets is refuted by Collins's unwillingness to fight against his former fellow fighters. Apparently driven to the decision by consequences, he gives the order for shelling of the Four Courts rather reluctantly, walking away in disgust.⁹ Even though the representation of the events is softened by Collins's agonizing over the decision, the manner in which the Irish Free State soldiers operate, equipped with artillery and tanks, instantly resembles the modus operandi of the British army. It is especially the use of the same armored vehicle that was used by the British army to reprise for the killings of the British intelligence servicemen on the morning of the Bloody Sunday that immediately forces the viewer to recognize in what direction the conflict had evolved. The newly institutionalized Irish power is now struggling to fortify its position and attempts to cut off the more radical branches of the revolutionary movement. An instance of thermidor phase is taking place, and even though Jordan does not intend to omit it completely, he certainly is not focusing on the problem.

In contrast with *Michael Collins*, which contains only hints of the fact that a thermidorian counterrevolution indeed occurred, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* not only openly deals with the question but also dramatizes and emphasizes such situations. The ways the thermidor phase is portrayed in Loach's film ranges from the initial visual indications, when some of the characters enter the Irish Free State service and appear in the uniforms of

⁸ Marsha Siefert, *Extending the Borders of Russian History: Essays in Honor of Alfred J. Rieber*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003) 435.

⁹ *Michael Collins*, 101 min.

the Free State army, to a full depiction of the Free State army carrying out very similar actions that the British Army had been hated for. The bombardment of Four Courts, which gets represented directly in *Michael Collins*, is here only alluded to as actually the first indication that the Civil War has started. The thermidorian counterrevolution, in the sense that the new regime starts to resemble the old establishment, appears on the screen when Teddy decides that it is only by reprisals they can deal with the insurgents. “They take one out, we take one back. To hell with courts.”¹⁰ Teddy’s hot-headed reaction symbolically marks the end of the revolution, which has gone the full circle. The IRA, which first set out to drive out the British, succeeded in this primary objective and then transformed itself into the Irish Free State army only to get driven into sanctifying the same vicious circle of reprisals it originally fought against.

A particular example of the trend foreshadowed by Teddy’s decision to reprise on the rebels comes soon enough and in a form readily recognizable. A raid, allegedly in search of rebel weapon stashes, is carried out by the Irish Free State soldiers on the farm of Sinead’s family. The scene is a parallel of a British Army raid, which takes place in the beginning of the film. The similarity of both situations is clearly emphasized as the inhabitants of the farm are stood at gunpoint against the same wall as in the case of the first raid. It is symptomatic of the situation that while being confronted by the inhabitants, who ask them if they are not ashamed of themselves, Leo, the officer in charge of the raid squad, is only able to defend himself by saying that these are “orders from the headquarters.”¹¹ When reproached with the question whether the orders are “to turn on [his] own people,”¹² he only paraphrases his previous answer, stating that it is “orders of the government of the Irish Free State.”¹³ This brevity and uncertainty suggest that Leo, as well as other soldiers of the Free State, were inherently aware of the drastic irony of the situation and it is highly likely that deep within they resented being put into this kind of situation. However, Loach’s representation of the reactionary actions of the Free State lacks in one aspect. As he decidedly sides with the anti-Treaty mentality, he distorts the historic reality as to make it seem that the newly established Free State government was unpopular or even without mandate, even though available sources suggest otherwise. While Forster, for example, when dealing with reprisal executions and other horrors committed by the Free State soldiers, allows that “public opinion did not

¹⁰ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 97min.

¹¹ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 102 min.

¹² *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 103 min.

¹³ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 103 min.

repudiate such policies; the Free State government was strongly supported, even at its most coercive, because it was ‘Irish.’”¹⁴ Loach can thus once again be seen as bending the historical evidence as to make his reading of history seem more plausible and alluring.

3.4. Socialist Echoes

All the preceding sections have discussed the representation of persons that directly appear in the films as characters, this section is about to shortly discuss the testament of James Connolly, who appears only in Jordan’s film, and even there only for a very short while. His role in Jordan’s film is strictly historical. Connolly, as one of the Easter Rising leaders and the prominent socialist and Marxist thinker of the beginning of the 20th century Britain, appears only to be subsequently shot on a wheel-chair because his wounds would not allow for him standing up to the post. In Jordan’s film, Connolly’s testament is not apparent, even though Michael Collins was said to have admired the man and “would have followed him through hell had such action been necessary.”¹⁵ In spite of this, Jordan decides not to give voice to the labor leanings of some of the revolutionaries and decides to portray the Irish struggle as a bourgeois rather than socialist revolution. Loach, on the other hand, does not include Connolly as a character representing the historical persona, but his testament is ever-present throughout the film.

Dan, the train driver, is first introduced as he refuses transport to the group of British soldiers because his “union has instructed [him] not to carry any British personnel, weapons or supplies.”¹⁶ This non-violent act of non-cooperation is rewarded with violence, which is apparently the only response the outraged and desperate British soldiers are capable of. Later on, Dan appears on the scene again, meeting Damien and other members of the flying column in a jail. The meeting is an important scene for the film as their shared interest in socialist ideology gets voiced here. Dan, a fellow-fighter of James Connolly from the Irish Citizen Army, is the symbolic representative of Irish socialist tradition. Their shared admiration of Connolly’s speeches and ideas, opens the theme of the necessity for social as well as national revolution in Ireland. Even more so, suggesting that without the social revolution, the national struggle would be pointless since Britain would retain its control over Irish society though its

¹⁴ Forster 513.

¹⁵ Quoted in Coogan 54.

¹⁶ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 12min.

financial investments and undeniable economic dominance. This opinion reappears in various forms in all subsequent discussions of the goals and aims of the nationalist struggle.

Dan and Damien unerringly support the socialist cause, and both tragically die while opposing the Treaty, which they thought changed nothing but “the accents of the powerful and the colour of the flag.”¹⁷ Their struggle could be said to have been focused more on the question of class than of nationality, while of course, they both relate to the nationalist struggle, as long as the bourgeoisie interests of the rest of the IRA are not interfering with their beliefs. In case of Damien, and Dan especially, the loyalty to IRA is not unconditional and there is opening for criticism. For example, the scene of the first republican court ruling, which gets immediately undermined by Teddy, leads to Dan openly criticizing the IRA for “backing the landlords and crushing the people like you and me,”¹⁸ i.e. in this case, poor landless working class people.

Forster confirms that in the long run “the nationalist politics short-circuited the class politics.”¹⁹ Yet the events did not indicate that the struggle must inevitably have this result as “by the 1921 the cause of labour was threatening in many areas to displace that of the republic.”²⁰ Prioritizing of the social over the national is also openly articulated in the film. One of the anti-Treaty volunteers offhandedly voices his concern about the priorities of the struggle, saying: “One thing I don’t understand about you, lads, is why you always put labour above the republic.” This puzzlement illustrates that these priorities were not universally shared, and it is important to note, they were not universally shared even among the anti-Treaty forces, who opposed the establishment of the Irish Free State from more diverse reasons than because of adherence to socialist ideology. Loach, by selection of this subject matter, and by focusing on the characters who are concerned with class and social rather than national issues suggests that there was more than just one revolution taking place in the 1916-1923 period. The social revolution, which was well underway by 1921, got eventually countered by the nationalist and capitalist interests, yet Loach’s representation and emphasis of the struggle for social and class justice clearly suggests what kind of revolution he would preferred. Directorial, i.e. authorial decision, again makes it apparent which version of Irishness Loach would have favored, and once again, as is the case with Jordan, the version of history promoted by the film, is the one that stood on the losing side and in the end got

¹⁷ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 88min.

¹⁸ *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 61 min.

¹⁹ Forster 515.

²⁰ Forster 514.

overridden by different trends, ideologies and histories. Loach, as well as Jordan, in this case idealizes what he wished had prevailed.

4. Conclusion

As with any piece of art, a film could hardly be considered to stand apart from the context in which it originally appeared. This applies especially in the case of historical film, as this genre is inseparably tied with its alleged source, the actual past recorded in various media and treated under the comprehensible label of history. Due to the nature of the subject treated, the authorial voice or intention apparent in a historical film is of quite distinct kind when juxtaposed with other cinematic genres. Through selection, misrepresentation, falsification and invention, the historical material can be molded into shape that fits the purpose of the author, yet due to the fact that the historical material is more or less universally available there is at the same time a perceptible trace of all these processes taking place in the final work. There is, of course, need to conform to certain dramatic necessities, since feature film, be it historical or not, is still deemed to be a kind of entertainment. However, this does not imply that the purity of the material must inevitably make place for a dramatic show and that a balance between historical precision and dramatic appeal cannot be reached. The viewers then can, with the help of available historical sources, judge to what end the director, or the author of the screenplay, had used this material. Despite the fact that all the conclusions drawn are inevitably stained with subjectivity of viewers' experience, attempts at closer reading of a historical film are bound to at least partly reveal the authorial imprint on the historical subject matter.

In the case of the three films this work has dealt with, Jonathan Lewis's film *The Treaty* could be said to be closer to the ideal of precise and truthful representation of the past than to the ideal dramatic form of film entertainment. The film is closer to the ideal, i.e. not necessarily fully accurate, yet when contrasted with the two other films considered it is clear that Lewis's purpose was perhaps more to portray the actual past than to distort the subject matter in order to put forth his own version of past. Jordan's *Michael Collins* and Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* are, on the other hand, reaching more towards the other end of the scale, attempting to be more of an entertainment than a document and following their distinctly own agenda. Both Jordan and Loach offer their versions of history and their own explanations of the motivations of their main protagonists as to define the versions of Irishness they would have preferred to prevail in the aftermath of the War of Independence and the Civil War. As

neither the secular and pragmatic vision embodied by Michael Collins or radical socialist or communist vision embodied by Damien O'Donovan were the one to survive and dominate the consciousness of the Irish society, their accounts are inevitably stained by nostalgia for an alternative reading of history, which results in recording the greatness of their protagonists on the account of the personalities and ideologies embodied by their rivals. Both Jordan and Loach's visions of what they wish had happened seems to have influenced the way they handle the historical truth. They both portray the allure of the roads not taken.

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6. Filmography

Michael Collins. Dir. Neil Jordan. Prod. Stephen Woolley and Redmond Morris. Screenplay Neil Jordan. Music Elliot Goldenthal. Perf. Liam Neeson, Julia Roberts and Alan Rickman. Warner Bros Pictures and Geffen Pictures, 1996.

The Treaty. Dir. Jonathan Lewis. Prod. Kieran Corrigan, Screenplay Brian Phelan. Perf. Brendan Gleeson, Ian Bannen and Barry McGovern. Radio Telefís Éireann, 1992.

The Wind That Shakes the Barley. Dir. Ken Loach. Prod. Rebecca O'Brien and Redmond Morris. Screenplay Paul Laverty. Music George Fenton, Perf. Cillian Murphy, Padraic Delaney, Liam Cunningham and Orla Fitzgerald. Matador Pictures, 2006.