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Historical Accuracy and the IRA Over 70 Years of Cinema

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“Historical Accuracy and the IRA Over 70 Years of Cinema”

By

Eric Scott Elliott

Claremont Graduate University

2012

This thesis has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Eric Elliott as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Master of Arts.

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I. Introduction

Loyalty in Ireland has long been an issue of paramount concern. To turn against and inform on one's friends, comrades, family members, or neighbors is a betrayal of one's country. Though treating disloyalty has not been regarded solely by the Irish as a treacherous act, it has long been an essential trait of the Irish identity. From the bardic tradition in which masculinity and heroics were core benefits of loyalty¹ to the plays of Sean O'Casey—particularly his “Dublin Trilogy,” in which the characters debate the merits and realities of joining the 1916 rebellion²—Irish literature has utilized the concerns of loyalty in examining the greater issues of the nation. For militant Irish who grew up with this cultural tradition, particularly the Irish Republican Army (IRA), “simple dissent or non-cooperation”³ has been tantamount to informing. In examining the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798 Oliver Knox asserts that for those who informed on behalf of the English: “two centuries...is not enough to erase their infamy...it is easy to understand how the trade of informer is still the most despised and dangerous in Ireland today.”⁴ Centuries cannot erase the disdain that the Irish have for those willing to betray their fellow countrymen.

Over the past century movies have grown into one of the leading forms of mass entertainment around the world. Movies that have dealt with Irish drama have often followed the history of Irish literature in utilizing the theme of loyalty. From a narrative standpoint the themes and issues of loyalty make for enthralling cinema. For the question of loyalty itself goes beyond just supporting an Ireland free of British rule: disillusionment with the methods of the

¹ Sarah E. McKibben, “Bardic Poetry, Masculinity, and the Politics of Male Homosexuality,” *A Companion to Irish Literature, Vol II*, ed. Julia Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010) 62.

² Sean O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, The Plough and the Stars* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998).

³ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at War 1916-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 234.

⁴ Oliver Knox, *Rebels and Informers: Stirrings of Irish Independence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 19.

IRA has been represented as tantamount with informing to the British. Over the past 90 years filmmakers of varied nationalities have used loyalty, from the die-hard to the disillusioned to the informer, as a jumping off point for telling stories involving the Irish conflict with British rule; as the historical struggle between these two nations has evolved so have the movies themselves. I will examine in the following pages how successful several movies have been in presenting the issues of informing and loyalty within the IRA; considering possible source material, the film's production, historical accuracy and the ultimate standing of the movie as a historical film.

Historical films, as defined by Natalie Zemon Davis, are: "those having as their central plot documentable events, such as a person's life or a war or revolution, and those with a fictional plot but with a historical setting intrinsic to the action,"⁵ and it is within this understanding that I have chosen five films from different decades and political periods: *The Informer* (1935), *Odd Man Out* (1947), *A Prayer For the Dying* (1987), *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (2009). While arguing the success of these movies as historical films I will break down the historical setting that is depicted as well as the events surrounding the production.

The primary assertion of this paper is that historical accuracy in film is important and should be expected of historical films. There are two distinct categories of film as laid out by Richard Rosenstock that I am going to discuss, "history as drama" and "history as document." "History as drama" represents both the historical and dramatic movie while "history as document" is the more traditional documentary.⁶ The movies that I am dealing with fit within the category of "history as drama" for their narratives present historical events, situations, and people while striving to tell a compelling cinematic story. A standard argument against dramatic

⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead': Film and the Challenge of Authenticity," *Yale Review* (1987): 459.

⁶ Robert Rosenstock, "The Historical Film as Real History," *Film-Historia, Vol. V, No.1* (1995): 5-23.

film as historical medium is that dramatic movies are within the realm of fiction while it is the documentary, “history as document,” that is taxed with accurate historical depictions. This is ultimately a flawed perception of both the power and potential of dramatic feature films. A documentary is trying to tell a specific story, like traditional films, and must rely upon the clear evidence and cinematic techniques available to him or her. When footage or transcripts are not available the docudrama may be utilized in which an essential scene is reenacted for the viewer. Like a dramatic historical film, reenactments allow the audience the opportunity to not only view events of the past but to witness history both visually and audibly in a way that traditional manuscripts are unable to. Natalie Zemon Davis further argues that “films can show—or, more correctly, *speculate* on—how the past was experienced and acted out, how large forces and major events were lived through locally and in detail.”⁷ A film can speculate how historical figures, from peasants to monarchs, interacted and lived.

Movies allow the historian to examine events and lives that may exist within the grey area of historical archives. Though traditional film is produced for the sake of entertainment it is foolish to neglect the potential inherent in the medium. Film has the power to both personalize and add emotion to history while showing the processes by which history takes place.⁸ Not only can a historically accurate film present a meaningful assessment of the past, it can allow the audience to leave the cinema with a deeper understanding of the emotional relevance of historical events. A prime example of this is director Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* (1966), in which Pontecorvo produced a film that highlighted the minute emotional details of the Algerian resistance to continued French rule.⁹ Though omitting factual details such as the extent

⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 7.

⁸ Rosenstock, “The Historical Film as Real History,” 5-23.

⁹ Davis, *Slaves*, 8.

to which the French tortured Algerian prisoners as well as Algerian violence against women,¹⁰ Pontecorvo presents the personal struggle, as well as military strategies utilized by the National Liberation Front, to give a compelling historical account of a complex war. With the use of successful direction, writing, acting, and editing, filmmakers can present a compelling and respected history through the means of drama. Scholars seek to understand and enlighten, while historically accurate films succeed in conveying “realities”—reconstructions of the vague and inaccessible truth that lies beyond sources¹¹—that can inform the historians understanding of the past. It is through this view of historical movies that I will examine these films and the cinematic presentation of Irish history.

Over the past century numerous movies have been made dealing with various aspects of the Irish-British conflict, often utilizing the dramatic themes of both the informer and the internal struggle of loyalty. The styles of these movies are affected by several factors: production codes, heritage and views of the filmmakers, country in which they were produced, and the political issues facing Ireland during production. Earlier movies, from the 1930s-1950s, tended to be less realistic and detailed in their overall depiction of these issues. The movies of the 1970s-1980s leaned toward a grittier visual style while often utilizing narratives that dealt with the ramifications of intense violence on the lives of the Irish. Into the 1990s movies tended to follow either realistic portrayals of the issues of Northern Ireland through secondary characters and issues, or they went to the extreme of clichéd rogue IRA antagonists with American protagonists, best seen in *Patriot Games* (1992), *Blown Away* (1994) and *The Devil’s Own* (1997). From 2000 on IRA-themed films have taken a harshly realistic portrayal, both visually and thematically, of

¹⁰ Matthew Evangelista, *Gender, Nationalism, and War: Conflicts on the Movie Screen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 60-61.

¹¹ Martha Howell & Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001) 149.

the Irish fight from the War of Independence through the Troubles.¹² It is through these variations that I have examined eight decades worth of IRA films and selected the five movies analyzed in this paper.

In narrowing down the several dozen IRA-themed movies produced over the last century I have selected five movies that not only utilize the IRA as a major component in their plot and development but also have an overriding theme of loyalty and the internal struggle of the protagonist. In selecting these films I have followed a specific criteria. First, I eliminated movies that utilized the IRA as background, a minor plot-point, or as the antagonizing force, such as: *The Plough & The Stars* (1936), *Cal* (1984), *Children in the Crossfire* (1984), *Patriot Games*, *Blown Away*, *An Everlasting Piece* (2000), and *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005). Next, I weeded-out all movies that were not widely distributed in the theatres, instead choosing to focus on major studio productions and movies easily accessible to the public. This eliminated many well-made television productions and independent movies that were not produced for a large audience: *Guests of the Nation* (1981), *Harry's Game* (1982), *Four Days in July* (1984), *Circle of Deceit* (1993), *My Brother's War* (1998), and *Boxed* (2002). The third criterion in my decision was to not use movies in which the issue of loyalty to the IRA is not a primary theme. Thus, I eliminated: *Beloved Enemy* (1936), *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946), *Michael Collins* (1996), *Some Mother's Son* (1996), *The Devil's Own*, *Ronin* (1998), *Omagh* (2004), and the phenomenal *Hunger* (2008). Though some of these movies, particularly *Some Mother's Son* and *Hunger*, deal with intense emotional themes, they primarily focus on the effect that loyalty has on the family of IRA members and not the possible struggle one may have experienced as part of a revolutionary organization. Lastly, I specifically sought movies from three distinct periods of

¹² The Troubles represent the period of violence affecting Northern Ireland from 1970 through the 1997 Good Friday Peace Accord.

time: the middle decades between the Irish War of Independence in the 1920s to the start of the Troubles in 1969, then movies produced during the Troubles, and finally any movies released after the 1997 Peace Accord. These are not merely arbitrary periods, for they each represent distinct periods of development for the IRA as well as film censorship.

The Informer is not only one of the first movies to deal with the IRA but it was a critically acclaimed film upon release, receiving several Academy Awards while turning John Ford into an acclaimed and serious director.¹³ Whereas the acclaimed James Cagney film, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) focuses more on the Irish War of Independence than the IRA, *The Informer* examines the role of the IRA in the community and the effect of an informer on the organization. *Odd Man Out* not only delves into the turmoil that an IRA unit leader may have felt regarding what he must do to survive but also the struggle that innocent Belfast citizens engaged in when confronted with a wanted IRA criminal.

For the movies produced during the Troubles, I chose two for their similar narrative themes yet distinct production qualities. *A Prayer for the Dying* represents the mental strain of the IRA's guerrilla techniques that on occasion led to the deaths of innocent civilians. It also represents the emerging cinematic usage of an American actor portraying the rogue IRA agent, similar to the movies *Blown Away* and *Ronin*. Furthermore, *A Prayer for the Dying* examines religious themes untouched by other films, such as *In the Name of the Father* (1994) and *The Boxer* (1997), both of which deal with family relations and not the personal consequences of disloyalty to the IRA. The Academy Award winning *The Crying Game* offers a strong comparison and analysis in relation to *A Prayer for the Dying* in how each deals with the Troubles and the growing disillusionment of IRA soldiers. The final movie to be discussed is *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, an adaptation of Martin McGartland's autobiography of his time as an

¹³ Patrick F. Sheeran, *The Informer* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002) 61.

informer within the IRA. As the final film analyzed in this thesis, it offers a chance to examine the realities of the previous movies within the context of personal experience while also allowing for the opportunity to conclude just how relevant historical accuracy in film is when confronted with specific events translated to screen. Each movie exists as a historical film so now we must examine the historical events that have encouraged the very existence of these films.

II. Historical Overview of the IRA

When most people think of the conflicts in Irish history, particularly the violence in Northern Ireland, the common assumption is that political and military lines are religiously drawn. Though religion has played a significant part in the conflicts of Ireland since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, sectarian lines have only recently taken on such a substantial role in determining the politics of Ireland. In fact, in the waning years of the nineteenth century, Irish Protestants, most notably Charles Stewart Parnell, led the Parliamentary debate regarding the Home Rule of Ireland within the Act of Union¹⁴ while the 1916 Easter Rebellion included Protestant volunteers.¹⁵ While religion is a significant component in understanding the conflicts within Ireland, it fails to outline the deeper issues of socio-political loyalty. For the Irish the ultimate litmus test has not been historically one of church affiliation but commitment to the cause of ending British rule.

The IRA was formed during the Irish War of Independence in 1917 to act as the official army of the newly proclaimed Irish Republic. Prior to the formation of the IRA the Irish Republic, which orchestrated the 1916 Easter Rising and organized the war against Britain, was supported militarily by the Irish Volunteers.¹⁶ In 1913 the Irish Volunteers formed in answer to the politically-minded Irish Republican Brotherhood—itsself had formed in 1858 in response to

¹⁴ Robert Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993) 612.

¹⁵ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 160-161.

¹⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 23-26.

the militarily weak failure of the 1848 Young Ireland uprising—which called for a national military to oppose the British presence in Ireland during the tenuous Parliamentary Home Rule debates of 1911-1914.¹⁷ In 1917, the Irish Republican Army was organized as a well-disciplined force to replace the Volunteers and act as the military counterpart of the IRB. After years of intense fighting the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in December of 1921, establishing the Irish Free State. Under the terms of the treaty the northern six counties were divided from the Free State and kept under British control as they were predominately Protestant and loyal to Britain.¹⁸ The IRA fractured over whether or not to support the partition of the nation, leading to a bloody Civil War from 1922-1923. The anti-treaty side eventually declared a ceasefire and accepted the new Free State, while vowing to continue the political and military pursuit of a true Republic in which all thirty-two counties of Ireland would be united under one Irish government. Under the guidance of the politician Eamon De Valera, the Free State evolved into the Republic of Ireland and left the Commonwealth of Great Britain in 1949. Despite political development the IRA sought nothing less than a united Ireland so the Army focused its fight against British occupation of Northern Ireland.

In 1942 the IRA throughout the North and South was losing members to both desertion and police arrest. Any IRA activity in the North led to prosecution by the Southern state, eliminating the South as a viable region for safe hiding for Army members. Part of the reason for the South's harsh view of the IRA was that in 1931 the IRA, along with various other republican organizations, was declared unlawful by the Free State.¹⁹ As membership dropped

¹⁷Oliver Rafferty, "Irish Republican Brotherhood," in *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*, ed. Brian Lalor (Hartford: Yale University Press, 2003) 554.

¹⁸Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (New York: Viking, 2005) 365-366.

¹⁹Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London: Arrow, 1995) 409.

“Chiefs of staff were lost, on average, once every six weeks”²⁰ diminishing not just the manpower of the Army but also the leadership. The IRA presence in the North, particularly in Belfast, was effectively abolished in November of 1943 with the arrest of Hugh McAteer, a former Chief of staff of the Northern operation.²¹

By 1947, a new Chief of staff was established and recruitment was well under way throughout the South. A year later the IRA had grown enough to hold a convention in order to determine the future course of the Army: it was here that a “new military campaign to end the British occupation of Northern Ireland”²² was devised and approved. Despite this resurgence and the initiation of a new campaign against the British the organization suffered from inter-army discord and the continuous failure to wage an effective guerrilla war against British military and police installations in the North. On February 26, 1962 the IRA’s Publicity Bureau announced: “The leadership of the Resistance Movement has ordered the termination of ‘The Campaign of Resistance to British Occupation’ ... all arms and other materials have been dumped and all full-time active service volunteers have been withdrawn.”²³ After gaining little in their campaign of violence, the IRA bowed to a lack of public support and a fear of intensified government pressure in the South, leaving the Nationalists of Northern Ireland to seek their own solutions to the British presence.

Over the next few years fatal attacks effectively ceased until June 27, 1966 when the Ulster Volunteer Force,²⁴ a Unionist paramilitary group, attacked four young Catholics leaving a

²⁰ Conor Foley, *Legion of the Rearguard: The IRA and the Modern Irish State* (London: Pluto Press, 1992) 208.

²¹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 190.

²² Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003) 49-50.

²³ Coogan, *IRA*, 329.

²⁴ Originally formed in 1913, the UVF, along with the Ulster Defense Association, engaged in regular attacks on Catholics in the North. Throughout the Troubles, the IRA often claimed retaliation to UVF attacks as justification for their own assassination attempts on political and military targets.

Belfast bar, killing one and seriously injuring two others.²⁵ Catholics riots sporadically erupted across the North until the 1968 formation of the Civil Rights Association of Northern Ireland. Inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States, Catholics sought greater political representation and fairer treatment by the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Marches took place throughout the Northern counties, despite the constant threat of Loyalist violence. In the summer of 1969 rioting began during the July 12 Orange Day Parade, which commemorated the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. In Derry Protestant marchers, assisted by the RUC, attacked Catholics living in the Bogside in what has become known as the “Battle of the Bogside.” Violence continued throughout the summer, spreading to Belfast before finally calming down in September. Overall, roughly “1,800 Catholic and Protestant families” were driven “out of their homes. Of these, the vast majority, 1,505, were Catholic...in the period between the outbreak of the riots in 1969 and February 1973 over 60,000 people were forced out of their homes.”²⁶ During the rioting the IRA attempted to act as a security force for local Catholics but due to the diminished presence caused by the ceasefire there were at most only sixty members in Belfast that were capable of fending off Protestant violence.²⁷

From the summer of 1969 until the 1997 Good Friday Peace Accord, the IRA maintained an ultra-violent campaign against the British military and Unionist paramilitary groups like the UVF. This period has received the dubious title of the “Troubles” in both social and scholastic discussion despite the fact that it cost 3,523 lives, of which 1,798 were civilians.²⁸ Through nearly three decades of violence this “Long War” went through various cycles of intensity,

²⁵ Peter Berresford Ellis, *Eyewitness to Irish History* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004) 273.

²⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the 20th Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2006) 493.

²⁷ Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Heinemann, 1987) 67.

²⁸ Ellis, *Eyewitness*, 299.

forcing the civilian populations of Northern Ireland, as well as England, to live in constant fear for their lives. The violence left civilians afraid of mass bombings outside their homes, storefronts, and on public transit, forcing the larger populace to adapt to life in a warzone in which no one was truly safe.

Over the previous fifty years the IRA leadership that had been based in Dublin had growing effectively out of touch with members in the North. In December 1969 the IRA held another convention in order to open determine the future of the Army. The Dublin leadership sought a Marxist political approach, which would create a National Liberation Front to absorb Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, and the Irish Communist Party. There was dissent among members of both the IRA and Sinn Fein, and in January 1970 the Provisional IRA, along with the Provisional Sinn Fein, was created to focus a new campaign of violence against the British occupation of Northern Ireland. While the Dublin- based leadership referred to themselves as the “Official” IRA, under the leadership of Cathal Goulding, it was the Provisional IRA, led by Sean MacStiofain, a friend and former prisoner alongside Goulding, that waged the Northern war and became recognized publicly as the IRA.²⁹

The first major explosion of the new campaign to remove the British came not from the IRA, but from the British themselves. On January 30, 1972 the Civil Rights Association staged a march through Derry in protest of continued abuses against Catholics. During the march the British military stationed the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment throughout the city to act as both protection from rioting and a deterrent to any possible IRA activity. After the march began the Paratroopers opened fire on the crowd, killing thirteen and wounding an additional fourteen. The British claimed to have acted in self-defense against the IRA; however, according to one of the soldiers their Lieutenant had prepped them for the day by stating: “let’s teach these buggers a

²⁹ Coogan, *Ireland*, 501.

lesson—we want some kills.”³⁰ Furthermore, none of the victims had been armed and several were found shot in the back while fleeing from the gunfire.

The IRA treated this attack on Catholics and the failed government inquiry of it as further vindication for the escalating war. In addition to a sense of justified retaliation, the IRA taught all new recruits that “all volunteers are and must feel morally justified in carrying out the dictates of the legal government, they as the Army are the legal and lawful Army of the Irish Republic which has been forced underground by overwhelming forces.”³¹ To the Army and its members the British were fearsome invaders and colonizers, and all government and military personnel were seen as fair targets.

Despite a growing sense of moral justification, the IRA struggled to maintain successful campaigns throughout the North while contending with growing discontent among the Irish in the South. In October 1972, the Ulster Defense Association set off firebombs in several Dublin hotels and initiated a raid into Donegal in order to force the Southern government to act against the IRA. On November 19, the IRA’s Chief of Staff, Sean Mac Stiofain, was arrested in Dublin. He immediately went on hunger and thirst strike, declaring: “I will be dead in six days, live with that.”³² Irish across the South and North publicly supported his release, reinvigorating the IRA’s support base. On the 29th Mac Stiofain ended his thirst strike to alleviate a growing fear of violence in Dublin. Despite the survival of Mac Stiofain two key things were learned by this event: hunger strikes were viable means to gain public support and that the British must change tactics.

³⁰ Philip Jacobson and Peter Pringle, *Those are Real Bullets: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972* (New York: Grove Press, 2000) 13.

³¹ Coogan, *IRA*, 545.

³² J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997) 395-396.

In 1973 the British government established Diplock courts and eliminated judicial recognition of IRA members as political prisoners. Prisoners brought before the court faced a lone judge instead of a jury and uncorroborated testimony from informers could be admitted without requiring validation of their testimony.³³ Once convicted, an IRA member was treated as a terrorist without the special status afforded political prisoners and prisoners of war. According to The Lord Gardiner Report that was published in 1975, special status allowed various comforts to the prisoner:

They are allowed to wear their own clothes and are not required to work. They receive more frequent visits than other prisoners and are allowed food parcels and can spend their own money in the prison canteen. They are segregated in compounds according to the paramilitary Organisation to which they claim allegiance...the result of this is that the sentences passed in the courts for murder and other serious crimes have lost much of their deterrent effect.³⁴

The IRA protested, with several prisoners going on aborted hunger strikes. After another failed strike in 1980, IRA member Bobby Sands—in prison for firearms possession—orchestrated a strike with the intention of going until his death unless political status was reinstated. While on strike Sands became a cultural hero, and in absentia won the Fermanagh and South Tyrone parliamentary seat. After sixty-six days of the hunger strike, however, Sands fell into a coma and was pronounced dead on May 5, 1981.

Condolences for Sands's family poured in from all over the world. In New York Irish bars closed for two hours and over 1,000 people attended a special mass held at St. Patrick's

³³ Keith Jeffery, "Diplock Courts," in *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*, ed. Brian Lalor (Hartford: Yale University Press, 2003) 300.

³⁴ Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The Inside Story of the IRA Prisoners' "Dirty" Protest* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 71-73.

Cathedral. An estimated 5,000 students marched in Milan in protest of the British government, burning the Union Jack.³⁵ Along with international grief in Belfast, rioting against the RUC commenced once again. For the IRA the death of Sands was sad, however, along with the nine fellow hunger strikers who died soon after, it was utilized in their ongoing propaganda war to recruit new volunteers.

The 1980s saw further escalation by both sides of the war. In the mid-decade the British began to rely upon the Special Air Services (SAS). The SAS were a highly trained execution unit that utilized a policy of Shoot-to-Kill. Instead of acting as security like the rest of the British military forces in the province, the SAS were sent on specific missions with the sole purpose to kill an IRA agent. The most notorious of their missions was in March 1988 when a squad flew to Gibraltar with the explicit assignment to kill three unarmed IRA operatives.³⁶ For their part in intensifying the conflict the IRA succeeded in the smuggling of over 105 tons of munitions in 1986³⁷ as well as a new campaign in England that saw the bombing of locations throughout England and the assassination attempts on several government officials. The IRA planted bombs in the Paddington and Victoria train stations in 1991, arguing that the civilian targets were not acts of mere terrorism because the Royal Air Force was targeting roads and train stations in Iraq.³⁸ This new openness to attack civilian locations instead of military stations and barracks created one of the worst financial acts of the whole era: on April 10, 1992 a large fertilizer car bomb was detonated outside the Baltic Exchange in London, killing three people and causing £800 million in damage. With successive attacks following suit fear grew as no

³⁵ David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987) 98-99.

³⁶ Coogan, *IRA*, 579.

³⁷ Moloney, *Secret History*, 327.

³⁸ Bell, *Secret Army*, 625.

longer was this merely a war primarily affecting Northern Ireland but they “put the whole financial system at risk.”³⁹

After nearly a quarter-century of continued violence, the British government issued the Downing Street Declaration in 1993, asking for a peaceful solution to the Troubles. According to the declaration: “the British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland.”⁴⁰ The government had tired of the egregious loss of life and damage to the nation's financial system. For their part, the IRA implemented a ceasefire of all operations in the summer of 1994. This cessation of violence was not without its limits, as the British requested that it be explicitly declared as permanent while the IRA's Army Council flatly refused anything other than a temporary halt to operations if the peace process did not show immediate and substantial progress.

The ceasefire lasted for two years before major IRA activity resumed. For the British, the major request of the IRA was full decommissioning of munitions; however, the IRA flatly refused out of the assumption that violence would once again restart, an assumption proved correct by their own actions. On February 9, 1996 the IRA detonated a fertilizer bomb in London's Canary Wharf, claiming two lives and causing in excess of £150 million in damage. The IRA soon issued a statement of intent: “the cessation presented a historic challenge for everyone and... Instead of embracing the peace process the British government acted in bad faith, with [Prime Minister] Major and the Unionist leaders squandering this unprecedented

³⁹ Bell, *Secret Army*, 631.

⁴⁰ Coogan, *Ireland*, 666.

opportunity to resolve the conflict.”⁴¹ Refusing to relinquish their weapons in the quest for peace, the IRA reopened the Troubles for another two years.

In the spring of 1998 the United States intervened and with representatives from the various Nationalist and Unionist parties as well as from Ireland and Britain, a ceasefire was called while a new peace was negotiated. The Good Friday Agreement was signed on April 10, 1998, creating a new Northern Assembly, as well as a process by which the North could one day unify with the Republic of Ireland. Over the past fourteen years the process has struggled to come together, with issues of decommissioning frequently stalling the new Assembly from meeting. Though violence has ceased and the political process for a united Ireland is the focus of Nationalists, the harsh reality of the Troubles is ever-present in the minds of the people of Ulster.

With the belief that the informer, regardless of motivations, was a traitor to Ireland and the cause of a united nation, the IRA instituted harsh penalties for anyone that betrayed information to the Crown. The customary punishment has always been death: often execution by gunshot to the back of the head with the body left in public as a message to possible informants.⁴² For British authorities informers have always been the most effective means at gathering information against the IRA, as technological surveillance remained relatively ineffective until recent years. During the Troubles the fear of spies within the local brigades led to strong distrust amongst IRA units within different cities: it was near impossible for the British to successfully have one of their own agents infiltrate the IRA, instead they had to seek out locals that were willing to risk their own lives as well as the lives of their families. In some cases the informers were fully-fledged members of the IRA that had a change of heart and sought out British authorities such as Eamon Collins in the 1990s. In other instances British Intelligence, in

⁴¹ Coogan, *Ireland*, 680-681.

⁴² Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995) 241.

Northern Ireland it was the Special Branch, developed informers out of the local communities from a young age, like Martin McGartland in the 1980s, and once older convinced them to join the IRA to gain better intelligence. After being outed these men were hunted down and in most cases killed, like Eamon Collins, for betraying the cause.

III. *The Informer and Odd Man Out*

The Motion Picture Production Code was devised in 1930 in response to the development of sound film and the perceived corrupting nature of movies. The Code came into being through the creation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), headed by the Indiana conservative Will H. Hays. The MPPDA formed in 1922 in response to several high-profile controversies, notably the 1921 rape and murder trial of actor Fatty Arbuckle and the 1922 murder of Screen Directors Guild president William Desmond Taylor. Hays impact on film standards was minimal at best until 1934 when the Legion of Decency, a Catholic organization, was formed to protest what it viewed as “vile and unwholesome moving pictures”⁴³ and the failure of the Hays Office to successfully enact the 1930 Production Code. In response, Hays created the Production Code Administration (PCA), headed by the Catholic Joseph Breen, to enforce the Code, which was a strict set of rules which movies had to follow in combatting the spread of various social taboos: murder, law breaking, pre-marital sexual relations, and general profanity.

Starting in 1935 the Hays Office used the PCA to enforce the Code on all new movies. Under Breen’s new leadership all of the Hollywood studios agreed, “that no production would begin without script approval and that no film would be distributed without a PCA seal of

⁴³ Mel Gabler et al., *Censorship: Volume II* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 1997) 436.

approval” with a threat of a \$25,000 fine against any studio that failed to meet these guidelines.⁴⁴ With only a few revisions, the Code maintained a creative hold over Hollywood through the 1950s,⁴⁵ limiting both the stories available and how movies could present complex, and often conflicting, points of view. Political and gangster movies of the era, such as *The Informer* and *Odd Man Out*, had to contend with these restrictions while still attempting to tell the complex stories of the IRA. The movies depicting the IRA were often censorable by their very nature of their stories: they consistently presented acts of crime as in *Odd Man Out*, and murder like in *Shake Hands With the Devil*. As in the case of *I See a Dark Stranger* the film follows the regulations of the code by showing the attempted dissuasion of the main character from joining the IRA due to its romantic and dangerous nature. The Hays Code set various restrictions that filmmakers had to work around in order to produce their narratives, and IRA-themed stories were of no-exception.

John Ford’s *The Informer*, adapted from the novel by Liam O’Flaherty, was released in 1935 shortly after the implementation of the Hays Code. The narrative follows the down and out Gypo Nolan (Victor McLaglen), a large and brutish man, during the Irish War of Independence after he has been thrown-out of the IRA. One night, tempted by a £20 reward, Nolan informs on his closest IRA friend Frankie McPhillip (Wallace Ford), so that he and his prostitute girlfriend, Katie Madden (Margot Grahame), could emigrate to America. After a shootout with the Black and Tans, McPhillip is killed and a wake is held at his family home. Nolan soon runs into Katie, and after a brief discussion about loyalty she asks: “What do you take me for, an informer”⁴⁶ which throws Nolan into a fit of grief. Nolan then visits Frankie’s mother where he loudly

⁴⁴ Gregory D. Black, “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940,” *Film History* Vol. 3 (1989): 169, pp. 167-189.

⁴⁵ David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 283.

⁴⁶ *The Informer*. iTunes. Directed by John Ford. 1935; Los Angeles, CA: Warner Bros Entertainment, 2006.

asserts, without being accused, that he did not inform on his friend. This outburst catches the attention of nearby IRA officers, who escort Nolan to see Commandant Dan Gallagher (Preston Foster), the head of the local brigade. Nolan again asserts his innocence while accusing another man, Peter Mulligan (Donald Meek), so Gallagher agrees to set a trial for Mulligan later that night in which Nolan can prove his case, regaining his place in the IRA if Mulligan is found guilty. Nolan, joyous after finally gaining favor with Gallagher after months out of the Army, goes on a spending binge. Over the course of the night he spends most of his £20 buying food and drinks for the local denizens, proclaiming himself Gallagher's new right-hand man. After a few hours of celebrating his newly conceived status, Nolan is brought to the trial to prove his case against Mulligan. Over the course of the trial Nolan reveals himself to be the informer after failing to prove it was Mulligan. His execution is set but Nolan escapes, getting shot in the process, and flees to the church where Frankie's mother is praying: Nolan dies after Mrs. McPhillip (Una O'Connor) forgives him for informing.

In adapting the novel to screen, Ford and his screenwriter Dudley Nichols made three major changes to both the story and the characters. The first alteration was to change from a Communist organization to the IRA. O'Flaherty was a prominent member of the Communist Party of Ireland and it is under this political philosophy that he shaped the militants of his novel.⁴⁷ Hollywood of the 30s, much like the rest of the nation, was coping with a Red Scare; in meeting both the Hay's Code standards and Ford's own political beliefs, the change allowed the film to present the political turmoil of Ireland in the light of Revolution instead of the tinge of Communism. By changing O'Flaherty's story from Communist revolution to Irish Independence Ford was able to create an overly romantic film that presented a noble, and not Bolshevik, cause.

⁴⁷ Sheeran, *The Informer*, 9-10.

Ford's second change is a small yet significant one. In the novel McPhillip and Nolan are both expelled from the Communist organization when they fail to follow Gallagher's orders by getting drunk, during which McPhillip kills a secretary of a Farmer's Union. McPhillip is seen as a mere criminal, no longer a comrade, but Gallagher proclaims: "We have to get that informer. It's really no business of the Organisation (*sic*)...but an informer is an informer...he's a common enemy."⁴⁸ For the movie McPhillip is still wanted for murder but remains a respected member of the IRA. Nolan, on the other hand, is expelled in the movie for failing to execute a British soldier. This slight change alters the character of Gypo; though he is not presented as loyal individual he becomes a more sympathetic character for suffering for his moral integrity. As for McPhillip, instead of just being a betrayed criminal he comes to represent not only the betrayal of a close friend but of the cause of Irish freedom.

The third change is in the character of Dan Gallagher, who goes from a harsh leader to a compassionate man struggling with the pressures of leadership. The novel presents Gallagher as a cruel, power-hungry tyrant: "Comrade Gallagher rules the national Organisation (*sic*) purely and simply as a dictator. There is a semblance of an Executive Committee but only in name. The tactics are guided by whatever whim is uppermost in Comrade Gallagher's mind at the moment."⁴⁹ For the film, Gallagher is portrayed as a loving, trustworthy, passionate, and patriotic leader. In a sense he is a representation of the mythic figures of the Irish struggle for independence: Michael Collins, Padraig Pearse, and O'Donovan Rossa. Ford and Nichol's alteration to the character seems to stem from Ford's romanticized image of the IRA and Ireland's struggle for independence.⁵⁰ Ford was renowned for his pro-Irish sensibilities and he

⁴⁸ Liam O'Flaherty, *The Informer* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2006) 67.

⁴⁹ O'Flaherty, *Informer*, 61.

⁵⁰ Sheeran, *The Informer*, 69.

enjoyed an idealistic impression of the land of his ancestors.⁵¹ This reworking of Gallagher fits within the notion of Ford representing the IRA in an overly positive light. Through the alteration of Gallagher from a cruel leader to a passionate and idealist patriot, Ford is able to create a nostalgic representation of the IRA during the War of Independence.

In presenting his film, Ford opens with a specific Biblical reference: “Then Judas repented himself—and cast down the thirty pieces of silver—and departed.”⁵² By invoking the story of Judas, Ford is able to present his very distinct point-of-view for the audience. While watching the movie the audience is now going to relate the actions of Gypo Nolan with Judas while subsequently creating an association between Jesus and Frankie McPhillip. The similarities are straight forward: Frankie is the intellectual superior of the two men and like Jesus’ return to Jerusalem upon Frankie’s return to Dublin he is betrayed by Gypo for money; after the execution of his friend, Gypo seeks forgiveness before his own death. Beyond these basic narrative similarities there is a deeper metaphorical connection that resonates with the audience: by having Frankie embody the essence of Jesus the audience associates him, and through connection the IRA, as the savior of Ireland. Instead of sympathizing with Gypo, who was not a criminal, the audience feels for Frankie. In fact, it was for murder that Frankie was wanted by the Black and Tans and the audience even witnesses him shooting a police officer before his own death. Through the Biblical connection Frankie’s existence as a murderer is glossed over and he is instead seen as a man that “died fighting for Ireland to be free.”⁵³ This praise for Frankie further solidifies him as Ireland’s savior, who spilled his own blood in order for the nation to be free. But Frankie himself is not just representing one man, for he is symbolic

⁵¹ For a brief representation of Ford’s romantic view of Ireland, particularly in 1921, see: Sheeran, *The Informer*, 19-21.

⁵² *Informer*, Ford.

⁵³ *Informer*, Ford.

of the Army as a whole, which is fighting and dying for the freedom of the Irish. Though the film is not a beat-by-beat representation of Judas' betrayal of Jesus it still holds a striking resemblance with the New Testament story which resonates with audiences, strengthening Ford's point-of-view of the IRA as the saviors of Ireland.

We are told at the beginning that the story takes place in Dublin in 1922, an interesting time to place the story due to the signing of the Treaty at the end of 1921. Unlike O'Flaherty's novel, which only indicates that the story is set "in the evening of 15 March 1922"⁵⁴ Ford and Nichols specifically chose the waning months of the War of Independence. On July 11, 1921 a truce was called between the Irish forces and Britain⁵⁵ but the War was not technically over until the following January when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was ratified by the Dáil.⁵⁶ The Treaty led to the fractioning of the Irish, with citizens and soldiers alike protesting the terms of the peace. British forces quickly began evacuating outposts throughout Ireland.⁵⁷ The War for Independence divided into both the Civil War in the South and a continued guerrilla war against the British in the Northern counties maintained by Britain under the terms of the Treaty.⁵⁸ This creates some interesting issues for the movie in determining the exact location and timing of the narrative.

The reality of the War of Independence coincides better with Ford's idealized view of the period, whereas the intense violence of the Civil War does not. One primary example of the violence on both sides was the instance popularly known as "Bloody Sunday:" on November 21, 1920 the IRA executed twelve British informers along with two Auxiliary units of the police

⁵⁴ *Informer*, O'Flaherty, 1.

⁵⁵ Sean McMahon, *A Short History of Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier, 1996) 178.

⁵⁶ The Dáil was the Irish Parliament for the declared Republic during the War of Independence. Now it is the lower house in the bicameral Oireachtas.

⁵⁷ "Evacuation of Ireland Faster Than Expected: But People Show No Sign of Rejoicing or Regret at the Departure of the Troops," *New York Times*, 30 January 1922.

⁵⁸ Coogan, *Ireland*, 131-135.

force, and in retaliation the Auxiliaries opened fire on a crowd of spectators at a Gaelic football match, killing an additional fourteen people.⁵⁹ Violence continued to intensify and became more focused on civilians: “Civilian targets, in fact, offered the only remaining untapped market for IRA operations in early 1921.”⁶⁰ This focus continued through the end of the Civil War in 1923 as the IRA “deliberately shot over 200 civilians” in Cork alone.⁶¹ Informers were not just seen as betraying the IRA but also of having betrayed their neighbors and families: “I am sorry to say or think I had a spy belong to me, if [I] only knew he was one I would have shot him myself...as his mother I would be one of the first to banish him out of the way.”⁶² With the nature of war against Britain it would have made more sense for Ford to clearly set the movie during the War of Independence instead of closer to the Civil War. The War of Independence offers a more simplified setting for the events of the film, for the organization is at war with the British and not with its own members.

There is also an issue of ambiguity with setting the film in 1922. The primary issue now is that the Treaty debates and ratification took place in January. Upon ratification the official war, for all intents and purposes, was over and the new conflict that arose was between Pro-Treaty Irish and Anti-Treaty Irish. This conflict escalated into a full Civil War by the summer.⁶³ The movie portrays the conflict as still being exclusively between the Irish and the British with Gallagher claiming: “[Tans] will wipe us out with one sweep. Oh, I’m not thinking about myself. It’s the organization. It’s Ireland.”⁶⁴ Instead of worrying about the Black and Tans destroying the IRA, Gallagher should be worried about the Free State Army. Though there was a

⁵⁹ Robert Kee, *The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism* (London: Penguin, 2000) 263-264.

⁶⁰ Hart, *IRA*, 75.

⁶¹ Hart, *IRA*, 234.

⁶² Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 294.

⁶³ McMahon, *Short History*, 181-183.

⁶⁴ *Informer*, Ford.

small British presence in Dublin through most of 1922,⁶⁵ this implies that Ford assumed considerable historical knowledge on the part of his audience; however this still would not allow for the focus to be on the British destroying the IRA since the Truce had been in effect for almost six-months and the Treaty it self was about to go before the Dáil.

The only way in which the timing of 1922 would truly be accurate without any of the narrative's details changing would be if instead of placing the story in Dublin Ford had staged it in Belfast or Derry. Under the Treaty the Northern six counties of Antrim, Derry, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, and Tyrone, remained under the jurisdiction of the British Government. An IRA campaign continued the guerrilla operations that had worked in the War of Independence.⁶⁶ Had Ford changed the location of *The Informer* to one of the Northern cities than the inaccuracy of the setting would no longer be as glaring an issue as it currently stands for it more closely fits the historical record than setting the narrative in Dublin at a time when the focus of the film's participants would have been drastically different.

The next detail to examine is the portrayal of the Black and Tans as the IRA's chief antagonists. In response to an increase in IRA violence in 1919 an independent branch of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the British police force in Ireland, was created known effectively as the Black and Tans due to their uniforms. The Tans were loosely trained, utilizing harsh methods uncommon to the standard police and military.⁶⁷ The Black and Tans were a formidable presence in Dublin between 1920 and 1922, so their presence in the movie is accurate. When Gypo informs to the police it is the Black and Tans that go after McPhillip and they are accurately portrayed as breaking down the front door and quickly resorting to violence

⁶⁵ Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and Its Aftermath: 1916-1923* (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2003) 297.

⁶⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins* (Palgrave, New York: 2002) 362. Despite being one of the signers of the Treaty and the Commander-and-Chief of the new Free State Army, this Northern campaign was secretly sponsored by Michael Collins, further supporting his argument that the Treaty was nothing more than a means to an end.

⁶⁷ Bell, *Secret Army*, 21-22.

to stop McPhillip instead of attempting to arrest him. Even the fear that Gallagher has of being caught by the Tans when he visits the McPhillip home is realistically portrayed. However, with the ceasefire and creation of the Free State the presence of the Black and Tans as the antagonist force in the movie is more fitting for 1921 than 1922.

For the most part the IRA, like the Black and Tans, is portrayed accurately. The outfits of Gallagher and his officers, suits and trench coats, match photographs taken of the IRA at the time. Gypo's failed execution of a captured member of the Tans fits with the use of assassination, just as the execution of Gypo himself in the end matches multiple sources on the treatment of informers.⁶⁸ Also, Gallagher's professed fear that an informer would "run to the Tans and tell them everything"⁶⁹ is not exaggerated. After the Bloody Sunday violence of 1920 martial law was declared and in the Southern province of Munster "informers were coming forward to reveal the location of hideouts and arms dumps. Many units were hard-pressed just to survive."⁷⁰ To the IRA an informer was worse than a violent attacker, for the guerrilla war could only be successfully fought through covert actions. Any loss of arms or units through the actions of an informer had the potential to ruin a brigade's entire strategy and means to conduct the war.

The movie continues to represent historical inaccuracy in the patience and grace that Gallagher consistently shows Gypo. When Gypo is kicked out of the Army it is for allowing a member of the Black and Tans to escape execution after a promise to defect. Gallagher informs Gypo that had it not been for him then Gypo would have been executed. Realistically, we have to believe that Gypo would have been shot: "almost all of those shot were accused of being 'spies' or 'informers', this label covered a wide range of 'anti-National' or 'anti-Irish' offenses...very few were actually guilty of aiding the enemy. A large number seem to have been

⁶⁸ Coogan, *Collins*, 147.

⁶⁹ *Informer*, Ford.

⁷⁰ Hart, *Mick*, 242.

killed simply as a warning to others.”⁷¹ Gypo’s mistake, though humane, would have invoked retaliation far worse than expulsion from the IRA. The inaccurate portrayal of dealing with the disloyal continues into the present narrative of the film. Gypo’s actions following his informing on Frankie make his guilt clear to the IRA and yet he is still awarded the opportunity to pin the blame on the ill Mulligan. The hours leading up to the Court of Inquiry in which Gypo is able to accuse Mulligan are spent in a drinking binge, even though he makes it known how poor he has been: “The last six months I’ve been starving...living hand to mouth...I’ve got no clothes. I’ve got no money.”⁷² However, he goes on a spending binge in order to celebrate his possible reentry into the Army. With his actions and his sudden wealth, added to the fact that they believe he is already in with the British for his failure to execute the Tan, it is reasonable to assume that in a real situation Gypo Nolan would have been executed without the benefits of the Court of Inquiry.

As for the role the Hays Code may have played on the production of the film it is clear that all it did was offer a framework in which Ford could present his version of the War of Independence. The audience’s sympathy is never completely thrown to the side of wrongdoing or sin, as Ford straddles the line between Gypo’s betrayal and subsequent death with that of the IRA’s necessary retaliation for the act. Gypo obeyed the law by informing on Frankie but he also accused the sickly Mulligan in order to save his own life. Such an action does not invite the sympathy that would have drawn the attention of the censors. Furthermore, the reality of prostitution could not be directly presented so it is covered up by never explicitly stating the profession Katie has aligned herself with. Ford successfully avoided the ire of the Hays Office by following the basic narrative structure of the novel with only slight alterations.

⁷¹ Hart, *I.R.A.*, 234.

⁷² *Informer*, Ford.

When watching this movie it is important for the audience to understand the historical accuracy behind the setting as well as the issues that historical figures represented by these characters had to actually contend with. Through the culmination of the religious motif, the grace of Gallagher, and the inaccurate setting, the movie fails to pass as a historical narrative. Even though this is an interesting adaptation that once received great acclaim it fails to accurately present circumstances of the IRA's war against the Black and Tans. Furthermore, despite showing the genuine consequences of informing the movie romanticizes the period and the IRA, therefore failing as an historical film in which the audience leaves the movie with a deeper emotional and intellectual understanding of the represented narrative.

Much like *The Informer*, *Odd Man Out* is a book adaptation released during the era of the Hays Code. However, it is a far more successful historical presentation of the IRA, especially in its profound understanding of loyalty and its inherent risks. Based upon the original novel and subsequent screenplay by F.L. Green, *Odd Man Out* follows the journey of Johnny McQueen (James Mason) over the course of a day and night as he attempts to evade the police after accidentally killing a clerk during a robbery. The film opens with Johnny, the head of the Belfast brigade of the IRA, reviewing the plans for a mill robbery that will deliver much-needed funds to the Army. After the meeting Dennis (Robert Beatty), a high-ranking member in the Army, expresses concern to Johnny about his mental state: fourteen months prior Johnny was sentenced to nineteen years in prison for gun smuggling but after eight months he escaped and has been in hiding in the house of Kathleen Sullivan (Kathleen Ryan) ever since. Johnny admits his heart is not entirely in the raid: "I believe in everything we're trying to do, but this violence isn't getting us anywhere.... In prison you have time to think. You wonder if we could throw the

guns away. Make our cause in the parliaments instead of the back streets.”⁷³ Despite this hesitation, Johnny still leads the raid. After completing the robbery, one of the clerks comes after them brandishing a gun: during a fight both Johnny and the clerk are shot. His men attempt to help him into the getaway car but due to his injury he is unable to pull himself inside the cab and follows onto the street.

The film now follows Johnny as he seeks shelter from the ensuring police while slowly succumbing to the gunshot wound in his shoulder. After reaching Kathleen’s house, Johnny’s men split up in order to find him before the police do. Two of the men, Nolan (Dan O’Herlihy) and Pat (Cyril Cusack) fail to sneak past a police roadblock so take refuge in the home of Theresa O’Brien (Maureen Delaney). Theresa, a woman of questionable loyalties, secretly calls the police to inform on Nolan and Pat as well as to provide the little information she is able to get out of the men; both men are swiftly gunned down by the police. Elsewhere, Dennis successfully finds Johnny but the police are closing in so he creates a distraction in which he is arrested in order to buy Johnny enough time to get to safety. Severely wounded, Johnny only manages to make it a few blocks before collapsing in front of two English women. Being nurses, they take Johnny in to help with his shoulder though they quickly realize who he is: after some discussion Johnny decides to leave so as to unburden the women with his presence. He is soon found by the vagrant Shell (F.J. McCormick). Shell seeks the advice of Father Tom (W.G. Fay), where he encounters Kathleen as she is looking for Johnny: Shell intends to sell Johnny to the IRA but is convinced by Father Tom to bring him to the church so that the priest may try to save Johnny’s soul.

Before Shell returns, Johnny seeks refuge in a local bar. The barkeep Fencie (William Hartnell), agrees to allow Johnny to stay until closing but remains uncomfortable with the

⁷³ *Odd Man Out*. DVD. Directed by Carol Reed. 1947; Los Angeles, CA: Image Entertainment, 1999.

fugitive hiding in his establishment. Shell finds Johnny and seeks the help of Kathleen in getting Johnny to the priest. Kathleen, having fallen in love with Johnny during his time hiding out in her home, has made plans to leave with him on a cargo ship. Prior to making it to the dock, the police find Kathleen and the dying Johnny, and the two are swiftly gunned down.

In translating book to screen, F.L. Green followed his original novel's structure and events quite closely. The changes between the novel and the film two are essentially differences in medium. It would be impossible to successfully adapt the 217-page novel into a 116-minute film, so Green and his co-writer R.C. Sherriff had to eliminate pages of characterization and dialog, as well as the elimination of secondary characters. One example of such a change is the elimination of IRA soldier Murphy, an additional member that joins Pat and Murphy when they visit Teresa's. From a purely production standpoint it makes sense to remove minor characters such as this, for his inclusion would mean fewer lines for the other actors as well as an additional salary to pay.

However, though simple changes like this make little to no difference in the overall film there are two that significantly alter the film in portraying questions of loyalty for the IRA. In the movie Johnny not only openly questions the use of violence to Dennis, but also attempts to dissuade one of his soldiers from using his gun: "be careful with [a gun]...don't encourage them to ask. You haven't been mixed up in shootings before, you don't want to start now."⁷⁴ The book never presents the final planning meeting nor it does it offer any sense of Johnny's feelings towards violence prior to the robbery, so we are left with only vague passages that hint at his sudden regret for utilizing violence: "[Johnny] had accepted the task which his fanatical spirit had imposed on him. He had existed for years upon a dream, which was ended at last. He had obeyed passionate impulses and resolved himself. Now he shuddered with horror and agony.

⁷⁴ *Odd Man Out*, Reed.

He had committed murder.”⁷⁵ His regret in the novel is more sudden and in response to what has befallen him, while the film offers both his early doubts as well as a constant inquiry into the fate of the mill worker, deepening the theme of consequences for loyalty beyond that of the novel.

Beyond the story and direction of Johnny is the underlying performance of James Mason. Mason creates an emotionally conflicted Johnny that feels both a loyalty to the IRA’s cause in Belfast and to the citizen’s of the city. His killing of the Mill clerk, though accidental, haunts him throughout his journey and every scene, particularly his hallucination of still being in jail, plays with the deep emotional issue of how one is able to reconcile their actions against what is right and wrong. Johnny asks the fate of the clerk but in the performance of a lesser actor than Mason it could have come off as inquisitive instead of emotionally necessary. At the end of the film Johnny does not fight his fate but instead Mason delivers emotional peace at being with Kathleen. For the many qualities of *Odd Man Out* the greatest is Mason’s portrayal of the disheartened and dying IRA leader.

The next major change affects multiple characters: the elimination of details as to the motivations of why characters either inform or do not. There are three specific examples of this, the first of which is Teresa. In the movie Teresa’s loyalty is initially doubted by the IRA: “she is tricky, I wouldn’t trust her,”⁷⁶ but no reason is given for these feelings so when she informs the audience is left with little explanation. For the book there is greater argument about if they can trust her: “don’t you know who she is and what she is? You have lived in the Falls long enough to know she is only a blasted gombeen⁷⁷ woman!”⁷⁸ A few pages later these suspicions are confirmed for the reader when Green writes that Teresa was to inform because “knowing the

⁷⁵ F.L. Green, *Odd Man Out* (Boston: Rowan Tree Press, 1982) 109.

⁷⁶ *Odd Man Out*, Reed.

⁷⁷ A gombeen is Irish slang for a shady or untrustworthy businessman.

⁷⁸ Green, *Odd Man Out*, 35.

Organization had informed against her. It was a feud.”⁷⁹ Though the nature of the feud is left open to the reader’s guess, this greater attention to motivation offers an insight into both the retaliatory consequences of informing as well as the fear that the IRA had of being arrested. For these to me to take refuge with Teresa despite having reason to distrust and fear her implies a choice between the lesser of two supposed evils. The next major example of this change is in why the nurses that find Johnny in the street allow him to leave without informing to the police. In the book they argue over what to do and when the reality of treason for helping Johnny is mentioned, the nurse Rosie exclaims: “I hold nothin’ against anyone on this earth, except the king’s enemies. Maybe, this fellah Johnny is one o’ the king’s enemies; but he is dyin’, and that’s what matters now. Let the ones who like living at daggers drawn with their neighbours come in and put him out.”⁸⁰ These are loyal, British subjects that do not subscribe to the harsh ideologies of the IRA, but ultimately all that matters is that a man is dying. Within this section the fascinating discussing presented by Green outlines the very distinct and moral issues that informing can have within a household. For the film the discussion is far less compelling or political, with Johnny being shown greater kindness by Rosie’s husband when Johnny decides to leave. By eliminating the issue of treason from the film Green and Reed are able to decrease the potential for controversy.

The final change worth noting is a minor difference in dialog, though it eliminates a strong vindication against the IRA. In the novel after hiding away in the taxi of ‘Gin’ Jimmy, Jimmy explains to Johnny why he helped him past the police: “it would be two thousand quid for informing on you like, and a bullet in me backside or some other vulnerable area of my defenses

⁷⁹ Green, *Odd Man Out*, 39.

⁸⁰ Green, *Odd Man Out*, 127.

from the members of the Organization.”⁸¹ This fear fits exactly within the issue of civilians informing on the IRA that we discussed with *The Informer*. Jimmy’s fear is real but the movie only lightly touches on this: “I’m not for you. I’m not against you. But I can’t afford to get mixed up in this...if you get back to your friends, you tell them I helped you.”⁸² Despite such a slight change in dialog, the motivations for Jimmy are drastically altered. For the book Jimmy fears for his life and rightly so, but for the film he attempts to use his unwillingness to inform as a means for potential personal gain.

Though it may be surmised that most of the changes were due to adaptation constraints, these distinct three alter not only the motivations of these characters but also limit the political stance potentially taken by the filmmakers. Like the original novel, the film does not take a clear stance on whether or not the IRA and the civilians that encounter Johnny are morally justified in their actions. This is clearest in the conflicting views and acts of various players in the narrative. Upon the start of the movie, an opening text explains: “It is not concerned with the struggle between the law and an illegal organization, but only with the conflict in the hearts of people when they become unexpectedly involved.”⁸³ Unlike Ford and Nichols, Reed and Green take an objective viewpoint to the events of the story. This is not to say that harsh condemnations of murder and the price that Johnny must pay, be it merely is life or also his eternal soul, are not clear. At most, the film takes the stance that the negative repercussions of violence are not worth their goals sought, and that the IRA may be better suited, as Johnny says in the beginning, with taking their stance to Parliament. Such a repudiation of the IRA is not controversial nor is it biased in a way similar to John Ford’s romanticized IRA.

⁸¹ Green, *Odd Man Out*, 135.

⁸² *Odd Man Out*, Reed.

⁸³ *Odd Man Out*, Reed.

Unlike *The Informer*, the historical inaccuracies of *Odd Man Out* are based on interpretation of facts that do not lessen the power of the film. The movie presents a stronger IRA than existed in Belfast at the time of the movie's release. The film is the story of the small but strong Belfast IRA in the mid to late 40s; however, the IRA was essentially non-existent in Belfast at this time. As Green originally published his novel in 1945, it is reasonable to assume that while researching and writing the novel that the IRA was still present in Belfast, albeit in a minor capacity. This difference does not lessen the historical accuracy of the movie for, unlike *The Informer*, *Odd Man Out* does not proscribe a specific time for the events of the movie. Prior to the production of the movie, while still a presence in Belfast, the IRA conducted "a raid on the Academy Street Civil Defence Headquarters, which netted about £4,200 of payroll."⁸⁴ The film creates a similar robbery in amazing detail, and without a specific intended date for the narrative we must embrace this attention to accuracy for it does not contradict nor invalidate the historical record.

The movie presents the IRA as hard-lined militants, which follows the book quite closely, as well as available historical evidence. During the 30's most of the men that joined up were "straight-down-the-line military...99 per cent of the men in the IRA were the same...their idea of joining the movement was to get trained and equipped and to go out and free Ireland."⁸⁵ Into the early 1940s this mentality did not change, as men were still joining up in retaliation to what they saw as tyrants "who have infringed the nation's liberty."⁸⁶ While Johnny questions the never-ending nature of violence, at least up through the early 40s, he is butting against Dennis and other hardline members of the Army.

⁸⁴ Coogan, *IRA*, 179.

⁸⁵ Ronald Munck, "Class and Religion in Belfast—A Historical Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985) 256.

⁸⁶ Coogan, *IRA*, 181.

This tense nature, and the required robberies to support the organization, led to an increase in the fear of the overall populace of the cities of the North. The growing sentiment was that the Army was closer to gangsters than a true freedom-force, as there were ever-increasing examples of “men claiming to act for the Army robbed pawn shops, fired stray shots, indulged in petty crime, and carried out private vendettas.”⁸⁷ The citizens that encounter Johnny are presumably living in this state of anxiety, with Johnny as the leader of all of the vagrants committing these crimes. As we discussed with *The Informer*, private citizens had to live in fear of IRA reprisals for informing so the hesitation of the characters that meet Johnny is realistic in that they would have feared what could potentially happen to them if the IRA discovered that they had not helped Johnny. Violence and fear went hand-in-hand with the IRA until its near eradication in the middle of the decade, matching the anxiety of the film’s characters.

Are the changes and ambiguities of *Odd Man Out* due to Green and Reed’s own motivations or are they in reaction to the censorship of the Hays Office? There is no evidence to suggest either writer or director enjoyed distinct political or ideological influence over the film in the way that John Ford did. The Hays Office affected some aspects of the movie but Reed was able to successfully circumvent these restrictions in order to present an emotionally profound film. The primary example of compliance is the lack of automatic weapons in the movie, despite both their presence in the novel and the use of off-screen sound effects emulating automatic weapon fire. In still using the sound effects at the end when Johnny and Kathleen are killed by the police there is a powerful contrast between the singular sounding gunshots by Kathleen and the automatic shots by the police: the fate of the characters is absolute while also representing the extreme violence of the IRA conflict with Northern Ireland forces. Furthermore, without showing the guns, as prohibited by the Code, Reed is still able to maintain historical accuracy.

⁸⁷ Bell, *Secret Army*, 217.

Since the Code forbade the use of automatic weapons it is believable that this change was in order to adhere to the standards of the time; without specific evidence of any further changes it is clear that the Code had little effect on the overall impact and production of *Odd Man Out*.

Odd Man Out has faced criticism for its a shallow approach to the politics of the 1940s. The most vocal criticism is from film critic John Hill, who asserts that *Odd Man Out* suffers from “avoidance of social and political questions. It is only metaphysics or race, not history and politics, which offer an explanation of Irish violence.”⁸⁸ Hill is incorrect in this assertion for the movie, like the novel, deals with the social ramifications of Johnny’s actions, just not with a large-view approach. In Johnny’s interactions with the citizens of Belfast the question of how aiding a known IRA criminal may adversely affect someone. The movie does not have to directly deal with the socio-political effects of the narrative in order to be a significantly powerful historical film. Like *The Informer* before it, little depth is directly given as to the motivations of the stories players. However, unlike *The Informer* a variety of views of not just local residents but within the IRA itself are given, while both the IRA and the police are even-handedly treated. Even though Hill claims that the movie is a failure, the extraordinary attention to detail and the emotional portrayal of Johnny, as well as the people he encounters, makes *Odd Man Out* an exceptional historical film that offers viewers genuine understanding of the 1940s IRA.

IV. *A Prayer for the Dying* and *The Crying Game*

American movies produced during this tumultuous time of The Troubles were freed from the restrictions once imposed by the Hays Office but had to instead contend with the public perceptions of the IRA and the Troubles as a whole. Though public opinion shifted over the

⁸⁸ Michael Patrick Gillespie, *The Myth of an Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008) 204

nearly three decades of conflict between support for the IRA and for the British, movies typically treated the conflict from a distance without delving into the ideological and political arguments of the two sides. The best movies produced during this time were primarily directed by Irish directors and offer a complexity in their narratives. However, these movies, namely: *Four Days in July*, *In the Name of the Father*, and *Some Mother's Son*, focus on the social ramifications of the Troubles and not on the issues and consequences of loyalty within the IRA. However, most IRA themed movies of the 80s and 90s follow one of two paths: a retrospective though ultimately shallow look at Irish history such as *The Dawning (1988)* and *Fools of Fortune (1990)*, or the rogue IRA agent of *Blown Away* and *Ronin*.

Of the many movies produced during this period, two were released prior to the ceasefire of 1994. The following two films, *A Prayer for the Dying (1987)* and *The Crying Game (1992)*, follow very similar narrative paths though each utilizes the IRA in very distinct ways. *A Prayer for the Dying* is the far more controversial of the two, as director Mike Hodges and star Mickey Rourke both disowned the studio cut of the movie that was released into theaters. The story opens as Martin Fallon (Rourke), Liam Docherty (Liam Neeson) and a third IRA agent are placing a roadside bomb while two army trucks approach in the distance. A school bus carrying several young girls passes the trucks and triggers the explosive, killing the girls. Fallon soon meets an agent of Jack Meehan (Alan Bates), a notorious English crime boss that wants to hire Fallon as a hit man in exchange for a forged passport and cash. In order to leave the country Fallon agrees, soon finding himself in a Catholic cemetery executing the target while the priest, Father Michael Da Costa (Bob Hoskins) witnesses the murder. Fallon visits the priest for confession and after a heated argument about the murder reminds Da Costa that he is sealed by the act of confession from going to the police with his identity. Fallon is soon found by

Docherty who informs him “there was a Court of Inquiry...we’ve had to cancel every operation in Belfast over you. We’ve had to shift every arms dump that you knew about...I’ve been sent over to London to bring back my best mate, or shoot him if he wont come.”⁸⁹ Docherty is unable to kill Fallon so he leaves, ending the IRA presence in the movie. Out of fear that Da Costa will still go to the police, Meehan places a bomb in his church. Before the bomb can go off, Fallon arrives and saves Da Costa’s life while giving his own in order to stop Meehan. The movie ends with Da Costa blessing Fallon’s soul just before he dies.

When the movie was released, Rourke and director Mike Hodges publicly bemoaned what was on screen. To them the movie had been re-worked “to play up the exploitation elements,”⁹⁰ though in comparing the movie to the book it is hard to imagine a version less exploitative than what was released. The movie was adapted from the Jack Higgins thriller novel and does a fine job in staying true to the overall themes and narrative of the book. There are two major changes that significantly alter the IRA presence between the two mediums, while standing at odds with each other.

The biggest change from page to screen came with the creation of Docherty. Unlike the film, in which Fallon’s old friend and associate has been sent to either bring him back to Ireland or to kill him, the novel does not have any characters that are specifically searching for Fallon. The closest that Higgins offers is O’Hara, a former member of the IRA and friend of Fallon that has become a low-bit thug in Northern England. O’Hara offers the back-story, which goes unchanged, of why Fallon left the IRA and then is gone from the story. Docherty offers a much more compelling character, as he is not only Fallon’s friend but that they share responsibility for the death of the schoolgirls. Where the film fails in this character alteration is that once

⁸⁹ *A Prayer for the Dying*. ITUNES. Directed by Mike Hodges. 1987; Los Angeles, CA: Orion Pictures Corp, 2010.

⁹⁰ Roger Ebert, “A Prayer for the Dying,” Chicago Sun-Times, September 11, 1987.

Docherty finds Fallon he simply leaves, with none of the further back-story offered by O'Hara nor any of the subsequent danger that his presence in London implies. Docherty represents the IRA's presence in England and their view on deserters in a way that the novel never touches upon.

The movie's second major change was in the elimination of Fallon's back-story. All that remains is the school bus explosion, but the book explains why Fallon joined the IRA: "I went to stay with a cousin of mine in Belfast...in 1969...an Orange mob led by B specials⁹¹ swarmed in bent on burning every Catholic house in the area to the ground. They were stopped by a handful of IRA men who took to the streets to defend the area."⁹² As we've already seen, the riots of 1969 were a major catalyst in the evolution of the IRA, so this simple line adds not only background to the character but also a strong historical detail. The movie omits most of the Fallon background though this one line would have offered an accurate and plausible explanation as to why Fallon had initially volunteered. In trying to intensify the narrative through the addition of Docherty it would have made more sense to include this original line, or one like it, in order to establish a deeper connection between Fallon and the IRA. Instead of a complex and historically accurate characterization of the protagonist the movie presents a base character with little for the audience to connect to.

The tragedy of *A Prayer for the Dying* is that the few moments in which the IRA is on screen are not only the most compelling of the whole story, but fit strongly within the historical knowledge of the IRA. Among the tiny details that the film gets right is the initial bomb that destroys the school bus. In the movie Fallon and his cohorts place a culvert bomb along a rural road that is triggered by the school bus as it passes. Culvert bombs, placed in the drainage pipes

⁹¹ A branch of the RUC that, like the Black and Tans, was given greater freedom than the regular police in dealing violently with Nationalists. The Civil Rights Association sought their disbanding.

⁹² Jack Higgins, *A Prayer for the Dying* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2010) 106.

under rural roads, “had once made rural areas a terror for military patrols...these land mines had killed scores of soldiers in the 1970s.”⁹³ In addition to the method of destruction, the risk of civilian causality was high as well as the effect accidents could have on IRA operatives. As with the London bombings of the 90s, there was always a risk of accidentally killing a civilian, but it was something the IRA paid little attention to. According to former IRA agent Eamon Collins, the IRA rationalized that “a child has been killed. It was an accident. Accidents happen in war.”⁹⁴ Like Fallon, Collins felt disgust at the unnecessary murder of children, allowing for the possibility that Fallon would abandon the IRA after killing multiple young girls.

As Fallon fled to England he is followed by Docherty, a realistic course of events as informers and deserters of significant importance were hunted down by the IRA. The IRA’s Security Department was charged with orchestrating counter-intelligence in order to prevent informing. According to the head of the Security Department, Brendan Hughes, during the final years of the decade “there was a major problem with informants...there was an awful sense of mistrust.”⁹⁵ Even though Fallon leaves without giving the IRA reason to view him as an informant, the intense level of mistrust between different brigades and members in the same city would still have created fear amongst those remaining in Northern Ireland. Once Docherty finds Fallon it is realistic that he is not sent to specifically kill him, for despite the harsh reputation for eliminating informers it was possible for deserters or informers that recanted their claims publicly to be granted amnesty. After Eamon Collins turned informer he swore under oath that everything he had told the RUC was false, the IRA allowed him to live as long as he left Northern Ireland.⁹⁶ Since a known informer could be allowed to live in the late 80s then it is

⁹³ Moloney, *Secret History*, 339.

⁹⁴ Eamon Collins and Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta Books, 1997) 121.

⁹⁵ Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2010) 276.

⁹⁶ Collins, *Killing*, 356.

plausible that Fallon would receive similar treatment when all he did was lose faith with the killing of civilians.

For the limited time that the IRA is in the movie, *A Prayer for the Dying* is an exceptional example of historical accuracy in film. Ultimately, the movie is a failure due to poor editing, writing, and directing. Had the filmmakers utilized the IRA in a more substantial role within the narrative while keeping the accuracy of the small details of the Army then the movie would succeed as both a thriller and as historical narrative.

Like *A Prayer for the Dying*, *The Crying Game* follows an IRA soldier that flees the Army after a mission forces him to question the ethics of the IRA. An IRA unit kidnaps Jody (Forest Whitaker), a British soldier stationed in Northern Ireland, with the hope that they will be able to exchange him for a high-ranking IRA operative being interrogated by the British. Jody's put under the watch of Fergus (Stephen Rea), and after a few days a friendship blossoms. At the same time it appears that the British are refusing a trade so Fergus is given the dubious honor of executing Jody. While taking Jody away from the hideout Fergus is unable to kill his new friend so Jody makes a break for it; however, at this time the British descend on the hideout and Jody is accidentally killed after running in front of a military truck. Fergus escapes and takes up residence in England under an alias. Out of respect for Jody, Fergus locates his girlfriend, Dil (Jaye Davidson) and decides to look after her since Jody no longer can. They quickly develop a flirtatious relationship, and soon fall in love. Fergus is discovered by Jude (Miranda Richardson) and Maguire (Adrian Dunbar), the superiors from his IRA unit: Fergus had been tried for desertion but instead of executing him they offer him the chance to assassinate a prominent British figure in exchange for his own life. Jude also mentions that because she vouched for Fergus during his Court Martial if he fails to take the mission then the IRA will execute her in

his place. Before the assassination Dil discovers his relationship with Jody, preventing him from accomplishing his mission. Jude, angered from Fergus failing to show up, busts into the apartment but is killed by Dil. Fergus takes responsibility for killing Jude and the movie ends with Dil visiting him in prison.

The film is written and directed by Neil Jordan, an accomplished director who creates a patient and almost unnerving tension throughout the movie. Like *A Prayer for the Dying* the film opens with the event that leads to the protagonist's desertion from the IRA, though in *The Crying Game* Jordan allows Fergus and Jody the entire first act to build an emotional connection. This patience causes the viewer to pain for Fergus as he must walk Jody into the woods for the execution. The decision of Fergus to abandon the IRA for a life in England is understandable and complex, whereas Fallon quickly becomes disillusioned within the first few minutes, leaving the rest of the film to follow a trajectory that is almost entirely separate from the IRA setup.

Jordan has crafted a riveting film that touches upon various controversial issues. *The Crying Game* is most well known for the reveal that Dil is in fact a transvestite, whom Fergus remains in love with despite his initial shock and disgust. Despite the issue of Dil's gender, the movie is primarily focused with the guilt of Fergus as he tries to separate himself from his time in the IRA. *A Prayer for the Dying* uses the time away from the IRA not as a period of growth and self-reflection for Fallon but for a separate gangster plot and love story that has little to do with his reason's for leaving IRA. Fergus' guilt over Jody's death leads him to watch after Dil, without Dil's knowledge, further building upon the emotional question of how one may attempt to cope with the horror of his or her actions. This is a profound and thoughtful film that uses controversy not as a means to surprise the audience but to deepen the emotional development of

Fergus as he contends with the troubling reality of being responsible for the death of a thoughtful and kind man.

Like *A Prayer for the Dying*, the film's inter-IRA dynamics are quite sound. For the first forty minutes of the movie, Fergus and his cohorts are holding Jody while they await word on a hostage trade. Such a hostage negotiation was a reality in the 70s and 80s. On October 3, 1975, two IRA agents kidnapped Dr. Tiede Herrema, a Dutch industrialist in County Kildare, in an attempt to secure the release of three prisoners held in a Limerick jail.⁹⁷ Though Dr. Herrema was released despite the IRA not getting their demands met, he was a civilian, while Jody is a soldier that would not receive such leniency. Members of the military and British government were not off-limits to IRA aggression, and a kidnapped soldier would very likely be executed. In addition to the likelihood that Jody would be executed if the trade did not take place is the issue that he had seen the faces of Fergus and Jude, so no matter what Jody was as good as dead. In September 1990, RUC detective Louis Robinson was returning from a fishing trip in County Kerry when he was ambushed and kidnapped by the IRA; despite having no relevant information for his captors because he had been on disability for three years Robinson was still executed because he had seen the faces of his captors. Since Jody could recognize Fergus and Jude he is automatically a liability to keep alive.

Fergus' relocation to England is similar to Fallon's and like his *A Prayer for the Dying* counterpart, Fergus is hunted down by his former colleagues. When Jude finds Fergus she tells him that a court martial was held and the IRA wanted to kill Fergus she pled clemency, rare but possible: the informer Joe Fenton was eventually killed by the IRA but not until after a long period of suspicion in which he was kept alive due to his relationship with the respected

⁹⁷ BBCNews, "1975: IRA kidnappers release industrialist," *On this Day: 7 November*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/7/newsid_2539000/2539461.stm

Republican Harry Burns.⁹⁸ Fergus is kept alive due to his relationship with Jude and also because of what he can offer to the IRA. With the continued IRA operations in England, a known operative already established would make for a strong asset. The English campaign was plagued by failed operations that often took civilian lives conducted by inexperienced and incompetent agents.⁹⁹ In 1992, as we have already seen, the IRA was refocusing its efforts in England and Fergus, though potentially unreliable, would be a more successful volunteer than those that had previously failed to accomplish the larger goals of the IRA.

The next, and final, historical detail is the one that the movie gets wrong. While Dil is holding Fergus, Jude and Maguire must go through the assassination scheme without him. As their target exits the hotel he is staying in, the two IRA volunteers jump out of their car and begin firing: they are wearing their regular street clothes, with nothing obscuring their faces from recognition and they fire their guns wildly, unlike the more conservative one or two shot executions usually employed by the Army. These are important inaccuracies, for IRA assailants would cover themselves to prevent identification, often wearing balaclavas.¹⁰⁰ As for the gunfire, many attacks were done at close range, not from the other side of large avenues, as is the case in the movie.¹⁰¹ The sole redeeming quality of this scene is that Jude attempts to prevent Maguire from so foolishly attempting the murder. Luckily, Jude refrains from engaging in the attack in such a reckless manner, which allows for the assertion that though this one character so absurdly attacks his target it is not the way of the IRA as a whole. Jordan is known for altering facts and the reality of a situation to fit his movies, instead of fitting the narrative within the confines of reality, as most clearly seen in his absurdly inaccurate *Michael Collins* and *Breakfast on Pluto*,

⁹⁸ Moloney, *Voices*, 282.

⁹⁹ Bell, *Secret Army*, 519.

¹⁰⁰ Martin McGartland, *Dead Man Running* (Norwalk: Hastings House, 1999) 21.

¹⁰¹ Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, 142.

but with *The Crying Game* he succeeds in highlighting the moral and physical implications that the life in the IRA can have on a volunteer.

Despite the vast difference in quality between these two movies, each succeeds in effectively representing the IRA through the various details they choose to focus on. Both demonstrate the brutality and methods of the IRA during the Troubles. Though *A Prayer for the Dying* suffers from poor character development, it still presents a factually accurate IRA by showing guerrilla tactics as well as the punishment of individual members. *The Crying Game* is incredibly well made, with terrific direction and brilliant performances from every actor, yet despite some factual inaccuracy the movie still offers a compelling representation of the effects of disillusionment. While neither of these movies may be perfect they both demonstrate the potential for historical film.

V. Fifty Dead Men Walking

Twenty-first century filmmakers have taken a new approach to the portrayal of Irish history, including the IRA. The most recent movies utilizing Ireland as a backdrop have chosen an intensely realistic perspective in representing various aspects of their stories. Unlike the movies of the Troubles that could be closely scrutinized for political undertones and affirmations of the political ideals of either side of the conflict, movies of the past decade have been free of the pressure of current events. Along with these changing social variables filmmakers are also freed by the ever-increasing liberal social mores of their audiences. In our increasingly desensitized modern society, movies have come to show violence in realistic, and bloody, scenarios. The brutal effects of a car bomb and the bloodshed of a handgun are expected by today's audience, and this has allowed filmmakers to explore a broader range of narratives.

Our final film, *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, was released in 2008 to various controversies. *Fifty Dead Men Walking* is based on a book though unlike its predecessors it is based upon an autobiography. Martin McGartland is a young man living in the Catholic slums of Belfast in 1988, where he frequently rebels against the British military presence while hustling stolen goods around the community to make money. After getting arrested for attacking a soldier, Martin is approached by Special Branch agent Fergus (Ben Kingsley) to help identify suspected IRA agents. After an IRA attack on a young Catholic man that Martin tries to stop, he is hired by Mickey Johnson (Tom Collins) to drive IRA members around town. Martin takes the job but due to the previous attack he agrees to work with Fergus. He begins to inform to Fergus while gradually gaining trust within the IRA: they build up a trusting relationship and at one point after being stopped by the police while escorting an IRA soldier with weapons in the car he gives the police Fergus' number and he gets Martin out of trouble.

After gaining respect within the IRA Martin is present at the interrogation of a suspected informer where he is asked to execute the prisoner, though right after being handed the gun another soldier killed the informer first. Martin is a wreck with almost having to kill another man, but Fergus convinces him to stay with after finding out that Martin is to be made a full volunteer in the IRA. Once a full volunteer his personal relationships begin to suffer and he is asked to take part in more serious crimes. Martin's conscience is increasingly compromised as he witnesses more men die. He is trusted with a sensitive IRA operation, and when the British break it up the IRA realize that he had informed. Before being able to get to safety Martin is captured by the IRA. During the interrogation Martin makes to escape, jumping out of a fourth story window. Fergus arrives and gets Martin to safety in a hospital, then hides him out at his

home. Once healed, Martin flees to Canada, where he barely survives a shooting by an IRA assassin.

Fifty Dead Men Walking is an incredibly well made film with compelling performances from all the principle actors. However, so many changes were made in adapting McGartland's autobiography that the film is a highly fictionalized account that does a disservice to not only Martin McGartland and his family, but to the men whose lives he saved the harsh reality of the Troubles for the citizens of Northern Ireland. The movie does offer some very captivating and accurate historical portrayals but ultimately in telling the specific and true story of a notable informer the movie is a failure.

Writer-director Kari Skogland makes a large number of alterations to the life of McGartland in her adaptation of his autobiography. All of these changes fall within five distinct categories: name changes, consolidation of people, fictionalized relationships, McGartland's personal views and his reasons for turning informer, and key event changes. Name changes and character consolidations can be attributed to poetic license on the part of the filmmakers for the sake of a potentially more dramatic narrative. McGartland's girlfriend, who was also the mother of his children, had her name changed from Angie to Lara. The movie's key relationship, between McGartland and his Special Branch handler Fergus, is really an amalgamation of his relationship with multiple handlers. He was under the care of various agents over the course of his time working for the Special Branch: this alteration is seemingly made to create a more stable and emotionally compelling relationship than the ones he actually had, as well as the opportunity to have Sir Ben Kingsley in a more substantial role than he would have had otherwise. Along with these two sets of changes, McGartland is given a childhood friend named Sean that is jealous of McGartland's quick rise and growing trust within the IRA. Sean is an attempt to

develop a more complex relationship for Martin within the IRA as well as showing the different degree of IRA commitment that two similarly raised friends could have. However, such a creation is flawed as the jealousy expressed by Sean throughout the movie lessens what, I can only assume was the intent of Skogland, should be an emotional scene when he learns that Martin is an informer. Aside from the odd name changes, the creation of these new relationships not only detract from the authenticity of the film but are inconsistent in fulfilling the narrative objectives of Skogland.

As for Martin's reasons for joining the Special Branch, the movie either omits significant details or completely changes key events in the McGartland's life. The movie hints at Martin's political ideology but never makes clear his views on the Northern Ireland conflict. McGartland grew up in a Catholic, Republican family and he supported the intentions of the IRA: "I supported the IRA in their efforts to defend the Catholic community against the hardline Loyalists, the UVF and the UFF,¹⁰² who terrorized Republican areas, killing innocent people at random."¹⁰³ The movie expresses frustration on the part of Martin with the British, but primarily with the military that harasses he and his friends, so the viewer is left without the deeper understanding that though he turns informer on the IRA for various actions it is not against the Army's stated desire to protect the community. In the film the one scene that offers the viewer some of the reason that McGartland turns is intensely realistic and violent: Frankie, a young friend of Martin, is stopped by an IRA punishment gang for supposedly taking part in stealing cars and dealing drugs, which are considered crimes against the community, so they shoot him in both of his knees as punishment. This is the reason given for Martin turning, but in actuality it is only part of the truth. On several occasions Martin witnessed the abuse of such punishment

¹⁰² Ulster Freedom Fighters.

¹⁰³ Martin McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (London: John Blake Publishing, 2009) 80.

gangs, and it was an attack on his brother-in-law that first set him against the IRA: “an IRA punishment gang wearing balaclavas [accurately shown in the movie] waylaid him, took him into a back street and kneecapped him...I would never forget what the IRA did to him, nor would I forgive him.”¹⁰⁴ Kneecapping was a common form of punishment that was even used on victims without any proof of wrongdoing.¹⁰⁵ The movie takes this one scene, this sole encounter, as the deeper motivation for him joining the Special Branch; however, all it really did was enhance his frustration and anger with the Army.

Shortly after the kneecapping, Fergus capitalizes on Martin’s anger and convinces him to become an informer. McGartland had actually begun working for the Special Branch when he was younger than the movie portrays. Martin had not developed his distinct hatred for the IRA when he went for his drivers’ license, which is when he was first asked to help identify possible criminals he saw around Belfast. For the young McGartland, the secrecy of the whole operation and the added £100 weekly payment made him “feel important, a real man.”¹⁰⁶ Gradually over time he came to realize that it was the IRA that he was identifying but due to events like kneecappings he chose to continue working with the Special Branch. The movies claim that it was after an arrest that McGartland joined the Branch is false and omits a significant reason as to why Martin agreed to fully infiltrate the IRA for the Special Branch. On November 8, 1987, during the Remembrance Day celebrate, the IRA detonated a bomb that killed eleven innocent people and injured sixty-three.¹⁰⁷ Three days after the bombing McGartland was asked by his handlers to join the IRA and act as an internal informer, and Martin immediately agreed even though he was warned of the danger his live would be in: “Enniskillen, I can’t be putting up with

¹⁰⁴ McGartland, *Fifty*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ John Conroy, *Belfast Diary: War as a Way of Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) 86.

¹⁰⁶ McGartland, *Fifty*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ Bell, *Secret Army*, 592.

that.”¹⁰⁸ The movie’s attempt at a more personal reason for him turning informer fails to acknowledge the horror of the Remembrance Day bombing, as well as the negative impact it had on the public opinion of the IRA. Martin had grown to hate the brutality and unnecessary violence of the Army, but it was the wholesale murder of innocent civilians that convinced him to risk his own life and not merely a personal vendetta.

After agreeing to become an informer McGartland is shown gradually increasing his relationships with local cell members. At one point he is even present at the interrogation and execution of a suspected informer, a fabricated event. In his autobiography McGartland details the work he did for the IRA at this time as primarily lending out his car and escorting IRA members around Belfast as they conducted surveillance. The movie’s version of him taking part in legitimate IRA affairs prior to becoming a volunteer is absurd as according to the informer Kevin Fulton, in 1987, before McGartland joined the IRA: “A new directive had been issued by IRA leadership: anybody working for the IRA, in any capacity, had to be ‘green-booked’.”¹⁰⁹ Unlike the movie, McGartland became a full volunteer before engaging in any highly dangerous assignments. For the film’s initiation scene melodrama is added, with tears between Martin and his superior Mickey, which never plays into the actual induction. For McGartland the initiation involved swearing allegiance to the IRA and being green-booked, which is a set of rules detailing the punishment handed out to volunteers who inform or disobey orders. It was only upon this induction that Martin began to be trusted with detailed IRA operations.

For the sake of dramatic effect the movie expands the role of a female volunteer, giving McGartland a secondary love-interest. Immediately after being sworn-in the film introduces Grace, an intelligence officer that Martin begins to work for. Grace is a clear representation of

¹⁰⁸ McGartland, *Fifty*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Kevin Fulton, *Unsung Hero* (London: John Blake Publishing, 2008) 79.

Rosena Brown, “one of the most important IRA operatives” that the Special Branch had been trying to arrest.¹¹⁰ Rosena/Grace did act as a close associate of McGartland’s like the movie suggests, though there is no suggestion within the autobiography that they resisted the urge to have an affair. In order to have a major female character other than Martin’s girlfriend, Grace is given far more to do in the movie than Rowena actually did in real life. The most egregious of the changes regarding her is the addition of her in the final operation that reveals Martin as a Special Branch informer. In 1991, as the movie accurately shows, Martin’s IRA cell created a plan to attack a bar frequented by RUC members, hoping to kill over twenty officers.¹¹¹ For the film he informs to Fergus what is happening and during a dry run MI5 attacks the volunteers, which reveals Martin to be an informer to Grace. According to the autobiography, British forces were waiting at the bar for the IRA so before the dry run could occur the cell called off the attack. Rowena had nothing to do with the attack, and unlike Grace who is arrested during the movie; it was not until 1993 that she was eventually arrested by the RUC.¹¹²

Over the next few days Martin was excluded from the re-planning of the operation, which made it clear to him that he was suspected. Unlike the movie in which Martin is arrested by the IRA at his house shortly after the bar attack, McGartland actually continued to act calm and was arrested after being called to Connolly House, the Sinn Fein headquarters, for a meeting with an IRA’s Head of Discipline, Podraig Wilson.¹¹³ By changing how Martin is revealed to the IRA the film alters his character for the sake of emotion and dramatic effect. In the movie he attempts to flee after believing that Fergus and the Special Branch had set him up, which he realizes was not the fault of his handler: “‘You deserted me.’ ‘Like it or not, I’m your only friend

¹¹⁰ McGartland, *Fifty*, 190.

¹¹¹ McGartland, *Fifty*, 259.

¹¹² McGartland, *Fifty*, 244.

¹¹³ McGartland, *Fifty*, 280.

now.”¹¹⁴ The emotional relationship of the two men is repaired. If the movie followed the events of Martin’s life more closely then the relationship between Martin and his handlers would offer a far more complex emotional resolution. McGartland was angered but he still trusted his primary handler at the time, Felix, so it was because of his advice and offer of protection that Martin accepted a request to visit Connolly House. Unlike the movie the real McGartland was essentially handed over to the IRA even though they believed that they could protect him. For an easier resolution than the truth offered, Skogland has chosen to simplify the events surrounding McGartland’s capture.

The final major historical alteration is the most egregious of the entire movie. At the start of the film it is “somewhere in Canada, 1999”¹¹⁵ and Martin is seen walking to his car. After getting in he is suddenly attacked by a masked gunman and shot repeatedly in the chest. The scene cuts to Martin as a young man in Belfast, only to return to the Canada shooting in the final moments during which we see that his neighbors have arrived to get him help. As the audience, we are made suddenly aware of the high stakes that the movie is playing with, creating an instantly dramatic experience. However, the shooting, which took place on June 17, unfolded in much the same way as the movie portrays except for one key difference: McGartland was hunted down and shot in his car in Whitley Bay on Tyneside, in the north of England. The very first detail of the story is wrong. Though staging the attack in Canada presents the IRA as more perseverant than if it had been accurately placed in England, the alteration diminishes the impact of McGartland’s betrayal by his British handlers later in the movie. McGartland was effectively sacrificed by the Special Branch and then years later had his protective identity revealed by the English government, allowing the IRA to find him in Whitley Bay. Had this detail been

¹¹⁴ *Fifty Dead Men Walking*. DVD. Directed by Kari Skogland. 2008; Fort Mill, SC: Phase 4 Films, 2008.

¹¹⁵ *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, Skogland.

unaltered at the start of the movie then the ending would have been much more dramatic, and accurate.

Skogland begins the movie with the standard practice of admitting to the alteration of historical facts. Following the classic standard of historical film, the movie opens with the statement that: “Some of the events, characters and scenes in the film have been changed.”¹¹⁶ By admitting historical alteration most filmmakers take artistic license to change the story to their liking, yet the original book by McGarland was compelling enough to garner Skogland’s attention. By utilizing the facts of McGarland’s life instead of altering them, the film would still be quite dramatic. The details surrounding Martin’s life as an informer offer an emotional and intellectual complexity that is lacking in the final product. With so many character and event alterations it is probably more honest to say that Skogland’s film is more inspired by McGarland’s life than adapted from it. Enough of the movie was changed that Skogland would have been better off in creating an entirely fictional movie that utilized the experiences of McGarland in creating a realistic story of informing within the IRA. Had she gone this route then *Fifty Dead Men Walking* would be closer to Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* as historical film than it is now. *Fifty Dead Men Walking* is a more realistic movie than any of the other movies we have examined, but it is the least historical due to the disservice Skogland committed in bastardizing legitimate historical events and people.

For such a well-made dramatic film the significance of historical accuracy becomes even more important. A viewer of this movie may be taken in by the quality of the acting and production value, which will lead to him or her developing an emotional connection to Martin and Fergus, further enhanced by the notion that the narrative is based upon a true story. The story as presented is quite dramatic and emotionally powerful yet it is not as powerful as a more

¹¹⁶ *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, Skogland.

accurate representation would be. One example is that Martin's reasons for turning informer were complex and developed over time, and had this been highlighted accurately in the film then the viewer would still be emotionally invested in Martin's turn but would also have a better understanding of the social ramifications of the IRA's actions within Catholic communities. With a better grasp of what it took for Martin to join the Special Branch then the emotional resonance of the film would connect on deeper and more intellectual level.

Another instance of historical inaccuracy in the film is when Martin directly witnesses the torture and murder of another man. This is a powerful scene that causes the audience to feel sympathy for Martin; however, it discredits just how much good Martin was able to do as an informer without taking part in such horrific acts. Martin saved dozens of lives without having to take part in murder, and if the movie would have accurately represented this fact than not only would the audience have still been engaged in the story but would leave the movie with a deeper understanding of just how much good Martin was able to do without too much personal access. Both of these ways are manipulative though it is the accurate version that would add the intellectual conceit that innocent lives could be saved without having to take part in direct violence.

Every moment of historical distortion manipulates the audience away from a deeper understanding of Martin McGartland's actions as an informer. Though the filmmakers made a fantastic dramatic film, they failed to convey key historical events and distorted the facts of McGartland's life for cinematic enjoyment. By following a more historical approach not only would the movie have still maintained a high-entertainment value but would have offered the audience a personal and emotionally stunning cinematic experience.

VI. Conclusion

In seeking greater historical knowledge historians look at a variety of sources, including the culture of a given society or period of time. Following the guidelines of Natalie Zemon Davis: “as long as we bear in mind the differences between film and professional prose, we can take film seriously as a source of valuable and even innovative historical vision”¹¹⁷ it is necessary that we treat movies as a new branch of historiographical study. Movies that present accurate historical truths are not only capable of developing emotional responses out of the audience but establish an honest perception that bears striking similarity to perceptions garnered from more traditional texts.

None of these five movies are fantasy, but are instead presented as realistic dramas. While a fantasy film must create the laws of its own universe, realistic dramas, and comedies for that matter, more often than not exist within the confines of a potentially realistic world. The 2009 film *Inglourious Basterds* is an example of a movie that proudly discounts historical accuracy for the sake of narrative and entertainment. It cannot be viewed as historical because its major conceit is the representation of a Hitler killing fantasy: nobody watching this film would take what it has to say and present as potentially true. The difference between *Inglourious Basterds* and any of our five movies is that unlike *Basterds* none of them are based around a conceit of fantasy. All of our five movies present either verifiable historical events or people, so as historians we are bound to acknowledge the historical truths and failings of each.

The continuing release of IRA themed films, going all the way back to 1935, argues for the dramatic attraction that such movies offer. Even Fred Cobain, noted Unionist, asserts that:

¹¹⁷ Davis, *Slaves*, 15.

“Republicans represent the struggle of the small man fighting the big man.”¹¹⁸ These five movies beg to differ. Each presents the dangers and moral consequences of disloyalty within the Irish Republican Army. *The Informer* fails to get the setting correct but the emotional toll that Gypo Nolan’s actions take on himself, his lover, his friend, and the IRA is devastating. Johnny McQueen expresses doubt over the course of the war against Britain and he is unable to successfully complete his mission. *Odd Man Out* follows a conflicted soldier as well as the concerns that ordinary citizens have, both Loyalist and Nationalist, in handing over a wounded IRA leader to the police. Despite failings as a drama, *A Prayer for the Dying* allows the audience to witness the mistakes possible in a guerrilla war and the lengths that the IRA will go to ensure its own safety. *The Crying Game* digs deeper than the previous movies at the risks of building a relationship between IRA and British combatants, and like its predecessor it shows the extraordinary reach of the IRA. *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, the most direct historical adaptation of all these movies, is also the most interesting failure. If the IRA can be consistently used for over seventy years, effectively establishing its own sub-genre, as the backdrop for a wide array of stories then it must offer stories that attract audiences. *Fifty Dead Men Walking* has not only the Troubles as backdrop but also the true exploits of a publicly known informer.

Cinema has the opportunity to present history in a way that a majority of historians are unable to. While a well-written book or paper can offer arguments and analysis, what they cannot always provide are the visual, auditory, and emotional elements present in on film. As society continues to evolve and our means of presentation change, we must be able to look at movies as potential historical texts that allow the historian and filmmaker to explore events too often confined to the limitations of the written word.

¹¹⁸ Kevin Maher, “Rebirth of the reel IRA,” *The Times Online*, April 11, 2009. Accessed July 7, 2009. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article6073303.ece

Though movies, aside from traditional documentaries, have primarily been produced for both profit and public entertainment it is necessary for historians to consider their historical relevance for it is through the new mediums of television, cinema, and the internet that modern history has continued to develop. Historians must be open to the development of new means of transmitting information: just as the printing press revolutionized the dissemination of historical knowledge so can the new means of communication. As we have seen, movies are a representation of what “film makers...thought worth recording”¹¹⁹ so we must accept the restrictions while seeking greater historical understanding. Film can offer great historical insight, be it of the time represented or of the time in which a movie is produced, and for these reasons alone we must embrace the potential of historical film as resource for knowledge.

¹¹⁹ John Burrow, *A History of Histories* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008) 484.