



**PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
ADAPTATION AND VISUAL CULTURE**

Screening Contemporary Irish Fiction and Drama

Edited by
Marc C. Conner
Julie Grossman
R. Barton Palmer

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Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture

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This series addresses how adaptation functions as a principal mode of text production in visual culture. What makes the series distinctive is its focus on visual culture as both targets and sources for adaptations, and a vision to include media forms beyond film and television such as videogames, mobile applications, interactive fiction and film, print and nonprint media, and the avant-garde. As such, the series will contribute to an expansive understanding of adaptation as a central, but only one, form of a larger phenomenon within visual culture. Adaptations are texts that are not singular but complexly multiple, connecting them to other pervasive plural forms: sequels, series, genres, trilogies, authorial oeuvres, appropriations, remakes, reboots, cycles and franchises. This series especially welcomes studies that, in some form, treat the connection between adaptation and these other forms of multiplicity. We also welcome proposals that focus on aspects of theory that are relevant to the importance of adaptation as connected to various forms of visual culture.

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Introduction

Marc C. Conner, Julie Grossman, and R. Barton Palmer

The trajectory of the Irish film industry interestingly parallels the story of Ireland's economic and cultural development following its independence from Great Britain, which was achieved at the conclusion of the Civil War in 1922. In the century that has followed the establishment of the Republic, the Irish cinema, virtually non-existent during the last years of British rule, has become a thriving commercial enterprise, as well as an essential vehicle for the expression of national (and sometimes counter-national) narratives. It is certainly the case, as Lance Pettitt argues at convincing length in his *Screening Ireland*, that “film is now the preeminent

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medium through which Ireland both examines itself and projects itself to the wider world" (xvi).

In recent years, the cinematic projection of Ireland has had little to do with the continuing political division of the island into two separate political entities: the independent Republic in the south and Northern Ireland in the north, a part of the UK. In the 1980s and 1990s, internecine political conflicts ("the Troubles") were a dominant subject for Irish filmmakers, north and south. Since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Accords in 1998, however, and the elimination of the militarized border that once divided the Republic from Northern Ireland, the sense among the Irish that they belong to two separate societies has weakened into near irrelevance. There is considerable film production in the North but only in a quite technical rather than cultural sense can this filmmaking and the infrastructure that supports it be considered a separate cinema. Ireland's writers, directors, performers, and technical workers ply their trades in both parts of the country, and of course overseas in international co-productions. In this volume, the term "Irish Cinema" refers to all the filmmaking connected with this talented cadre.

The Irish today are as proud of their cinema as they are of their literature, and with good reason. Ireland's emergence, starting in the 1990s, as a model EU economy (for better and for worse) has thus been matched by the emergence of a film culture that reflects the European rather than the Hollywood model, with a productive interdependence of the private and public sectors at its base.

A remarkable series of acclaimed and profitable domestic productions during the past three decades has accompanied, while chronicling, Ireland's struggle with self-identity, national consciousness, and cultural expression, such that the story of contemporary Irish cinema is in many ways the story of the young nation's growth pains and travails. Whereas Irish literature had long stood as the nation's foremost artistic achievement, it is not too much to say that film now rivals literature as Ireland's key form of cultural expression. The proliferation of successful screen versionings of Irish fiction and drama shows how intimately the contemporary Irish cinema is tied to the project of both understanding and complicating (even denying) a national identity that has undergone radical change during the past three decades (see, e.g., the account of what can without exaggeration be called this "new Ireland" in O'Dowd; for a longer historic perspective, see Pettitt). Few other national cinemas, however, including those of other EU members, are as dependent on the national

literary establishment for their source material (including original scripts by prominent novelists and dramatists). It would be an understatement to say that literary adaptation has played a substantial role in the success achieved by the Irish cinema, which is in important ways a literary cinema, as the essays collected in this volume illustrate.

The film business in the US is just that: a private industry that operates independently of any government control or oversight, protected and regulated, if only to a minimal extent, by trade organizations, pre-eminently the MPA, the Motion Pictures Association (see <https://www.motionpictures.org/>). Film culture in Ireland today, by way of contrast, has positioned itself as a public good, its accomplishments to be celebrated as part of an ever-evolving national patrimony (see <https://www.screenireland.ie>). Consider, as an indication of the affection of the Irish for their cinema, Kevin Rockett's *Ten Years After: The Irish Film Board 1993–2003*. An American counterpart of this book is literally impossible to imagine. *Ten Years After* is a lavishly illustrated, unabashedly promotional narrative of artistic accomplishment and commercial success of the Irish cinema that emerged in the wake of transformative legislation in 1993 that re-established the Irish Film Board (Bord Scánnan), chronicling its first ten years of operation. The Bord, as Rockett recounts, has enthusiastically overseen a generous grants program of start-up financing that is readily available to aspiring filmmakers, while providing other necessary services to the industry.

Originally instituted in 1980 in order to help Ireland develop a proper film industry and culture, the Bord at first proved largely ineffective, with its only real success being Neil Jordan's debut film *Angel* (1982). When it shut down operations in 1987, this seemed to ratify the inability of the national culture to produce and support a fully functioning cinema. By 1993, however, the country's circumstances had changed with the incipient economic growth of the Celtic Tiger, and the Bord came to a quite different second life under the leadership of one of the country's most dynamic politicians, Michael D. Higgins, who is also an important figure in the Arts community. Rockett observes:

It is hard to imagine from the vantage point of 2003 how complete the transformation of the institutional and cultural landscapes for film in Ireland has been, not just in the last decade presented here, but in the two decades prior to that, when the very term 'Irish Cinema' had yet to be coined or used with any confidence. ...During this decade, the Board supported one

hundred feature films and television series, and almost three hundred short dramas, documentaries, and animation, while over five hundred film projects received development money. (ix)

In the nearly two decades since the publication of *Ten Years After*, fulfilling the promise that Rockett had identified, Irish filmmaking has continued to flourish, surviving changes in government and the considerable challenges posed by the financial crisis of 2008–2009, which brought the Tiger to a screeching halt. In fact, the Bord (renamed as Fis Éireann, literally “Screen Ireland,” in 2018), re-organized and expanded in 2009, along with associated state institutions devoted to the film sector such as the Irish Film Institute, has continued to play a significant role, with a guiding principle being that the film industry should serve as the national means of expression for a people that had previously been deprived of the ability to fashion the images of their own culture. As Síle de Valera observed in a Dáil debate in 1997 about proposed amendments to the 1993 Film Board act:

The Irish people have been on the receiving end of images of Ireland and Irishness since time immemorial. The significance of the Irish Film Board’s achievements is that Irish film makers are now able to speak directly to an audience at home and our best work can be exported abroad in an epoch of increasing globalization. (Dáil Éireann Debate 25 May 1997)

The ability to “speak directly” imagined by de Valera has meant that Irish cinema not only promotes projects based on original screenplays (often authored by writer/directors in the mold of John Michael McDonagh and Conor McPherson), but also offers adaptations of significant Irish prose fiction and drama. Many above the line creative personnel in the industry work regularly in the other arts, including the theater and television, as the Irish film industry has become multi-layered and interdisciplinary, with deep connections throughout the national arts scene. This has been, as Pettitt suggests, a kind of “Second Coming” (see his detailed account, 115–133).

This present volume offers itself as a sequel of sorts to the multi-authored survey of film adaptations of modern Irish literary works in Palmer/Conner *Screening Modern Irish Fiction and Drama*, published in this same series in 2016. As the planning and production of that earlier book proceeded, it became increasingly obvious to the editors that a

further collection of essays was needed in order to assess in more depth the increasing prominence of adaptation in Irish filmmaking since 1991, particularly of contemporary Irish literature. Central to the cultural mission of this state-supported, but not state-controlled, cinema has been the screen re-versioning of the national literature, with the authors themselves often playing a significant role in project conception and production.

The different chapters that follow, through their focus on individual films, address how adaptation has figured in this Irish cinema, and in some overseas productions, for the last three decades. With deftness and perspicacity, leading figures in government, especially Higgins, have taken full advantage of the country's most noteworthy cultural resource: its writers and their internationally acknowledged achievements in both fiction and drama. (This is a stark contrast to the history of film adaptation of earlier modern Irish literature, particularly the great achievements of the first half of the twentieth century. As Palmer and Conner note, "the drama and fiction of the period of the Irish Renaissance, that great flowering of Irish literature and culture that runs from roughly 1890 to 1940, has proven curiously resistant to adaptation to film" [1].) In a fortunate parallel development, a generation of talented directors, their careers supported by the Bord, soon emerged who, like their counterparts in the US Independent sector such as Steven Soderbergh and the Coen brothers, were willing to make limited budget art films for that exhibition niche, even as they sometimes lent their talents to larger, more mainstream commercial projects. They often have worked in television as well, in line with another global trend. To be sure, what might be called the New Irish Cinema (not unlike a number of other national/cultural cinematic movements in the new millennium) reflects the ethos of auteurism that has been prominent on the international scene since the 1960s, when so-called New Waves, first in France and then elsewhere, emphasized the central role of the director in production and also as a critical touchstone. What distinguishes contemporary Irish filmmaking is its promotion of the other kind of authorship that, thanks to adaptation, can figure prominently in the way that a national cinema draws upon, even as it represents, its sponsoring culture.

Chance had little or nothing to do with the emergence of this extended moment of excellence. The closing years of the last century were notable for the success, both with critics and at the box office, achieved by three films produced abroad but taking full advantage of Irish talent: *My Left Foot* (1989, Jim Sheridan), *The Commitments* (1991, Alan Parker), and *The Crying Game* (1992, Neil Jordan). Jordan and Sheridan emerged as

two of Ireland's most notable writer/directors (see Gilbert in Palmer/Conner 2016). An international figure born in the UK, Parker succeeded in bringing to the screen the first in a trilogy of films drawn from the works of Roddy Doyle, one of contemporary Ireland's leading fiction writers (see Ulin in Palmer/Conner 2016, and Conner in the present volume). The profits from these three films were realized elsewhere, while Ireland received only a reflected glory for the accomplishments of its émigré talent. This sense of a lost opportunity prompted a number of figures in the arts and business communities to lobby successfully for the re-commissioning of the Bord, which had ceased operations several years earlier, as well as an expansion of its role in project development. It was fortunate that at the time Higgins happened to be the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht; consequently, he was able to make sure that all institutions of government were supportive of the results. As films developed with financing and other forms of assistance, the Bord began successful and critically acknowledged releases, and official reaction was strongly positive. As Senator Quill observed in the 1997 Seanad debate over amendments that modified the original act:

The film industry is very important to the future of this country, not alone to our cultural development and understanding of our identity but to our economic development, directly and indirectly. When shown abroad, Irish films invite curiosity about the country. They often project an interesting and appealing image of Ireland and prompt tourists to visit and industrialists to invest here and thereby generate jobs. These are indirect benefits which should not be overlooked. There are direct benefits such as the growing number of people who are gaining interesting and exciting employment in filmmaking. When we invest taxpayers' money in the film industry, we invest wisely....Senator Mooney spoke passionately on the importance of making indigenous films. *Young people in particular have the ability to make films based on our stories, because we have good stories to tell. We also have great scriptwriters.* (emphasis ours) (Seanad)

Since the early 1990s, committed to making films “based on our stories,” the Irish cinema has become one of the most artistically and financially successful of the national cinemas that have achieved a global presence through the somewhat paradoxical policy of cultivating attractive alternatives to Hollywood, while also contributing substantially (especially through joint ventures) to international projects that enjoy considerable, often spectacular, success. Cooperation with US/UK/EU filmmakers,

producers, and distributors has proven mutually beneficial to all concerned. Ireland, so it has been argued, has taken advantage, like Spain, of being on the late-modernizing periphery of the European cinema-scape, away from other members of the common market, notably France and Germany, with their long-established vertically coordinated industries and established urban habits of cinema-going and appreciation. (These issues are discussed in Holohan.)

A signal change that has also contributed to the rise of contemporary Irish cinema has been the expansion of its audience market. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, native filmmakers in Ireland have not been hampered by the limited scale of the national film audience. As of early 2021, Ireland's population is a mere 5 million, about the size of suburban Atlanta or one of Mumbai's expanding neighborhoods, with more rural (especially small village) rather than urban patterns of settlement and cultural life; it was in cities and small towns in North America and elsewhere that the "movies" established themselves as a commercially successful popular art in the early decades of the previous century. Consequently, for much of Ireland's history post-independence, being on the periphery of town and city development ensured Ireland's failure to develop a national cinema, a rejection of modernity that was consonant with its cultural and political circumstances, of which more later. The country's small size would today still preclude any plan for its cinema, including television production, to base its operations on the economic power of domestic exhibition in the face of the daunting expenses now involved in producing and marketing "A" features, as well as quality serialities for the rapidly expanding global television market.

The advent of television as an alternative source of financing and exhibition provided further support to traditional filmmaking, as has the streaming sector of a digitizing cinema economy—technical and industrial developments also supported by the FIS, as series television production in Ireland, most often with government sponsorship, has flourished, often with the participation of prominent filmmakers, often working with literary sources. The most notable recent example is *Normal People*, produced by Ireland's Element Pictures in partnership with BBC3 and the streaming service Hulu. This 12-part series is based on the novel of the same name by Sally Rooney (b. 1991), who is one of the leading literary lights of a younger generation strongly committed to the useful interplay between the literary arts and visual narrative. *Normal People* was published in 2018 and named "Irish Novel of the Year," in addition to winning other awards.

This popularity virtually guaranteed a screen version, with the series modality proving a canny choice for all concerned, allowing the full breadth of the novel's exploration of a complex nexus of relationships to figure in the adaptation.

Rooney wrote the screenplay with Alice Birch (a British playwright and screenwriter), while Dublin born-and-bred Lenny Abrahamson, perhaps Ireland's hottest young director, split directing chores with the UK's Hettie MacDonald. Abrahamson also served as one of the project's executive producers. With a focus on the sometimes turbulent romantic relationship between two secondary schoolmates in County Sligo, the series follows them to Trinity College, engaging with a number of current social issues: her kookiness, their sexual connection, the bullying she endures from others, their difficulties with parents. Intimate scenes between the couple featured some nudity (prompting the occasional complaint during the Irish broadcast run), but the production had been wise in employing an "intimacy coordinator" who proved successful in overseeing what many thought were some of the steamiest scenes ever a part of a television series in Ireland. *Normal People* successfully balances its detailed depictions of the suburban culture that is an increasingly prominent element of the national experience with a more general contemporary vibe, avoiding thorny political issues for the most part. The production team proved agile in creating a product that was sophisticated enough to appeal to upscale narrowcast audiences in the US, UK, and Ireland, without closing out possibilities for even wider distribution in other countries. The series is, perhaps, just Irish enough to satisfy the demonstrated taste for Irishness of both domestic and international audiences, in that balancing of national and universal themes Síle de Valera has argued the industry should promote.

The success of *Normal People*, among many other similar Irish productions, suggests that Ruth Barton is correct in stating that international "co-productions are now the backbone of the industry" (Barton 2019 1). Some of these films (Abrahamson's *Room* [2015], e.g.) are Irish in terms of their creative team and production circumstances even though the stories they tell are not. The project that would become *Room* was developed with initial financing from the Bord. Production was overseen by one of Ireland's most successful directors, with a script adapted from the novel by Irish-émigrée writer Emma Donoghue. The promotion of the film by distributor Universal Pictures was crucial to its success. The story is set in North America and makes no reference to Irish culture. Nominated for

the Academy Awards Best Picture, *Room* won that award in both the Canadian and Irish competitions, confirming its powerful sense of transnationality, which almost earned it an unusual trifecta of appreciation had it succeeded in all its nominations. *Room* deals in themes that easily crossed cultural and linguistic borders; *Normal People* does much the same, but its fictional world references its County Sligo location, while the manners and accents of the characters are unambiguously Irish (even if the show's dialogue carefully avoids regionalisms not easily comprehensible to those who are not).

Such successful productions prompt Barton's claim that "the understanding of what constitutes a national cinema is ever more elusive," but this is perhaps true only if the parameters of nationality are too narrowly defined at a time when a certain political indeterminacy usefully prevails in both "parts" of the island itself (Barton 2019 1; for a different view see Gillespie). And yet Barton, and those of similar mind within the Irish critical establishment, have a point. The Irishness of Irish filmmaking is threatened not only by the emergence of "Europudding" cinema, whose releases feature a bland mixing of national styles, traditions, and themes, and what Iain Robert Smith usefully terms the "Hollywood meme" as a force for insipid bastardization in trans-national adaptation (see Selznick; Smith). Still, the pervasive trans-nationality of the current world cinema requires a flexible definition of national affiliation, and one that undergirds the choice of topics for the different chapters that constitute this present volume. These essays focus on how, since the 1990s, Irish literature has become an important, arguably essential, presence, a key attraction, both domestically and globally, in an exciting run of artistically complex and profitable films, with the changes to theatrical exhibition imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic less likely to create serious difficulties for the industry, given how adroitly the industry has already adapted to new modes of creation, production, and distribution. In the new millennium, no other national cinema can make a similar claim on a multi-layered literariness that enhances rather than displaces the more purely filmic qualities for which directors and other creative personnel are responsible.

It is striking how different the present situation is from the not-too-distant past in Irish cinema. For the first nine decades or so of the previous century Ireland was, with only few exceptions, a cinematic desert. Had it not been for American and British producers willing for their own reasons to take on the cultural task, prior to 1980 or so there would have been no "Irish" films as such, including any that were adapted from stories from

native fiction and drama, providing them with an extended second life. No masterpieces of the Irish literary tradition, a collective treasure of considerable world renown, had a screen presence except in films directed, produced, and distributed by others. This was especially remarkable, given the extraordinary richness and artistic achievement of the Irish Renaissance writers. With only a handful of exceptions (most notably, John Huston's 1987 adaptation of "The Dead"), the great literary works of Joyce, Yeats, Synge, Gregory, Shaw, Wilde, and O'Casey were underserved by filmmakers who could claim an Irish identity. As many have observed, this inability of the Irish film industry to successfully adapt and interpret Ireland's literary achievements was a defining failure of that industry (see Palmer and Conner, 2–3). This was a regrettable irony that cut deeply for ardent nationalists eager to promote their culture. What passed for an Irish cinema for the first 90 years or so of world cinema history was, both metaphorically and in fact, yet another form of extra-territorial diaspora, yet another mournful sign of the failure of what Edna O'Brien, writing as a refugee from a culture that had condemned her Europeanist views and shunned her for them, still nostalgically and ironically refers to as "mother Ireland" (see O'Brien). In part, the blame for this artistic failure must be ascribed to the near-theocracy established during the early years of the Republic. The Irish church fully endorsed Pius XI's intense wariness about the power of the cinema as expressed in his encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* (1936), a screed about the dangers of modern media that unfortunately served as the foundational document of the Irish Film Institute, established in 1943 under the leadership of Archbishop Charles McQuaid, for some decades the unofficial moral spokesman of the nation who figures as a controversial, even negative figure in recent revisionist histories of the period (see O'Dowd and Brown).

The "film madness" that took Europe by storm by 1900 never affected Ireland, then still largely a nation of small villages and very conservative social values, as promoted by the nation's first *Taoiseach*, Eamon de Valera, in a radio address that became a foundational document of post-Civil War identity (see de Valera). De Valera's economic nationalism and commitment to Ireland's self-sufficiency included a cultural program that insisted upon Ireland's unique moral character, what Terence Brown has described as "a conviction that the life of an Irish small farm represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surrounded her" (Brown 133). In his famous St. Patrick's Day radio address of 1943, de Valera evoked an image of the Irish

homestead that would become almost comical in its naiveté, were it not for the power that this image would exert over Irish cultural life for the decades to follow:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age.

This vision of Irish life made no room for the urban modernism of the cinema. The impact of de Valera's cultural program on the arts was extraordinary. Censorship, including banned books and a suppression of the film industry, was an omnipresent element in Irish life well into the 1970s. As Brown explains, "an almost Stalinist antagonism to modernism, to surrealism, free verse, symbolism, and the modern cinema was combined with prudery (the 1930s saw opposition to paintings of nudes being exhibited in the National Gallery in Dublin) and a deep reverence for the Irish past" (135). This decision to remain disconnected from the most prominent artistic/commercial innovation of the early twentieth century should have put native literary arts at a distinct disadvantage, but this collective artistic energy could not be suppressed. In other European countries, at least since the 1920s, the national literature found a place on national screens, even if the nature of the commercial medium meant that filmmakers in other countries at times could adapt the same texts (e.g., *Madame Bovary* [1934, Jean Renoir, France] and [1949, Vincente Minnelli, US]), putting into question the "nationality" of the films involved.

However, the quality of Irish fiction and theater, even when publicly presented (as in the case of writers like Bernard Shaw and Beckett) in other countries, was too extraordinary to remain unexplored by the cinema. In the absence of a native filmmaking industry, acclaimed and appealing fiction and drama produced in Ireland were provided overseas with the "screening" that would allow these works to reach a wider audience in Ireland itself and globally. For decades, the only Irish cinema was what Gillespie has identified as an "Irish-themed" cinema. In the absence of a vibrant national industry that would cultivate and utilize the gifts of the

native-born, would-be filmmakers were forced to seek work abroad, even if occasional runaway productions did film in the country (such as Michael Anderson's UK-produced version of Rearden Conner's novel *Shake Hands with the Devil* [1959]), thus enacting another version of the sad trope of emigration that has so deeply marked the national experience. For most of the history of the cinema, Ireland exported its talent, while the domestic economy profited little from the many successes at the box office of "Irish" films that re-versioned works from a literary culture of world renown and influence.

Consider one of the most famous of this series of overseas productions: John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952). Based on a short story by the Kerry writer Maurice Walsh, the film earned nearly \$4 million, making it one of Hollywood's most profitable films that year. Location shooting in Ireland (County Galway and County Mayo) provided some boost to the local economy, and the production offered cameos and minor roles to many of the notable performers from the Abbey Theatre (including Arthur Shields and Eileen Crowe) and even an ex-patriate or two like Séan McClory, as well as third billing to Barry Fitzgerald, at the time one of the most famous Irish-born actors on stage and in Hollywood. A key writer in the crucial period of the 1930s, that decade in the wake of the tragically inconclusive finale of the Civil War, Walsh was a perceptive observer of, and passionate partisan in, an ever-shifting political climate where an Irish national identity was being shaped. His romantic ruralism (in line with official policies supported by de Valera) was an important voice in that national conversation (consider the role played by the Grierson documentary unit during the same period in the UK, in which film "spoke" for and made visible aspects of communal life then ignored or silenced by modernization). But without a native Irish film industry, and no state-level support of such an industry, writers such as Walsh and films such as Ford's required extra-national production. As a result, they created only extra-national profit. At the time, the country possessed no governmental institutions or relevant NGOs that could sponsor the kind of national self-portrait produced of the UK by Grierson with the support of the Empire Marketing Board. Today, under the sponsorship of the Bord, documentary filmmaking in Ireland offers richly diverse perspectives of national life.

Because Hollywood came to dominate the international film scene after the end of the Great War, other cinemas, especially in Europe, even if they had developed initially in free market circumstances, were all forced eventually to depend on state intervention, from protectionist quota systems to

the provision of seed money or completion financing, and even in some instances government development of production and post-production infrastructure if they were to survive and prosper. Some countries, to be sure, had an unfortunate experience with state control, with government efforts in the UK, for example, failing to prevent during the period 1920–1970 a continuing Hollywood domination of the exhibition sector that resulted in a series of crises for domestic producers. Some government policy, in fact (particularly the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act) arguably made the problem worse rather than better. But this does not suggest that intervention in the film sector is always unwise; a Friedmanian criticism of controlled and regulated markets does not universally apply. If not a creation of state policy alone (one cannot discount the role played by a vibrant national arts community), the contemporary Irish cinema certainly would not have had the quick, substantial success that it has enjoyed since 1993 without effective government assistance. It seems certain that the conditions of the nation's cultural market could not have nurtured and supported filmmaking even in the midst of the freewheeling capitalism of the Tiger in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is also true, however, that the rapid cultural and political changes of the past three decades have provided a social landscape in which the cinema, particularly one in which the nation's literary voices play a prominent role, has been able to thrive.

The extraordinary success and production of Irish film in the period of roughly 1990–2020 that, as noted earlier, Rockett describes as “the transformation of the institutional and cultural landscapes for film in Ireland” occurred alongside, and often in a causal relationship to, a series of seismic social and cultural changes in the country whose effects are still being felt today. Put alongside the economic eruption of the Tiger and the significant transformations it has wrought in Irish social life and economic experience, one sees the intensity of the transformation in Ireland right during this time of growth and production in the film industry. These events are all intertwined in the contemporary Irish experience. As Brown has argued, “the early 1980s...was the end of an era in Ireland,” as the old “Gaelic, Catholic, and Republican” national identity finally receded and a global, multicultural, and cosmopolitan array of identities offered themselves to the nation (318–319). These multiple identities offered a fruitful landscape for the new achievements in Irish film that are discussed in this volume.

The main areas of transformation occurred within gender roles and their associated laws, and with the role and authority of the Catholic

church in Irish life. The extent to which traditional hetero-normative gender definitions dominated Irish culture can be understood by the fact that it was not until the 1977 Employment Equality Act that it became illegal to bar married women from the Civil Service and the local authorities and health boards (Brown 291). The emergence of a women's liberation movement in the 1970s eventually fueled the abortion amendment debates of the 1980s, and the divorce referenda of the mid-1980s and 1990s. These major, highly contentious public debates eventually issued in the 15th amendment to the constitution in 1996, which made divorce legal, and finally the climactic passage of the 36th constitutional amendment in 2018, which made possible the legalization of abortion in the Republic. (This included a repeal of the 8th amendment, approved in 1983, which had recognized the equal right to life of the unborn.) The 34th amendment of 2015, which legalized same-sex marriage in Ireland, is of course a key part of this progression. Seeing the 8th amendment in 1983 and the 36th amendment in 2018 as the "bookends," as it were, of the current volume, we form a good idea of the immense transformation in Irish life contained in that 35-year period.

The challenges and transformations in the Irish Catholic Church were equally groundbreaking. A slow disentanglement of the nation from the church was signaled in 1972, when the national referendum resulted in the removal from the Irish Constitution of the clause that specified the Catholic church's special relation as the national "guardian of the Faith" (Brown 294). Further indications of Ireland's shift away from the near-theocracy of de Valera's vision included the exponential growth of multinational popular culture (the meteoric rise of Ireland's own U2 beginning in the early 1980s was part of this), the appearance of clearly secular and indeed anti-Catholic literature (Edna O'Brien's writing long exemplified this, though many other examples accrued), and of course cinematic works, perhaps best illustrated by the film version in 1991 of Roddy Doyle's 1989 novel, *The Commitments* (the subject of Conner's chapter to follow, and the first film, chronologically, treated in the present volume). The modernizing transformations of the church in the wake of Vatican II were also taking hold, although more slowly in Ireland than in much of the rest of the world.

But of far greater impact on the major role of Catholicism in Irish life were the terrible scandals that rocked the Church over the past 30 years, such as the Brendan Smyth case, the Bishop Casey scandal, the Magdalene sisters' revelations, and multiple other sexual abuse scandals. As Louise

Fuller has pointed out, the ethical reversal that came about after these revelations was such that whereas “previously the church monitored the moral behavior of the state [now] the state was acting as moral policeman in areas that were the church’s own domain” (183). The resulting loss of authority in the very areas of sexual morality and family teaching for the church created a vacuum of public moral direction for a society that had traditionally held itself accountable to an institutionally directed code of behavior. The resulting uncertainty is the very terrain that so many Irish films and works of literature examine, from Doyle’s *Barrytown Trilogy* to Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* (novel in 1992, film in 1997) to *Song for a Raggy Boy* (book in 1999, film in 2003). The most poignant and shocking cinematic dramatization of the effect on small village Irish life of clerical pedophilia among other forms of cruel manipulation of the “flock” has been *Calvary* (2014), written and directed by John Michael McDonagh, one of the country’s most acclaimed playwrights (see Chap. 12 in this volume). Indeed, it is only in the contemporary period that thoughtful and provocative film studies of Irish religious life have emerged at all. Prior to this time, as Gillespie has noted, “getting a sense of how films reflect Irishness through representations of religion and religious attitudes becomes even more difficult than it is in other aspects of Irish society because of the paucity of motion pictures on the subject” (170). But in the current moment, literature and films that deal with the decline of the Catholic church’s authority specifically, and with the overall fragmentation and disunity in spiritual life more generally, have become much more pervasive, as several of the chapters in the present volume attest.

Of course, perhaps the most signal alteration in Irish identity and cultural life over the 30-year period from the 1990s to the present moment is the shift in the political structure of the North, beginning with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and continuing in the various fits and starts of power-sharing and devolved government in the decades to follow. Northern Ireland has seen the police barricades, armored vehicles, and British Army presence nearly disappear over this period, a remarkable change to daily life in the North, the region of intense conflict since Independence whose particular culture, one might argue, is yet to be adequately assessed and expressed in both literature and film. Exceptions include not only the impressive oeuvre of Derry-born writer/director Tommy Collins, and, in general, “Troubles” films such as Jim Sheridan’s *The Boxer* (1997) and, more recently, the action-thriller *The Foreigner* (2017, Martin Campbell), both of which examine the simmering