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# Irreconcilable Modes of Masculinity: The Prevalence of Contemporary Irish-American Double-Protagonist Films

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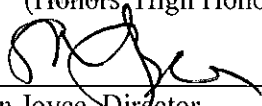
Irreconcilable Modes of Masculinity: The Prevalence of Contemporary Irish-American Double-  
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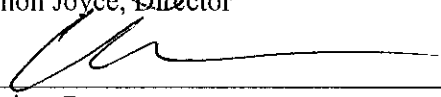
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by

Anne Riley Curran

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**Irreconcilable Modes of Masculinity: The Prevalence of  
Contemporary Irish-American Double-Protagonist Films**

Anne Curran

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***“Bráithreachas thar gach uile ní”***  
 Brotherhood above all else

### 1.) Introduction

Since the earliest days of American cinema, Irish and Irish-American narratives have entertained and captivated mass audiences. While stereotypes and tropes have evolved greatly through the decades, the abundance of Irish-American films produced by Hollywood has not diminished. Currently, there is a pattern of Irish-American contemporary films that fit within a greater genre coined by film critic David Greven — the double-protagonist film. In summation, Greven argues that double-protagonist films feature two male leads that compete for narrative dominance. Most importantly, each lead represents an opposing type of masculinity. These films deal with the negotiation of power between a masochist and a narcissist, one of who takes on a more dominant role.

In the past two decades, there has been enough Irish-American films and television shows that fit the double-protagonist genre to argue that it has become a recurring narrative. However, the significance of this pattern comes from how these iterations are unique within the genre. The films all feature two men from an Irish-American community, who are often brothers. The narcissist who stays connected to his roots gets involved in drug abuse, alcoholism, and/or organized crime, while the masochist who emancipates himself from both his double and his community ultimately succeeds. Consequently, these films argue that not only is masochism the correct mode of masculinity, but also that Irish-America is toxic for promoting the cult of narcissism.

Four films frame this argument— *The Departed* [Scorsese, 2006], *Black Irish* [Gann, 2007], *The Fighter* [O’Russell, 2010], and *The Town* [Affleck, 2010]. Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed* is even mentioned in Greven’s seminal article as a double-

protagonist film. In the film, Boston Police Department agents Billy Costigan and Colin Sullivan each live double lives as they become more entangled with mobster Frank Costello. *The Fighter* tells the true story of boxer Micky Ward and his crack-cocaine addicted brother, Dicky Eklund. Similarly, *Black Irish* focuses on aspiring baseball player Cole McKay, who tries to deflect the pernicious influence of his troubled brother, Terry. While Greven's analysis counts only Hollywood films, *Black Irish* in particular is an interesting case as it is a product of independent cinema. In Ben Affleck's *The Town*, after falling in love with an "outsider" woman, Doug MacRay decides to give up his life of armed robbery, much to the chagrin of his literal partner-in-crime, Jem Coughlin. Each film sets up the Irish-American community as being a corrupting influence on the men.

This thesis will both explain the intricacies of the Irish-American subgenre of double-protagonist films and why this pattern is currently prevalent. Greven argues that the genre exists for monetary reasons because two stars are likely to draw more people to the box office. He also says that cinematic manhood has been building towards the split mode of masculinity, citing earlier genres like noir and the western as evidence. Since the market has made these narratives profitable, Hollywood (as well as independent cinema) is now willing to explore this interpretation of homosocial bonds (Greven 25). While Greven's suggestions are valid, this thesis argues that a multitude of factors have contributed to the preponderance of Irish-American double-protagonist narratives — including but not limited to the effect of globalization, the Catholic Church priest scandal, the James "Whitey" Bulger media frenzy, and the traditional way that Irish-Americans have allowed themselves to be portrayed cinematically. Thus, this pattern exists simply because it reflects the current conditions of Irish-America.

## 2.) A Brief History of Irish-American Cinema

The Republic of Ireland and the United States have a rich, intertwined history. According to the most recent census, there are 39.6 million Americans who claim Irish heritage. The number of Americans with Irish ancestry is seven times larger than the population of Ireland itself (Irish Central). Surprisingly, the Irish began to immigrate to America as early as the 1600s. However, the mass exodus occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the Great Famine of 1845-1852 and the subsequent wholesale evictions by British landlords (Miller 131). It is well known that like most immigrants, the Irish were initially subjected to prejudice (Dezell 17). As such, one of the ways that Irish-Americans of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries found acceptance was through the vaudeville circuit and silent cinema (Dezell 18).

Irish-American cinema has not been written about extensively by film critics and in consequence is a fairly new area of study. Joseph Curran's 1989 book, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen: The Irish and American Movies*, was the first major work to focus on Irish-American cinema. The first collection of essays on Irish-American cinema, editor Ruth Barton's *Screening Irish America*, was only published in 2009. However, in what research has been done since Curran, it is clear that Irish-American representations in the media have evolved greatly during the last century.

Maureen Dezell writes in *Coming Into Clover* that stereotypical cinematic representations of Irish-Americans, such as the "Irish boozier," continue to exist not because of prejudice, but because Irish-Americans have perpetuated this image. The Irish realized in the early 1900s that they had a chance for greater acceptance if they portrayed themselves as "self-effacing people with a romantic past and a weakness for drink" on the

vaudeville circuit. While these tropes were born out of prejudice, they continued to be used by the Irish because of the positive receptions from audiences. The stereotypical vaudeville character was “Paddy.” His skits would almost always feature pigs in the parlor, whiskey, and brawls that resulted in the police being called — which gave birth to the term “paddy wagon.” In these minstrel shows, Irish actors would also play “Sambos,” donning blackface and dancing to a combination of Celtic fiddle songs and African American music. Dezell says that “both Paddy and Sambo were childlike, musical, hapless, exuberant, and irrationally loyal to their employees” (Dezell 16-19). The pervasive association of Irish-America with racism still features in contemporary cinema.

As the Irish-American communities changed in the U.S. — becoming less impoverished due to the growth of the American Catholic Church and the emergence of powerful Irish political figures — so too changed their representations (Dezell 20). When theatrical producer Dion Boucicault came to the U.S., he ushered in a new generation of Irish representation on stage. His plays presented self-sufficient Irish peasants outsmarting their British overlords. These characteristics created a new “Irish-American persona: the self-effacing regular guy” (Dezell 20). Similar representations extended to early American cinema. Critic Kevin Rockett says that prior to 1929, there were as many as 500 silent films with either Irish themes or prominent Irish characters (Rockett 18).

Yet with the advent of sound, representations continued to evolve. Along with the rise in popularity of the gangster film, Irish narratives “shifted from the home to the street” (Barton 6). Male characters split into two stereotypes — the sinner and the saint. Dezell writes that American pop culture “absorbed the sunshine in Irish culture — the humor, the wit, the musicality and dance” which came to be associated with the Irish



priest (Dezell 25). Perhaps this is because Joseph Breen, head of the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC), was an Irish Catholic (Dezell 27). Breen controlled the MPPC from 1934 to 1959, and in consequence his censorship greatly impacted the ways that the Irish were portrayed (Barton 4). There were also Irish gangsters or bad boys, most commonly portrayed by James Cagney, but generally the Irish priest, often played by Pat O'Brien, pacified his wicked traits. The best example of the "sinner and saint" dichotomy was personified by Cagney and O'Brien in *The Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>* [Keighley, 1940]. Since then, doubling has proven to be a perennial characteristic of Irish-American cinema.

The most iconic Irish and Irish-American representation in Classical Hollywood comes from the film *The Quiet Man* [John Ford, 1952]. Director John Ford was the son of Irish immigrants and used his heritage as inspiration — even his westerns feature "Idiot Irish relief" (Dezell 29). However, Barton notes that film critics now recognize that *The Quiet Man* in many ways reinforces stereotypes, through "its simultaneous celebration and problematising of the associations between masculinity and violence" (Barton 8). Thus, even Irish-America's most iconic filmic representation perpetuates the connection between Irish masculinity and violence.

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Irish-American representations became increasingly negative. Tim Meagher notes that because of the Irish Catholic hold over the MPPC, the Irish were riding high during the 1940s and 1950s. As censors lost control in the 1960s, "the police and the priests became the bad guys. They were seen as symbols of the old order" (Dezell 32). These representations were a reaction against the Production Code. They also reflect the backlash against Irish Catholic Senator Joseph McCarthy, who spearheaded the Red Scare in Congress. Things worsened in the 1970s, where the

Irish were seen as “angry, ugly, race-hating” due to the Boston Busing Crisis, where Irish-Americans violently protested school integration. Irish-Americans became cartoonish, who were either whimsical (*Ryan’s Daughter* [Lean, 1970]) or frightening (*Patriot Games* [Noyce, 1992]). In 1980s action films, Irish Republican Army (IRA) members were common villains, and Dezell says that the only group more crudely portrayed were Arabic terrorists (Dezell 33). There was also the emergence of the “good brother/bad brother” narrative. In *True Confessions* [Grosbad, 1981] Robert de Niro plays a corrupt priest, while Robert Duvall portrays his brother, a detective who relishes in dismissing both Catholicism and his Irish-American upbringing (Barton 9). The film introduced the theme of the rejection of Irish culture.

Since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of Irish-American films, television shows, and books, yet often they return to stereotypes. *Trinity*, a short-lived television show, features siblings who are each a caricature: a priest, a labor-union representative, a policeman, a shiftless alcoholic, and a woman who has a successful professional career, but drama-filled personal life. However, films like *Good Will Hunting* [Van Sant, 1997] were welcomed bright spots. Even though the film does not stress its Irishness, youth from South Boston were pleased to see positive Irish traits shine through in a “backdrop of dysfunction” (Dezell 33-34).

Irish-American cinema of the 1990s set the stage for the pattern discussed in this thesis. Barton finds that in contemporary Irish-American film, the “splitting of that ethnic inheritance” is shown through doubling, where one protagonist receives the “regressive ethnic traits.” This current form of cinematic Irishness is “almost always identified with masculinity” (Barton 11-13). Because of the focus on masculinity, critic Diane Negra

argues that gangster narratives are now more popular than anytime since the 1930s. She says that since this “material has been so transparently “Irish-ized”,” the Irish are seen as a “precariously classed, highly unstable whiteness.” Negra believes that narratives of “gangster fraternalism” burgeoned during the presidency of George W. Bush. Irishness has been “hardened” through the connection between fraternalism and criminality. She postulates that the current “masculinist narratives of anger, resentment and defensiveness” are a reflection of men in the media, such as Chris Matthews and Bill O’Reilly (Negra 279-284). Geraldine Meaney expands upon this “unstable whiteness,” by arguing that the relationship between Ireland and America is explored as a conflict between the “incompatible demands of modern masculinity” (Negra 287).

This thesis merges these critics’ observations to argue that these tensions have developed into a clear pattern. The recurring conflict of incompatible forms of masculinity has spurred Greven’s “double-protagonist film.” Contemporary Irish-American representations build upon old stereotypes of the “sinner and saint,” as well as “gangster fraternalism,” to issue in a new era where the “good” brother must jettison his Irishness in order to succeed, while the “bad” brother falters because of his Irish criminality. While the four aforementioned films are the focus of this thesis, the themes of masculinity, criminality, and brotherhood have featured in many other recent films and television shows, including *The Brothers McMullen* [Burns, 1995]; *Monument Ave.* [Demme, 1998]; *The Boondock Saints* [Duffy, 1999]; *Southie* [Shea, 1999]; *Mystic River* [Eastwood, 2003]; *Brotherhood* [Masters, 2006-2008]; *The Black Donnellys* [Haggis & Moresco, 2007]; *White Irish Drinkers* [Gray, 2010]; *Kill the Irishman* [Hensleigh, 2011]; and *Black Mass* [Cooper, 2015].

### III.) The Double-Protagonist Film

TERRY MCKAY

You can't shoot me! We're family. You and me. Black Irish ...  
You're more like black licorice. You're soft and sweet. You're  
hollow on the inside!

COLE MCKAY

We may be brothers, but I am nothing like you.

#### Defining the Genre

This argument is framed by Greven's "double-protagonist film" genre. In his essay "Contemporary Hollywood Masculinity and the Double-Protagonist Film," Greven writes that in the past 20 years, a new genre of film has emerged with two male protagonists, both played by stars, who "vie for narrative dominance." He says that while there are double-female protagonist films, there are far more double-male protagonist films, which makes the central conflict of the double-protagonist film the complex negotiation of power and masculinity. The protagonists negotiate this through their "battle over narrative dominance, sexual objects, and audience sympathy." Greven's thesis suggests that in contemporary Hollywood film, manhood is fundamentally split — therefore two stars instead of one perform the "burden of male representation." He postulates that this split "can be understood as a division or conflict between a narcissistic and a masochistic mode of masculine identity" (Greven 22-25).

The precursor genre to the double-protagonist film is the buddy-film, although there are differences. While buddy films are the most common genre that feature two male leads, double-protagonist films differ because the leads are not "buddies." Even if

they are initially friends, their friendship falls apart due to the conflict over the right mode of masculinity. Another key difference that critic Robin Wood illuminates is the lack of a “home” in buddy films, which is not necessarily a physical place, but rather a state of mind or ideological construct. Double-protagonist films, and specifically this subgenre, feature a strong sense of “home” — the Irish-American community. In fact, “home” causes some of the major conflict. Other related genres are the western and film noir. Noir shows the conflicting interpretations of male desire, identity, and sexuality. While there is doubling, noirs stress the hero’s isolation, and thus the impossibility of male-male friendship. The double-protagonists of westerns represent the law-abiding masochistic side and the lawless narcissistic side of manhood. Double-protagonist films use the tensions explored in these genres and “reimagine the male-male relationships” to be the “next stage of cinematic manhood” (Greven 23-30).

Greven stresses that this trend is contemporary because Classical Hollywood films did not typically feature two male stars, with the exceptions being the aforementioned genres. More often than not, Classical Hollywood films feature the double-protagonist structure with one male and one female star. But the standard plot for the Classical Hollywood film is “the lone, solitary star making his way through a complex and challenging special world.” These films often have a male villain, but the villain is not posited as a protagonist, but rather as a cause of conflict that the protagonist overcomes in order to have the plot resolution that is integral to the Classical Hollywood narrative. Significantly, Greven notes that in the double-protagonist film, “Classic Hollywood *isolate* manhood is transformed into *dyadic* manhood” (Greven 24). This dyadic manhood poses a threat to the standard heterosexual relationships in Classical

Hollywood, as these films focus on the complex relationship between the two male stars. What complicates this further is that both have equal star power and thus have equal narrative dominance (Greven 23-24). For quantitative evidence, Greven lists 33 double-protagonist films from the “Bush to Bush” presidencies, including *The Departed*.

What has caused Hollywood to explore narratives of dyadic manhood? Greven’s first guess is strictly economic, saying that Hollywood’s motives are “desperate” and that having two stars increases the chances of box-office success. Yet, Greven also provides a psychosexual reading where the two men represent the two “warring halves of one consciousness.” As previously mentioned, this tension had been building in American cinema for some time, but the economic need has provided the opportunity for the next stage of male-male representation to be realized (Greven 25).

The split in manhood is “literalized in the creation of the alternate protagonist,” who threatens the dominance of the main star. Greven argues that the alternate protagonist is symbolic of the Greek nymph Echo, and thus he is placed in a submissive position to the narcissistic lead. Greven postulates through the lens of psychoanalytic and queer film theory that the dominant protagonist has to be the narcissistic side. Yet in Irish-American iterations of this genre, the dominant protagonist is the law-abiding man — the masochist. Therefore, the subgenre discussed in this thesis is unique to the overall pattern of double-protagonist films. While Greven acknowledges that this reversal is possible, citing *The Fast and the Furious* [Rob Cohen, 2001] as an example, he argues that in cases such as this, the dominant masochistic protagonist still has echoistic qualities to the alternate protagonist’s charismatic narcissism. Ultimately, Greven finds that the masochistic mode of manhood triumphs (Greven 30-42).

Greven also presents a homoeroticized reading of the genre. He says the double-protagonist film posits the “one apparently normative” male protagonist as a “diegetic spectator of male beauty.” The alternate protagonist then, who longs for the main protagonist, takes on the position of homosexual voyeur with his gaze. Greven quotes Freud by saying that “voyeurism is sadism in the form of the look, a desire to dominate through the eyes.” If the double-protagonist film centers on the desire for power, then this reading infers that the dominance the alternate protagonist seeks is of a sexual nature. Greven characterizes the gaze as masochistic because it is not active, yet not entirely passive because it implies a desire. Feminist scholar Gaylyn Studlar, who challenged Laura Mulvey’s influential psychoanalytical thesis on visual pleasure, introduced the concept of the masochistic gaze. Mulvey argued that Classical Hollywood cinema encourages voyeurism and that the camera forces viewers to identify with the male gaze, while women are the objects of the gaze because they have a certain “to-be-looked-at-ness.” In contrast, Studlar contends that this idea is problematic and instead uses a pre-Oedipal psychoanalytical reading to argue that the gaze is passive because the audience does not seek control (Studlar 5-26).

With this context, Greven postulates that the gaze of the alternate protagonist can not be sadistic, but “rather anguished, embattled...prohibited looking.” Greven argues that since the gaze is generally performed by a normative heterosexual male star, it accordingly “revises masculinity” as it rejects the “kinship of heterosexuality” and stands in for “homosexual masculinity.” Accordingly, the straight male who is the object of the gaze “liminally stands between normative heterosexual manhood and abjected queer manhood.” This oscillation shows a “fusion of both modes and an inability fully to

embody either” (Greven 33-34). Greven’s seminal essay provides a framework for interpreting the Irish-American double-protagonist films.

### **Brotherhood in the Irish-American Double-Protagonist Film**

In the films discussed in this thesis, the double-protagonists are generally two brothers. This also differentiates the Irish-American iterations from the rest of the genre. Thus, these films have all the makings of a buddy film. However, the desire for power and the irreconcilable modes of masculinity creates a division between the two men. The resulting conflict is why these films fit within the double-protagonist genre.

In the communities featured in these texts, “brotherhood” is not necessarily a blood relationship. Examples of actual brothers are Micky Ward and Dicky Eklund in *The Fighter* and Cole and Terry McKay in *Black Irish*. While not examined as a main source in this paper, the television show *Brotherhood* centers on the antagonistic relationship of Michael and Tommy Caffee. The title of the show clearly expresses the importance of fraternity to its narrative. Fraternity is also formed by location. In *The Town*, Doug MacRay and Jem Coughlin are not actual brothers, but were raised together in Charlestown, Boston. They come from the same socioeconomic and cultural background, and hence they form a close bond and frequently refer to each other as brothers. The film goes to lengths to prove that Charlestown fosters familial feelings. In a montage as Doug walks the streets of his neighborhood, one man says in a voiceover “Growing up in Charlestown, you know, a small tight-knit community, we took care of each other, were protected,” while another says “My friends were really like my family.” Thereupon, the protagonists in *The Town* are positioned to be like brothers.



The one film that differs is *The Departed*, as Billy Costigan and Colin Sullivan are not related. Despite their familial connections to Southie, Boston, their paths have never crossed prior to their connection to gangster Frank Costello. However, this thesis will argue that the film makes them into brothers in the way that Costello positions each of the men as his son. Through Costello's role as a patriarchal Irish-American figure, Billy and Colin are both unconsciously competing to be the heir that he passes his business and fortune onto. If they are each Costello's symbolic son, then that would make them brothers.

### **The Masochistic Dominant Protagonist**

In contrast to Greven's standard for double-protagonist films, these Irish-American texts follow the pattern of *The Fast and the Furious* because the masochistic man is the dominant protagonist. This is a critical point in differentiating the Irish-American iterations. As Greven notes, the masochistic protagonist is the one who follows the law — a tradition that stems from the American western. While Greven concedes that masochism is shown to be the victorious mode of masculinity, typical double-protagonist films craft the narrative so that the audience roots for the narcissistic protagonist, even though he eventually fails. In Irish-American double-protagonist films, the dominant protagonist is the masochist, and consequently the audience is rooting for him to remain lawful and resist the negative influence of the narcissist. He might be enticed and corrupted by his charismatic alternate, but the audience knows this to be wrong.

Famous actors mostly portray the masochists examined in this paper, which is in keeping with Greven's suggestion that this genre is a product of Hollywood's commercial motives. Billy (Leonardo DiCaprio) of *The Departed*, Micky (Mark Wahlberg) of *The*

*Fighter*, and Doug (Ben Affleck) of *The Town* are all masochists played by A-list Hollywood stars. Yet, Cole (Michael Angarano) of *Black Irish* is portrayed by a relatively unknown actor, as is his respective double.

The masochist of Irish-American films has standard character traits. He is a loyal brother, son, and friend. He works a respectable day job, even if the alternate gets him involved with something unsavory on the side. Early in the film, he fails to resist the negative influence of his alternate — whether it is sacrificing a potentially successful boxing career to be trained by an untrustworthy family member (*The Fighter*); robbing high-profile locations (*The Town*); or breaking into a neighbors' home to drink their liquor (*Black Irish*). The masochist is more in touch with his emotions than his double, and as such feels emotional stress and guilt over engaging in lawless behavior.

Yet, in the climax film, the masochists confront their doubles and reject their influence. This makes them infinitely more dynamic than their narcissistic counterparts because they change and mature during the duration of the film. The dominant protagonist's resulting success is due to him rejecting the influence of his alternate (and by extension, Irish America) and accepting the support of outside forces. His outside influence represents something strictly American; examples include Cole's choice of playing baseball over joining the church (*Black Irish*); Doug moving to Florida (*The Town*); or Micky agreeing to be represented by a new, non-Irish manager (*The Fighter*).

### **The Alternate Narcissistic Protagonist**

The audience knows from the beginning of the film that the narcissist is trouble. These texts also feature actors from a range of fame — Colin (Matt Damon); Dicky (Christian Bale); Jem (Jeremy Renner); and Terry (Tom Guiry). He is charismatic,

rebellious, and rough around the edges. He initially holds power over his double and is able to influence his actions. However, he is threatened when the double begins to assert himself and take a different path. Most importantly, the narcissist engages in a slew of lawless behaviors, which ultimately drive a wedge between him and his double. These behaviors include large-scale robberies (*The Town*); serving as an informant for a crime lord (*The Departed*); crack addiction (*The Fighter*); and dealing drugs (*Black Irish*).

The narcissist, more so than the masochist, feels the need to prove and justify his mode of masculinity. This implies an inherent insecurity, which manifests in his over-the-top bravado. He clearly feels the need to validate himself and assert his dominance; therefore all of the narcissists come off as extremely boastful. Consequently, the narcissist's insecurities over his own masculinity drive a wedge between him and the masochist because of his latent jealousy. He remains static throughout the text because he is unwilling to change his ways. The alternate encapsulates many of the stereotyped cultural tropes of Irish-Americans, such as stubbornness and holding grudges. He values his Irish-American community over everything else, and unlike his counterpart, is unable to accept any outside influence in his life. As a result, he generally meets tragic consequences: death (*The Town* and *The Departed*) or prison (*Black Irish* and *The Fighter*). For that reason, his narcissism is not glamorized and the audience feels a sense of relief that the masochist is able to get out from under his double's influence.

### ***Black Irish's* Oppositional McKay Brothers**

The movie poster for *Black Irish* perfectly illustrates the pattern of Irish-American double-protagonist films. Two men stand with their backs to the screen. The man on the left wears a green shirt; the color most commonly associated with Ireland. In one hand he

holds a gun, which implies his criminality, while his other fist is clenched, showing his desire to protect his masculinity. The man on the right wears a red, white, and blue baseball uniform, thus suggesting that America has helped him succeed.

The first scene where both Cole and Terry are present defines the former as the masochist and the latter as the narcissist. Cole painstakingly fixes his necktie prior to a funeral; his appropriate dress illustrates his respect for the deceased and his desire to follow societal conventions. Terry is wearing a leather jacket, which exemplifies his rebellious nature. Terry grabs Cole's tie in an attempt to mess it up, illustrating both his disdain for Cole's rule following ways and his attempts to assert his dominance.

Terry is further characterized as someone who rejects all appropriate conventions of behavior. He descends into the world of dealing and the insinuated use of drugs. When he and his father Desmond fight, Terry throws a potato at his head. This prototypical symbol of Ireland implies that it is their Irishness that makes them so volatile. Terry breaks into the O'Leary's house, who are clearly an Irish family, which conveys that he is so corrupt that he steals from his own community. Terry also has the characteristic insecurity about his masculinity and intelligence. When Cole throws pitches that he cannot hit, Terry throws the ball away like a peevish child, and tells him not to think "that [he's] anything special." His action shows how Terry is trying to make Cole feel bad in an attempt to make himself feel better about his inabilities. He also tells his family that "You all think I'm dumb. I'm not dumb, I'm smart...It's easier being a loser. Nobody expects anything out of Terry McKay." The quotation demonstrates that Terry has become complacent being the narcissistic alternate. Even when he tries to leave Southie by joining the Marines, they reject his offer because his reputation precedes him. After

Cole shoots Terry to prevent him from murdering Joey, the film cuts to Terry in the hospital, and the camera focuses a close-up shot of Mrs. McKay lamenting over her love for her son before he goes to prison. Terry waits for her to leave before he bursts into tears. This indicates that Terry has not learned to behave like a masochist, who would not be afraid of his emotions, and will ultimately pay the price for his choices.

In contrast, while Terry initially negatively influences his brother, Cole eventually asserts his own form of masculinity. Cole is the well-behaved son — great grades, helpful around the house, and even gets a job to support his family. Early on, Cole has a pet white rabbit, which is a symbol of his innocence and purity. After he breaks into the O’Leary’s with Terry, the rabbit dies, which heavy-handedly exhibits his loss of innocence. As Cole gets drunk at the O’Leary’s, a time-lapse slowly zooms in on him. Terry and his friend Anthony move around him, engaging in rowdy behavior. The shot shows the process of his indoctrination into Terry’s lifestyle. Cole dreams of entering the priesthood, and he tells the father during a confession that “I feel terrible; Terry is sucking me in.” Cole ultimately decides to abandon his dream of the priesthood because he does not want to remain chaste, but instead uses baseball as an escape from his brother. During the climatic scene where Terry attempts to rob the restaurant where Cole works, Cole cocks the gun at his brother, signaling his allegiance to his boss. Terry replies that “You can’t shoot me. We’re family. You and me. Black Irish. You’re more like black licorice. You’re soft and sweet. And hollow on the inside.” It is significant that Terry calls them Black Irish, which are the minority of Irish with dark hair and features. While the exact origins are unknown, theories suggest that the Black Irish descended from Viking or Spanish invaders. As a result, some have been subjected to prejudice and

were treated as second-class citizens (Irish Central). The fact that Cole does not similarly identify proves that as a masochistic, he follows the conventions of the masses. Terry's metaphor of sweet licorice illuminates his deep-seated contempt for his brother's ability to show off his emotions. When Cole responds that "We may be brothers, but I am nothing like you," he signals that he has officially differentiated himself as a masochist and henceforth will not be influenced by Terry and the rest of his family.

### **Micky & Dicky's Problematic Bond in *The Fighter***

*The Fighter* also features the story of two brothers; only it complicates the pattern because Micky allows Dicky to remain in his life by the conclusion of the film. However, I will argue that since Micky accepted outside help in his boxing career, he has in fact emancipated himself from his brother's influence. The film also differs from the others because it is the only one based on real people.

From the first scene of the film, it is clear that the brothers are inseparable, but that Dicky is the boss. Dicky asks "Are they bringing Micky in," which shows his desire to control his brother. Once Micky enters the shot, the fidgety Dicky grabs his brother, while Micky's body language is very resistant. This initial shot, followed by home video footage of Dicky teaching his brother to box as a child, illustrates his power over Micky. Dicky used to have a successful career in boxing. He constantly references the time he boxed against Sugar Ray Leonard and that he is the subject of an HBO documentary. This type of bravado is consistent with narcissistic protagonists. But his delusions of grandeur cloud him from realizing that the documentary is not about his (nonexistent) comeback career, but rather about crack addiction in America. Yet, he also has the classic

charisma of a narcissist, and is shown walking through the streets of Lowell, Massachusetts receiving positive greetings from his neighbors.

Like the alternate protagonists of these films, Dicky has gotten himself involved in something troubling — his crack cocaine addiction. One early scene intercuts real footage of his Sugar Ray fight with him playing around with his addict friends and smoking more crack. The editing of this sequence demonstrates how drugs have transformed Dicky's once promising life into something tragic. When the family waits for Dicky to arrive for Micky's fight, there are audible sounds of church bells in the distance, followed by a close-up shot of Dicky smoking. The sound bridge proves how crack has become Dicky's religion; it is the guiding focus of his life. Dicky tries to avoid his family by jumping into a trashcan, which is symbolic of how far drugs have brought him down. But tensions arise when his addiction jeopardizes Micky's career. When Micky tells Dicky he does not want him as a coach, Dicky begins to beat the lockers in the gym. Dicky's young son mimics his father's action. This indicates how bad behaviors are passed from father to son in Irish-American communities.

On the other hand, Micky is actively working to have a successful career. He makes honest money paving roads and values his family and his daughter. However, the main conflict centers on Mickey's decision whether to let his brother and mother run his career. Micky frequently tells his girlfriend Charlene and his other coach O'Keefe that he "need[s] to be with my family in Lowell" and that Dicky has "taught [him] everything [he] knows; he's been in [his] corner." These quotations demonstrate his extreme familial pressures. Yet when Micky's hand, which he obviously needs to fight, is broken in an attempt to help Dicky during his arrest, it is a physical and emotional reminder about how

Dicky is unintentionally sabotaging his career. During the court scene, a wide shot shows both men awaiting their punishment. As the judge reads out the multitude of charges Dicky faces, the camera focuses on Dicky, who is unfazed, and then refocuses on Micky, who is shocked. When Dicky claims that he did everything for his brother, Micky holds up his broken hand and says “Do me a favor. Don’t do fuckin’ nothing for me no more, ok? I’m done lying for you?” Much like the confrontation scene in *Black Irish*, this scene marks Micky’s realization that he needs to free himself from Dicky’s influence.

### **The Unhealthy “Brotherhood” in *The Town***

Growing up in the same tight-knit community of Charlestown, Boston, Doug and Jem form a bond of friendship more akin to brotherhood. They were both raised in the cult of narcissistic masculinity, so much so that Doug has never seen a man cry. Both men also go into the “family business” of bank robbery, which implies Irish criminality is a trait that is passed down the generations, like in *The Fighter*. Yet their relationship is tested when Doug grows into his masochism and as such comes to resent Charlestown.

Jem is proud of his Charlestown roots and his profession. He encapsulates many of the characteristic traits of a narcissist, such as the need to prove his masculinity. At their favorite local bar, reformed alcoholic Doug orders a tonic, to which Jem and another friend mock him by saying, “Let me get an umbrella for my beer” and “Let me get a Shirley Temple.” Jem’s action suggests that he believes that Doug is feminized because he does not drink alcohol and that he is threatened by how comfortable Doug is with his sobriety. As will be discussed later, Jem is also threatened by Doug’s relationship with Claire, and would prefer him to be with his sister Krista and stay in Charlestown.



Jem also has no problem using violence or force, while Doug has qualms. When Jem recommends that he should kill Claire, Doug calls him a “triggerman” and says that he’s “going to get the fucking electric chair brought back over Charlestown” to which Jem flippantly replies that it is just “loose ends.” Jem’s blasé attitude towards violence culminates when Doug asks him for help hurting a man, but tells him that he cannot explain why he needs to hurt him. Jem casually replies by asking “whose car are we going to take?” While this line provides a brief comedic release, it further exhibits Jem’s desensitization towards using violence. When Jem shoots the man, Doug is disgusted both by Jem’s violence and by the fact that he asked him for help. This introduces a critical point about the narcissists in that they are loyal, but to a fault. In their desire to protect their doubles, they lose their moral sense of what is right or wrong. During Jem and Doug’s biggest argument, it is revealed that Jem served nine years in “Walpole” prison for killing a man who was terrorizing Doug. He tries to guilt Doug into continuing their criminality by saying that he “waited for [him]” to which Doug responds that “I never asked you to!” Similar to the other confrontation scenes, this interaction makes evident the impasse in their friendship that has arisen from dueling forms of masculinity.

Doug is raised by his narcissist father, who teaches him this criminality, but climatically he grows into his true masochism. Mr. MacRay did not show his emotions, as demonstrated through his impassive reaction to Doug’s mother leaving and his scorn for Doug’s sadness. Doug was a talented hockey player, but as the audience learns from an FBI briefing on his gang, “the hockey ship sailed with the narcotics,” thus implying that Charlestown prevents the American Dream. During a conversation with Krista, Doug admits that he misses using drugs, but that he decides to stay sober because he knows it is

right. This proves that Doug has a sense of morality, which Jem later mocks, calling him “Mr. Fucking Clean. Mr. Fucking Goddamn High and Mighty.” This tension between the doubles only increases throughout the film. During their first robbery, it is clear by the dialogue and the close-up shots that the two of them run the show. However, when Jem arrives late, indicating how he is unreliable, a close-up shot shows Doug grimacing. Doug has difficulty living a double life of crime, especially once he begins dating the morally resolute Claire. He tells Jem that he “can’t be up there killing people,” which affirms that he does not have the same relish for crime and violence. Doug becomes a dynamic character when he decides to get out of Charlestown.

### ***The Departed* Protagonist’s Double Lives**

What first differentiates *The Departed* from the rest of the films is that masochist Billy and narcissist Colin are strangers. Yet, through their relationship with mobster Frank Costello, the Boston Police Department, and their same romantic interest in Madolyn, the two men are clearly doubled. As previously mentioned, *The Departed* was included in Greven’s list of films. Additionally, what complicates the analysis of this film is that Billy is masquerading as a narcissist and Colin is masquerading as a masochist. The former is doing so in order to infiltrate Costello’s gang and the latter is doing so to prevent the Boston PD from discovering that he is working for Costello.

Colin fits all of the characteristics of lawless narcissist, but promotes himself as a lawful police officer in order to better serve Costello’s interests. Costello’s knowledge of Colin’s family is what wins his trust. However, Colin is better able to separate himself from his cultural heritage. He is ambitious, frequently looking towards the golden dome of the Boston Capital. Colin moves into an apartment with a stunning view of the capital,

and in all of the shots of his home it is featured in the background. He also is very insecure about his masculinity. When the Boston PD plays the firefighters in a game of football, Colin is clearly upset when his team loses. He repeatedly calls the firemen “queers,” exposing how his masculinity has been threatened by losing a physical competition. It should be noted that when Billy is pretending to be a narcissist, he beats up a man for implying that he is on his period; clearly, Billy understands the macho pretension that is characteristic of a narcissist. Notably, it is this action that wins over Costello. Colin balances his desire to move through the ranks while keeping Costello happy with ease, and even brags about his ability to lie. After Costello’s people murder Captain Queenan, arguably one of the most moral characters, a medium-angle shot shows Colin sitting at his desk. The shot is half illuminated and half in the dark, symbolizing Colin’s potential to be a masochist. Colin then stands up and turns off the lamp and sits in the dark. Because Queenan is killed due to Colin’s involvement, he has become just as bad as Costello; therefore, turning off the light symbolizes how he is truly a narcissist.

Billy is the masochistic protagonist because in his essence, he is law-abiding. Like Colin, he dreams of working for the Boston PD. However, Billy has been unable to shake his roots to his father’s criminal family. That connection is what prevents him from moving further in the police force. It is also what intrigues Costello. Billy is quickly able to climb the social ladder of Costello’s gang. This implies that the Irish have turned to crime because society prevents them from achieving the American Dream. As a true masochist, he struggles with living a double life. Billy suffers from debilitating panic attacks, which require him to meet with a therapist, Madolyn. Billy yells that he is “going fucking nuts. I can’t be someone else every fucking day!” His emotional stress stems not

only from fear of retribution from Costello, but also from having to live a form of masculinity that is unnatural to him. In another common trait of a masochist, he is also not afraid to show his emotions, as proven when he cries at his mother's funeral. Additionally, he hints that he is truly a masochist, like when he tells Costello, "I probably could be you, I know that much. But I don't want to be you, Frank. I don't want to be you." While on the surface, Billy is trying to convince Costello that he is not an undercover policeman, it also demonstrates that like Doug in *The Town*, he does not have the narcissism that makes crime enjoyable.

As described above, the Irish-American double-protagonist films have certain traits that differentiate them from the standard fare. However, it is more than just the reversal of the dominant protagonist that makes this subgenre unique. Another key aspect that situates these texts within a different framework is the creation of the seemingly incendiary Irish-American community.

## IV) Creating Irish-America

### Irish-American Mise-en-Scene

ADAM FRAWLEY

*It will come, despite your pitiable, misguided, Irish omertà...*

It has been established that Irish-American double-protagonist films already challenge Greven's theory by making the masochist the dominant lead. However, they further distinguish themselves from the rest of the genre by using the mise-en-scène to situate these films within a uniquely Irish-American context. Especially critical are the settings, costumes, and props in the development of an Irish surrounding. The mise-en-scène is important because it visually indicates how the masochist transitions from being a proud Irish-American to leaving behind his Irishness in order to get away from the pernicious influence of the narcissist.

In all four films, the costuming and props highlight that these characters are (at least initially) proud Irish-Americans. In *The Town*, both Doug and Jem frequently wear clothes that personify being Irish-American — Irish pub t-shirts, Boston Celtic shirts, Boston Red Sox shirts, and jackets with Celtic symbols. Both men also have tattoos of Irish iconography, which symbolizes that their heritage is always going to be a part of them. During a slow-motion shot of Jem beating a man during their first bank heist, Claire sees Jem's "Fighting Irish" tattoo on his neck. The logo is the emblem for Notre Dame University, but it also insinuates that Jem's violent nature is a hereditary cultural trait. It is also crucial that it is his Irishness that gives him away. Conversely, FBI Special Agent Adam Frawley, despite having an Irish last name, has an American accent that could place him anywhere. When interrogating Doug, he mocks his Bostonian accent and says that his downfall will come "despite your pitiable, misguided, Irish omertà." The

conversation implies that Frawley resents Doug's open connection to his Irishness. In a later scene, Frawley is shown drinking from a bottle of Jameson Whiskey, an Irish brand. This signifies that despite Frawley's apparent Americanization, he is still connected to his own Irish roots. Most importantly, as Doug begins to date the non-Charlestown native Claire, he starts hiding his Irish t-shirts under jackets until he stops wearing Irish symbols all together, thus illustrating his rejection of his culture.

*Black Irish* uses Irishness in subtle ways to present the culture as harmful to Cole. Terry's car key is a four-leaf clover, which is an icon of Eire that is supposed to bring luck. Terry bought his car with his drug money and it is the car that gets both boys in trouble, so the subtle symbolism signals that Terry's cultural heritage is the "key" to his lawless nature. His father Desmond routinely watches Boston Red Sox games, a team that has a large Irish-American following, and he uses the games to tune out Cole. When Cole asks Desmond to play catch, he is too absorbed in the game and instead asks Cole to get him a "cold one." This scene demonstrates both Desmond's tunnel-vision focus towards his Irish-American culture and his alcoholism. Cole shows the rejection of his cultural heritage by abandoning his plan to join the Catholic Church. The symbols of Irishness in *Black Irish* imply both that the Irish-American culture is the root cause of the narcissist's lawless nature and that this has a detrimental effect on the masochist.

Irishness is all over *The Departed*, but is presented both heroically and perversely. The film begins with the rousing song "Shipping Up to Boston," by the American Celtic rock band Dropkick Murphys. This song situates the film within a new generation of Irish-Americans, shown by Billy and Colin. Even though Billy wants to leave Boston, his Irishness still remains a part of him until the end. During the funerals of morally decent

characters like Queenan and Billy, Celtic bagpipes play. As a post 9/11 film, this reflects the heroic status of Irish-American first responders. Conversely, with Costello, who represents an older generation of Irish-Americans, Irishness is deviant. Costello clearly knows Irish traditions, and uses phrases like “sláinte” (Gaelic for cheers) and “let’s not cry over spilled Guinness.” Costello conducts business in a bar that is frequented by Irish and Irish-Americans alike. He even jokingly calls one an “IRA motherfucker.” This line references the fact that Costello is based on real-life Irish-American mobster James “Whitey” Bulger, who attempted to aid the Irish Republican Army. But the biggest perversion of Irish culture comes when Costello reflects on the murders of two Italian men while innocently singing a hymn in an Irish brogue. The scene is intercut with crime scene photos displaying the extremely bloodied bodies. It illuminates Costello’s deviant interpretation of the Irish-American culture and the connection of Irish masculinity to violence, which is what Billy wants to distance himself from. To that end, the view of Irishness in this film is conflicted.

*The Fighter* uses much more subtle Irish costumes and props, yet it is still an undeniable part of Micky’s life. While the protagonists have different fathers, their mother Alice has Irish ancestry. Irish-Americans are known as both fighters and brawlers, the difference being that the former happens in the boxing ring and the latter happens on the streets. Micky himself describes the difference when he meets Charlene and is proud that he is a “fighter.” Since fighting is part of the Irish-American history, he cannot easily separate his cultural identity from himself. His boxing nickname is “Irish” Micky Ward and his pre-fight robe is green. In this fashion, he not only accepts his Irishness, but markets it.

As these examples evidence, Irishness is presented symbolically in costumes, props, and dialogue in all of these films. But it is also shown in an even more prevalent way through Irish-American settings, most importantly through the city of Boston.

### **From Southie to Charlestown: Boston's Irish-American Communities**

DINO

Found the van. Torched.

ADAM FRAWLEY

Where is it?

DINO

Where do you think?

Historian Thomas O'Connor believes that "the Boston Irish are *different*." He distinguishes the Boston Irish from other major groups of Irish-Americans in the United States, such as the New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago Irish. While he admits that the Irish immigrants that arrived in Boston were no different than any other Irish immigrants, he attributes their difference to the "unique surrounding in which the Irish found themselves when they first arrived in Boston." He credits this to Boston's "intensely homogenous Anglo-Saxon character," which rejected the Irish and refused to let them fully assimilate into society. While many other cities shared similar social, cultural, and religious traits, none held such a strong anti-Irish sentiment as Boston. Today, Boston's Irish-Americans "combine the attributes and idiosyncrasies they brought from Ireland with the eccentricities they developed as a result of their abnormal relations with the natives of Boston" (O'Connor XV-XVI). Ray O'Hanlon says that the Boston Irish know this and are proud of that difference. He notes how "The Boston Irish, not without reason, always saw themselves as unique, somehow the original Irish Americans" (O'Hanlon 157). Boston has the most concentrated city population of Irish-Americans, with 20.4



percent of residents claiming Irish ancestry (Irish Central). With statistics like these, it is understandable why Boston is the setting and perhaps even a character in three out of the four major texts analyzed in this thesis. In fact, Boston has been the setting for many contemporary films about Irish Americans. Just this past year, two of Hollywood's most buzzed about films — *Black Mass* [Cooper, 2015] and *Spotlight* [McCarthy, 2015] — are about Irish-American Boston. Fascinatingly, these films tackle the two biggest media frenzies to rock the city in recent years, demonstrating Hollywood's continued interest in covering Irish-Americans in Boston, especially the unsavory characteristics.

*The Departed* and *Black Irish* focus specifically on South Boston, most commonly referred to by the locals as "Southie." According to the 2010 Census, there are approximately 35,200 residents of Southie. The densely populated neighborhood is predominantly home to Irish-Catholics. In his memoir *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*, gun activist Michael Patrick MacDonald describes Southie as Boston's "proud Irish neighborhood," where everyone considered themselves family. As such, this tight-knit community contributed to a hatred of anyone who was different. MacDonald notes that "no "outsiders" could mess with us. So we had no reason to leave, and nothing to leave for." MacDonald introduces one of the crucial points about understanding Southie. Being ostracized by Boston, the Irish lived in de facto segregation. Now, as a result, there is a lasting hostility to anyone who does not hail from the neighborhood. *U.S. News and Report* states that Southie has one of the highest concentrations of white poverty in America, using joblessness and single-parent female-headed houses as a measure.

Despite the pride Southie residents feel, in actuality it is riddled with violence and drugs. MacDonald hits on another tradition in Southie, which is denial. He notes that

Southie residents “didn’t want to own to the problems” (MacDonald 2-3). MacDonald’s story is a real-life version of the narratives in these films, having lost four siblings to murder and suicide, with two more spending time in jail. This list of tragedies shows the type of things that regularly befall members of the Southie community and the types of things that the protagonists are up against. In *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History*, Timothy Meagher says that young adults like MacDonald “felt locked into a no-win world of drugs and crime” (Meagher 156). This is the context within *The Departed* and *Black Irish* are situated. On *Late Night with Seth Meyers* in early 2016, Meyers parodied filmic representations of Southie in a fake movie trailer called “Boston Accent.”

“I mean in Southie, loyalty’s more important than a gun, ya know? Don’t take my word for it. Watch *The Departed* or *The Town*. Ya know, *Black Mass*, *Mystic River*, *Gone Baby Gone*, *Boondock Saints*. Ya know, *Good Will Hunting* has a lot of those same themes too. There’s not as much violence, ya know, but I think it still holds up, ya know.”

This excerpt from Meyers’ parody exemplifies the prevalence of narratives from Southie in Hollywood. The fact that this parody exists signifies that there is a noticeable pattern in the way that Irish-Americans have been portrayed cinematically.

*The Departed* begins with a reference to one of Southie’s most heated political moments — the busing crisis of the 1970s. For 20 years after *Brown v. The Board of Education*, the Boston School Committee declared that the ruling did not apply to Boston schools (O’Connor 257). In 1974, Massachusetts’s courts ordered that Black children be bused into Southie and Charlestown in order to promote school integration (Meagher 175). In addition, white children were bused out of these neighborhoods to achieve racial balance (O’Connor 257). The decision affected 18,000 students and caused violent riots that lasted into 1975 (O’Connor 257). The film begins with a black screen that simply says Boston. This is the first narrative information that the audience is provided with and

throughout the duration of the film, Scorsese does not let the audience forget the setting. After this opening, the film cuts to real footage of white men beating up black men, images of black high school kids on a bus, and the word “no” spray-painted on a mailbox. The voiceover begins with Costello, a character inspired by Southie’s own infamous Bulger, saying “I don’t want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be a product of me. Years ago we had the church. But that was only a way of saying we had each other.” Costello’s opening line establishes how much power he holds in his community. By using the past tense to say “we had the church,” Costello situates this film as occurring after the Boston priest scandal. Throughout the film, the Irish-American relationship with the church is strained at best. Additionally, he echoes sentiments in MacDonald’s autobiography by reiterating that Southie residents value the exclusivity of their tight-knit community.

The film then cuts to a crane shot of the skyline of Boston. It is then that the audience is introduced to Costello from the side, but he is completely in the dark. He proudly declares that “20 years after an Irishman couldn’t fucking get a job, we had the Presidency, may he rest in peace.” This line acknowledges the Irish-American struggle to assimilate into Boston society. As such, Costello is proud of their rapid ascension into politics. Costello continues to say his motto, which is “If I have one thing against the black chappies, it’s this — no one gives it to you, you have to take it.” Costello embodies the racism that permeates throughout Southie. This racism is the product of the “no outsider” sentiment. Costello’s declaration that “no one gives it to you, you have to take it” is something he says multiple times. In fact, he says it less than two minutes later to a young Colin, who as a narcissist, clearly internalizes Costello’s advice.

This introduction is important because Costello embodies the historical and cultural context of Irish-Americans in Southie. He is fiercely protective of his community and thus “others” people who are not Irish. He also is aware of the Irish’s difficult past in Boston and as a result is proud of where they are today. It is significant that Scorsese chooses the busing scandal to start the film because it is not a proud moment in Boston’s history. Therefore, he crafts Costello to indicate that despite his declarations, narcissists are a negative product of their closed environment.

Both Colin and Billy are well connected in Southie, which is what allows them to get in with Costello. As a young boy, Colin meets Costello in a drug store, where the gangster asks him “You Johnny Sullivan’s kid? You live with you Grandmother?” Again, Costello is illustrating his stronghold on this insular, tight-knit community. It is because Costello knew Colin’s father that he offers to let him earn some money. Colin is influenced when Costello tells him that in Southie, you have the choice to be criminals or cops, but “When you’re facing a loaded gun, what’s the difference?” Significantly, this is the first time that Costello is shown fully illuminated. This is because he has illuminated Colin’s mind with the idea that he does not have to be one or the other. Colin internalizes this advice when he consciously doubles himself and becomes a rat in the Boston PD.

However, as previously mentioned, Colin has bigger dreams for himself in Boston, shown through his focus on the glowing gold dome of the Massachusetts State House. In a point-of-view shot of the dome, a sound bridge cuts in with a man asking “what are you looking at?” The camera then cuts to Colin, followed by another eye-line match of the dome. His friend tells him to “forget it” because “you’re father was a janitor; his son’s only a cop.” This demonstrates how the working class status of the Irish

in Boston still holds them back from certain levels of success. Yet Colin does not give up on his political dream. When he gets the aforementioned apartment with a great view of the dome, the real estate agent tells him “I mean if you move in, you’re upper class by about Tuesday.” The statement reveals that Colin’s aspirations are based more on desires of climbing out of his working class roots than making a political difference. He does not let Madolyn keep childhood photos in this apartment because he wants to look forward. However, Colin’s ties to Costello keep him from attaining his political aspirations.

Similarly, it is because Costello knows Billy’s father that Billy is able to trick him into becoming a part of his inner circle. These same connections are why Captain Queenan and Staff Sergeant Dignam are dubious about Billy’s motivations about becoming a cop. On one hand, they say he cannot be a cop because “you’ve got family connections down in Southie.” His working class ties are so pronounced that they do not trust him. On the other hand, since his father disassociated with Southie and lived in the nicer North Shore of Boston, Dignam questions what a “lace-curtain motherfucker like you [is] doing in the stateies?” The connotation of “lace-curtain” shows the disdain within the community for those who achieve a certain level of economic success. This exposes a troubling pattern in the way that the Irish judge themselves. Billy cannot win because of both his working class and middle class roots. Despite the fact that he pretends to align himself with Costello, in actuality Billy cuts ties with his Irish-American family after his mother’s death. This is the critical difference between Billy and Colin.

Unlike *The Departed*, *Black Irish* does not begin with an overt acknowledgment that the setting is Boston. The film starts with a voiceover of Cole narrating a baseball game. While he does have a Boston accent, the earliest images are of him playing

baseball, which could place him anywhere in the U.S. The audience does not know he is in Boston until a car rolls onto the screen with a four-leaf clover bumper sticker on its tail, which is painted with the Irish flag. Then, a billboard comes into the frame, which says “Fáilte go mBoston dheas / Welcome to South Boston.” The sign has the crests of Sinn Fein and Noraid, as well as an Irish Cross. This sign is faded, most especially the Gaelic words. The fact that the sign lists the Gaelic before the English translation proves the strength of the Irish Community in Southie. However, the decaying sign symbolizes how the community is falling apart.

Another aspect that differentiates *Black Irish* from the other films in this paper is the fact that Cole, Terry, and Kathleen are essentially first generation Americans. Their mother Margaret moved to Boston from Ireland as a young woman. The fact that the McKays never experienced the historic prejudice of earlier Irish-Americans is shown in their children’s relationship with “others.” Terry’s best friend, Anthony, is Latino. Cole gets a job at an Italian restaurant working for Joey, an Italian-American. Given the historic gang violence between Italians and Irish in Boston, the bond that Cole and Joey form confirm that *Black Irish* is situated in a more contemporary Southie, where some of the earlier issues of “othering” are not as prevalent.

*The Town* focuses in on a different Irish Boston neighborhood — Charlestown. The neighborhood, located north of the Charles River, is the oldest in Boston and as of the 2010 census it was home to 16,439 residents (Boston.com). Interestingly enough, Charlestown has a history of Irish mob violence against other Irish communities, such as Southie. Beginning in the 1960s, the McLaughlin Brothers clashed with Bulger’s Winter Hill Gang (Patch.com). Doug’s father represents the old Charlestown of those days,

because while in prison, he receives a longer sentence after he clashes with the “Fucking Southie kids.” However, similar to Southie, the neighborhood was home to the same toxic nature that comes with being a closed-off community. The film begins with three quotations. The first notes that “One blue-collar Boston neighborhood has produced more bank robbers and armored car thieves than anywhere in the world.” Before providing any other narrative information, the sense of place is established as a working class neighborhood where a narcissistic protagonist can thrive through crime. The second quotation notes that “Bank robbery became like a trade in Charlestown, passed down father to son.” As previously mentioned, for Charlestown, bank robbery is a cultural tradition, illustrating the corrupting influence of the neighborhood. The final quote is from an unnamed Charlestown resident to *The Boston Globe*. He says that he is “proud to be from Charlestown. It ruined my life, literally, but I’m proud.” The final quotation demonstrates the foible of unwavering pride in Irish-American neighborhoods.

Doug’s love life complicates his relationship with the neighborhood and illustrates the incestuous nature of the community. Claire is called a “toonie” because she is not from Charlestown. She mentions that people throw bottles at her and make her feel unwelcome — hence, she too is “othered” by the neighborhood. By choosing Claire over Charlestown resident Krista, Doug distances himself from his roots, much like Cole’s choice in *Black Irish*.

As Jem and Doug continue to rob banks, their costumes and schemes express how they are poisoning their community. In their second robbery attempt, the men wear nun costumes with ghoulish faces. These costumes symbolize a perversion of the Irish-Catholic tradition. It shows how Irish-American morals have been corrupted by organized

crime. When the men decide to rob Fenway Park, they choose one of the most famous symbols of the city. It proves that their desire to take has become so destructive that they are literally stealing from Boston and Bostonians alike. Despite the Boston paraphernalia that they wear so frequently, their true allegiance is to their neighborhood — over their city and even their nation.

From Southie to Charlestown, these films show the lasting effects of the historical de facto segregation of the Irish in Boston. According to American cinema, Boston Irish neighborhoods have become breeding grounds of blind pride, prejudice, and organized crime, due to their unhealthy level of exclusivity. It is no coincidence that within the first two minutes of *The Departed*, *Black Irish*, and *The Town*, the setting of Boston is established. But Boston is more than just a setting — it is a character. It sets into motion the tensions and conflicts explored in these films. Southie and Charlestown become the perfect location for the double-male protagonist conflict to exist because the masochist grows to feel uncomfortable in a community that promotes narcissistic masculinity.



## **V.) Negotiating the Masculinity Conflict: Women and the Corrupting Patriarchal Influence**

The Irish-American subgenre of double-protagonist films is already proven to be unique within the genre because of two factors — the reversal of the dominant masochistic and alternate narcissistic roles and the specific flavor of the Irish-American communities. However, the subgenre differs even greater through the unique ways that conflict is negotiated. Greven’s thesis states that double-protagonist films are a negotiation of power and masculinity, shown through “the battle over narrative dominance, sexual objects, and audience sympathy” (Greven 23). However, looking at the subgenre through a microcosmic lens, it is clear that the conflict that Irish-American protagonists face is exacerbated by two key tensions — on one hand, the sexual negotiation of power between their relationship with women and, on the other hand, corrupting patriarchal or sometimes even matriarchal influences. These two tensions intensify the rivalry between the protagonists because their contrasting forms of masculinity inspire different reactions.

### **The Role of Women**

DOUG

It’s never going to be me and you and Shye fucking playing house up there!

The women of these films present a complication for the male-male relationships. In some films, the protagonists compete for one woman; in others, an outsider woman who falls in love with the masochist spurs conflict with the narcissist. Yet one aspect is consistent in all of these texts. Diane Negra argues that in contemporary Irish-American film, female roles are “relegated to a sphere of emotion,” where they play mothers, sisters, girlfriends, psychologists, to whom “the male leads come to unburden themselves

and seek consolation” (Negra 280). She states that more than any other ethnic category, Irishness is associated with the absence of women and an emphasis on separate spheres for genders (Negra 280). Furthermore, whether a romantic partner or family member, the dynamics of the males are triangulated through their relationship with a woman.

The majority of the time, this triangulation involves romantic and sexual competition. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, she postulates that in a romantic triangle, in which there are two rivals and one love interest, the bond between the two rivals is as strong as their individual bond to the romantic interest. Even though “rivalry” and “love” cause different emotions, author Rene Girard found that they are equally powerful. Now, this does not always mean that the bond is a homosexual one; instead, Sedgwick uses the term “homosocial” to mean a type of male bonding and friendship that is created from the subconscious fear of homosexuality. She argues that on account of Western society’s latent fear of homosexuality, male-male desire — even if it is simply homosocial — is a threat, and as a result the men then have to route their male-male desire through a woman (Sedgwick 21-28). Sedgwick’s thesis corroborates Greven’s argument about homosocial bonds in double-protagonist films.

*The Town* shows the clearest example of this dynamic. The two female love interests are complete foils to each other. However, the significance comes from how Jem, the alternate narcissistic protagonist, reacts to these women. Krista, Jem’s sister, is a Charlestown resident. She grew up with the boys and accordingly also represents the corrupting influence of the Irish-American community. In fact, when she is first introduced, she offers a recently sober Doug “snappers,” which are synthetic pills taken

before sex. This is overtly symbolic of how she is toxic for Doug. When they have sex, it is rough and they are still wearing their clothes, which illustrates a lack of true intimacy. Yet Krista is the less threatening option for Jem. He tells Doug that he needs to stay and marry Krista and be a father to her daughter, Shye. Doug counters by yelling that “it’s never going to be me and you and Shye fucking playing house up there.” Jem’s desire for Doug to be with his sister demonstrates the incestuous nature of Charlestown. Through the childlike connotation of “playing house,” Doug implies that there would be something inauthentic about this lifestyle. It is significant that Doug says “me and you” rather than “me and Krista,” which insinuates that Jem’s desire is selfish and not really about his sister. It is easier for Jem to triangulate his homosocial desire through Krista, because she is a Charlestown insider and family member. Following this, the men get in a physical fight, which is the only kind of appropriate physical contact for two heterosexual males. Using Greven’s reading, if Doug marries Krista, Jem would be able to operate as a homosexual voyeur and control Doug by keeping him in the community.

In contrast, Claire is presented as the healthy, positive, normative heterosexual option for Doug. As a “toonie,” she is significantly an outsider. From the outset, Doug and Jem fight for control of her. During the robbery, Doug tells her that “no one is going to hurt ya,” followed by a close-up shot of Jem scoffing, thus demonstrating his disdain of Doug’s kindness. In addition, one of their earliest arguments is about who gets to stalk her, which shows their budding conflict over who has authority. When Doug first meets Claire, he jokes to her that he “likes to have a good cry at the nail saloon.” It is significant that Doug feels comfortable enough to joke about his femininity with a possible sexual partner; because that is something that a narcissistic protagonist would simply never do.

Claire represents everything that the Irish-American community is not providing for Doug. She volunteers at the Charlestown Community Garden, which is established through a shot of a decaying sign. Claire plants flowers regularly, and to that end she is symbolic of growth, renewal, and hope. In contrast, the only character with an Irish accent, the mobster Fergie, is a florist, who is always staged cutting up flowers. This floral parallel suggests that the Charlestown community is hurting itself, while the outsider woman represents the chance for regeneration. Doug and Claire's sex scene contrasts his encounter with Krista in every way possible. It is devoid of dirty talk, backed by romantic music, and they are both naked, proving their intimacy. Significantly, the scene is intercut with a flashback sequence of Claire on the beach after she has been kidnapped. The scene shows Claire when she is most vulnerable; hence, the editing of their sex scene next to this flashback implies that their encounter makes each of them feel a similar vulnerability. In a community where men are supposed to act with narcissistic masculinity, this emotional openness is satisfying to Doug. During an Alcoholic's Anonymous meeting, Doug hears a man talk about how he was not saved by God, but by his wife. The scene is immediately followed by a shot of Claire. This editing allows the audience to infer that Claire is the one who will save Doug from his pestilential lifestyle.

As such, Claire presents a major threat to Jem and Doug's friendship. Jem says that the "only way I see it is you got sprung like a goddamn bear trap on some toonie pussy." The metaphor of the "bear trap" suggests that he thinks that Claire is going to get his friend in trouble. Jem uses the derogatory Charlestown slang term of "toonie" to emphasize Claire's exteriority, yet this only illuminates his own insecurity about her outsider status. Jem knows Claire's name, yet he demonstrates a lack of respect by

referring to her with misogynistic language. He corroborates his chauvinism by sarcastically advocating that they “fuck all of the witnesses.” In consequence, Jem devalues Claire as a sexual object rather than an emotional partner for Doug. However, Doug’s allegiance remains to Claire. She ultimately donates the money he gives her to the hockey rink that he played at as a child and teenager. While Doug’s hockey career has failed, this action is symbolic of the fact that Claire continues to have a beneficial influence on the community. Just like with the community garden, Claire proves to be a restorative figure to Charlestown. She is providing children with the chance to do what Doug was unable to do, and hopefully break the cycle of failure in Charlestown.

Billy and Colin’s romantic relationship with therapist Madolyn in *The Departed* presents a clearer example of a romantic triangle, yet the complication arises from the fact that the two men, who are strangers, do not know that they are both involved with Madolyn. However, as both desperately try to discover the other’s identity, they each begin a sexual relationship with her. When Madolyn gets pregnant, it is not said explicitly who is the father. Nonetheless, through the different ways their relationships are portrayed, it is clear that the dominant masochist Billy is the father of her child.

Colin is able to win over Madolyn easily using his charismatic personality, which is a trait of a narcissist. Madolyn is the prime example of a woman relegated to an emotional sphere of support since she is a psychologist. Their courtship begins with Colin mocking her profession, by saying that “Guys use their service revolver in the course of duty and then they get to come talk to you about their feelings.” This quotation demonstrates Colin’s masculine bravado and his disdain for emotional vulnerability. Ironically, it is her job that introduces Madolyn to Billy. Colin and Madolyn’s

relationship comes to face a serious problem in the form of his implied impotence. In one scene, Madolyn asks Colin if he wants to talk about it and says that “Guys tend to make too big of a deal out of it. It’s actually quite common.” Colin reacts by ignoring her comment and rushing off to work, where he is able to parade as a masculine man. In fact, when Captain Ellerby tells Colin that “marriage is an important part of the game, it lets people know that you’re not a homo....and that your cock is working,” Colin replies that “it’s working overtime.” Ellerby’s crude comments are symbolic of the fear of homosexuality that Sedgwick delineated. Colin’s response shows his desire to overcompensate for the fact that he is actually not satisfying Madolyn. Through his implied impotence, it is unlikely that Colin is the father of her child.

Furthermore, there is enough evidence to suggest that Colin is a latent homosexual. Colin frequently calls other men, such as the firemen who beat his flag football team, “homos” or “cocksuckers.” He uses this derogatory language anytime a man appears to be threatening his masculinity. When Costello tells Colin to meet at a pornographic movie theatre, Colin is visibly uncomfortable and avoids the screen. Costello surprises him by pulling out a large black vibrator, which makes Colin jump out of his seat. Yet around other men at the office, Colin goes to lengths to checkout women, almost to suspicious levels. Additionally, Colin tells Costello in the theatre that he is “fucking good at lying.” He also tells Madolyn in bed that “I’m fucking Irish; I’m fine with something being wrong for the rest of my life.” Between all of these actions and the fact that he is impotent with Madolyn, it could be argued that Colin is lying to himself about his heterosexuality. At the end of the film, Billy calls Colin a “two-faced faggot.” While this type of offensive derogatory term towards gay men is common to the

vernacular of Southie, it might not be coincidental. The line hints that Colin is also hiding his sexuality with his double life.

In contrast, Billy becomes the normative heterosexual protagonist who is able to have a legitimate connection with Madolyn. Billy is established as someone who does not need to validate his masculinity. When he first meets Madolyn, he gets very angry and emotional, which is a stark contrast to Colin's inability to discuss his feelings. Billy is also emotionally intuitive and figures out that Madolyn had an alcoholic parent. The first time that they go for coffee, he removes his Boston Red Sox hat, which shows how she could have represented his way to get out of ruinous Southie. During the lead-up to their sexual encounter, there are many symbols that it is going to be a passionate match. The rain is pouring, which is a romantic setting, while a kettle boiling over symbolizes an orgasmic climax. Additionally, Billy hangs up the same childhood photo that Colin had told her to put away, expressing that he is not afraid to know about her past or share his own. Madolyn tells him that "your vulnerability is really freaking me out right now. Is it real?" to which he replies that it is. It is after his openness about his emotions, which makes him different from the cult of narcissism that she is used to, that they have a sultry encounter. The scene is set to the song "Comfortably Numb," which is about one person making another person's pain go away through their intimacy. Therefore, the film implies that it is the ability to be vulnerable that creates a procreative relationship. The next time that they meet, Billy rests his hands on her hips and his head on her stomach. This staging foreshadows her pregnancy and subtly implies that he is the father. Madolyn's unborn baby represents the future that Billy was unable to have.

*The Fighter* signals the extent to which incestuousness has taken over Irish-American communities by the Eklund and Ward family's continued rejection of Micky's love interest, Charlene. She is from Lowell and is the sister of one of Micky's friends. A parallel could be made to Krista of *The Town* in terms of how closely connected she is to the community. However, the alternate protagonist Dicky and the rest of the family vehemently reject her presence and influence in Micky's life. If not Charlene, a woman from their Irish-American community, then one has to wonder who else could they possibly want for their son and brother?

Micky is introduced to the bartender Charlene in an interesting way because his father George, likes to "stare at [her] ass," which also connotes an implicit incest if Charlene had been interested in him. The first moment Micky sees her follows the conventions of a Classical Hollywood film, as the camera slowly zooms into his love-struck face, while the loud voices of his family fade out and romantic music fades in. This sound editing demonstrates that Charlene has the ability to pull Micky away from the negative influence of his family. Micky ultimately wins Charlene over by grabbing and pushing the head of a man who disrespects her. As seen previously with Jem and Colin, narcissistic Irish-American men show a lack of respect in the chauvinistic way that they talk to women. Thus, Micky's action signifies how masochists condemn the objectification of women.

From the outset of the relationship, Charlene questions Dicky and his mother Alice's motives because Micky is badly beaten in a fight that he only fought so that they could get paid. Charlene asks Micky "you really think your family's looking out for you," to which he attests that he needs them. Yet, as their relationship continues, it is clear that



Charlene's influence is beginning to take affect. During their first joint meeting, Charlene's arm is wrapped around Micky's. The staging proves that Charlene is now influencing his decisions. In reaction, the Eklund and Ward sisters call her an "MTV girl" and Alice says that she "don't know who you are." The quotations show an attempt to discredit Charlene by not only implying that she is a promiscuous woman, but also that she will never have authority because she is not a family member. While it seems that Micky might still be susceptible to his family's advice, especially when he tells Charlene not to use family nicknames, he ultimately draws boundaries between him and his family when he tells them that "This. Us. Lowell" is what is causing all of his problems. It is significant that he realizes that his community is a contributing factor to his failure.

During a tender encounter between the Micky and Charlene, the scene is intercut with shots and sound bridges of the women preparing to go confront her, saying things like "It's that fucking girl Charlene. Ma, we gotta get rid of her." This masterful editing indicates how the family is driving a wedge between the pair. One of the most climatic moments comes when Charlene says she is going to leave Micky, and Dicky comes to negotiate with her. As the outsider woman, Charlene has meant trouble for Dicky because she has gotten him to agree to a new trainer. Yet, he knows that Micky will not let him come back without Charlene's permission. Their peace accord of sorts signals what makes *The Fighter* different from many of the other films — the alternate protagonist is permitted to remain in the dominant protagonist's life, but because only his love interest allowed it. After Micky wins his first title, he kisses Alice when the shot focuses in on Charlene grabbing his face away to kiss him. This action symbolizes that while Micky

has been able to reconcile with his family, Charlene will remain the major influence on his life.

*Black Irish* differs from all of the films in this subgenre in the fact that the two teen protagonists do not have a serious romantic or sexual love interest, with the exception of Cole's failure of a first date. However, much of their tension, and really the entire McKay family's conflict, is triangulated through their sister, Kathleen. Interestingly enough, Kathleen is the only character who engages in sexual activity, as shown through the fact that she is pregnant. That in of itself is threatening to the traditional Irish Catholic family, and Kathleen is shuffled off to a boarding home reminiscent of the infamous Magdalene Laundries for fallen women in Ireland. However, before she leaves the family home, she serves the role as an emotional and even physical fixer of their problems. To be clear, Kathleen is not a romantic interest for the brothers. Yet her significance to each of their lives, especially when they have no other young women around them, cannot go unnoticed.

Kathleen is first introduced when she is tearing up at her aunt's funeral. This action not only foreshadows her pregnancy because of her hormones, but also defines her as a compassionate character. Cole verbally expresses his confusion over her sentiment, which demonstrates his initial emotional immaturity. However, he begins to mature as he faces adult realities with Kathleen's support. After a verbal fight between Terry and Desmond becomes physical, Kathleen is shown fixing a hole in the wall with fresh drywall. She turns to Cole and says "Add one more to the collection. You'll have to take over this wonderful chore when I'm gone." Once it is dry, she hangs up an old family photo on the wall. The camera zooms out and the wall displays randomly placed family

photos, which implies that this kind of angry eruption is common in their home.

Kathleen's action is symbolic of how she is the person who diffuses the tension between Terry and the rest of the family. She is the one who tries to maintain a false sense of normalcy. Because Kathleen is leaving, she gives this responsibility to Cole, which he struggles with. Additionally, Kathleen tells Cole that there will be girls at his new school, to which he jokingly responds that he has heard rumors that they exist. This conversation insinuates that Kathleen wants Cole to find a female companion so that he can have a new emotional support system when she leaves. In contrast, her relationship with Terry is strained. However, in an act of compassion and support, Terry drives Kathleen to get an abortion, which she subsequently decides against. His silent assistance is his manner of thanking Kathleen for being the emotional stanchion, as she attempts to hold the family together. When Kathleen agrees to return home, it is only because she "misses [her] kid brother." Even though Terry is going to prison, this action reveals that Kathleen truly aligns herself with the dominant masochistic protagonist because they have the same emotional understanding of the world.

While each of these films show a variation on the male-male relationships with women, they all evidence how important women are to shaping the conflict. Generally, the woman is in a sense an outsider, whether she is exterior from the community or simply the family. This is complicated by the incestuous nature of these filmic Irish-American communities and the inherent fear of outsiders. If both men are not competing for her, then the other man feels threatened by the woman because she is hurting their homosocial relationship. The plot resolutions prove that the masochist is better suited for a healthy romantic and sexual relationship (or in the case of *Black Irish*, a friendship).

Yet both forms of masculinity complicate homosocial bonds. Unlike other double-protagonist movies, women in Irish-American iterations play a pivotal role in triangulating the conflict.

### **The Corrupting Patriarchal (or Sometimes Matriarchal) Influence**

BILLY COSTIGAN  
Say's who?

SEAN COSTIGAN  
Says him! Says Costello. God says as far as I'm concerned.

Greven's double-protagonist genre focuses on the power dynamics between two males. The Irish-American iterations of this genre are further complicated by the addition of an older character who tries to control each of the men. More often than not, the character is yet another man, and thereupon he fills the role of the patriarchal figure. Whether he is actually the protagonists' father or simply a father figure, he uses both emotional and physical tactics to keep the men in line. One of the major conflicts comes from whether the each of the men will tow the line. The patriarch's personality fits the pattern of a narcissist, which is why the sense of an additional cathartic relief comes when the masochist is able to get away from his influence as well.

Desmond McKay, Cole and Terry's father in *Black Irish*, most clearly illustrates this pattern. Desmond had the potential to be a great baseball player, but he squandered his opportunity due to his growing alcoholism. His drinking is so serious that even when he is diagnosed with terminal cancer, which he does not tell his family, Desmond continues to drink despite the fact that it is expediting his diagnosis. He also terrorizes his family with bouts of rage. Most importantly, Desmond is insecure about his status as the patriarchal figure. This is best exhibited through his petulant competition with the

family's aptly named dog, King. King frequently steals Desmond's shoes, which strikes a chord with him because he shines shoes to support his family. He is ashamed of this profession and thus when King eats his shoes, it becomes a symbol of his believed failure. When he sets King free, he yells "who's the king now," which demonstrates his insecurity about his patriarchal status because he is not a successful breadwinner. However, King finds his way home, which is an omen that Desmond's days as the patriarch are coming to an end.

Desmond's behavior is a catalyst for some of his sons' choices. His wife Margaret, who has grown disillusioned with their marriage, knows that his rage and alcoholism affects the boys, especially Terry. She warns Cole that his father and brother are "two peas in a pod and there's no room for a third." Because both Terry and Desmond exemplify narcissistic masculinity, they internalize the same negative behaviors of the Irish-American community. This quotation foreshadows how they both end up in the hospital at the end of the film. In their own specific way, Desmond and Terry are both paying for their life choices. Desmond has the potential to similarly negatively affect Cole, especially when he makes him drink whiskey when he finds out that his son has a hangover. He tells Cole that you can either "cry like a girl or drink like a man" and using his own father's quote says Cole should "save the tears for the cemetery, 'cause they're wasted on me." Desmond's actions reflect his lack of empathy, fear of femininity, and his corrupting influence on his son's life. Most importantly, it shows that this is a learned behavior, passed on from his own father. Since Cole is a masochist, he is able to see that his father is troubled and rejects his wisdom when Desmond attempts to give him baseball advice.

*The Fighter*'s corrupting figure is actually the family matriarch Alice Eklund-Ward. Even though most of the films feature a patriarch, a matriarch is not surprising given the cultural climate of low-income Irish-American communities. In *All Souls*, MacDonald describes how the majority of the Southie community was made up of single mothers who had children with multiple men (MacDonald 3). For that reason, absentee parenting is an aspect of these communities. Since Dicky and Micky have different fathers, Alice is the unifying figure who makes them family and for that matter, Irish.

From her first scene, it is clear that Alice is calling the shots in Micky's career. Alice is talking loudly off-screen, so the audience hears her before they see her. A tracking shot follows her as she walks into the boxing gym and immediately begins doling out orders. Alice is smart and manipulative and is clearly trying to paint the picture of a doting mother and savvy businesswomen for the HBO cameras. Significantly, in the old family videos that are sprinkled throughout the film, Alice is always shown coming in between the boys and yelling out orders. Just like Terry and Desmond, Dicky and Alice are two peas in a pod. This is because even though Alice is not masculine, she is certainly a narcissist. Just like Dicky, she frequently references the Sugar Ray fight. Their delusions of old success cloud them from seeing the present reality.

Alice's relationship with Mickey O'Keefe illustrates one of the key aspects of the corrupting patriarchal or matriarchal influence — a clear disdain for any person whose authority threatens their own. During that same first scene, Alice yells "what is that Keystone Cop doing in there" and that he needs to "get out of ring" because "Dicky should be doing that." The allusion to Keystone Cops, the bumbling, incompetent policemen early American silent comedies, suggests her aversion to police. This tension

is common in these narratives, especially when an Irish-American becomes a policeman. It signals Alice's contempt for any authority that is not her own. By putting Dicky in the ring, as an extension of herself, Alice is able to exact control over Micky.

While Alice swears that she loves all nine of her children equally, it is clear that she has a soft spot for her narcissistic eldest son. When she catches Dicky smoking crack again, all Dicky has to do is sing "I Started a Joke" by the Bee Gees and she forgives him. To that end, Alice turns a blind eye to all of Dicky's troubling behaviors. Alternately, she keeps a close eye on Micky because since he is a masochist, she has a difficult time controlling him, especially once Charlene enters the picture. As previously mentioned, she is manipulative, so when she feels that Micky is pulling away, she tries to guilt him by saying "I have done everything ... everything that I could for you, Micky." While Micky remains connected to his family, he hires Sal Lonano as his manager and thereupon successfully emancipates himself from Alice's control of his career.

The second type of this corrupting older figure comes in the form of the father figure, who actually has no blood relation to the protagonists. *The Departed's* Frank Costello exemplifies this when he makes Billy and Colin into his sons, although it remains unclear until the conclusion who he sees as heir apparent. Both men have lost their fathers, so there is a patriarchal role for Costello to fill. As previously mentioned, the film begins with a long, narcissistic soliloquy that establishes Costello's power. It is clear from his early scenes of money laundering that he knows everything that goes on in Southie. However, Costello's costuming complicates the narcissistic macho masculinity. He frequently appears in leopard and tiger print ties and silky robes, which are arguably quite feminine, but also show off his animalistic personality and kill or be killed manner

of operating. Southie knows that he is in charge and in a post priest scandal Boston, Costello is almost a divine figure. Billy's cousin Sean tells him that Costello is "god, as far as I'm concerned." Additionally, Costello himself tells two priests that "in this archdiocese, God don't run the bingo." Therefore, his narcissistic egoism makes him think he has the highest authority.

The film goes to lengths to express that Costello is very sexually active, yet he remains childless. One scene shows him at the opera with two women, and when it is hinted that they are touching him, he suddenly has an excited look on his face. The next shot is a white substance being sprayed into the air from the stage, which is symbolic of ejaculation. A graphic match shows that the substance is cocaine and in the following hallucinatory sequence in which he has sex with these women, the same splashing imagery is repeated. This sequence, which differs so greatly from the rest of the film, is important because it exhibits his sexuality. However, Costello never has an heir. This implies that Irish-American organized crime is so toxic that it is unable to be procreative, despite Costello's constant debauchery, which is seen similarly with Colin.

As such, Costello needs Colin or Billy to fill the role that he is unable to provide. Significantly, whenever Colin calls Costello to tip him off, he refers to him as "dad." Costello does some fatherly things for Colin, like co-signing on a swanky new condominium. However, he knows how to keep Colin in line, by threatening both him and Madolyn. Similarly, once Billy is accepted into his gang, Costello behaves fatherly, like when he frequently reminds Billy to eat. During Colin and Costello's final confrontation, Costello conveys that he loves Colin like a son, to which Colin scoffs "is that what this is about? All that murderin' and fuckin' and still no sons." When Colin



shoots him dead, blood covers up the word “Irish” on Costello’s shirt, which reveals that Colin is rejecting his both community and the idea that Costello is his father. It is the classic patriarchal situation of the “son” having to kill the “father” in order to emancipate himself and achieve his own success. However, Costello’s lawyer comes to Billy with his will, proving that he saw Billy as his heir. The irony comes from the fact that the masochistic Billy never was intending to take over Costello’s criminal business.

*The Town* illustrates the absentee father culture that is common to low-income Irish-American communities. Doug’s father raises him after his mother runs off (he later finds out that she committed suicide). Mr. MacRay works for Fergie, an Irish mobster who launders his robbery money through his business, Town Flowers. As previously mentioned, Fergie’s significance comes from the fact that he is the only character with an Irish accent. This intentionally associates criminality with Irishness. During the first heist, Jem mentions that they need to shave some off for “the florist.” Previously mentioned in the quotations that introduce the film, “bank robbery became a trade in Charlestown, passed down from father to son.” As a result, Doug enters into this criminal activity because it is a family business. When his dad lands in prison, Fergie manipulates him into continuing this activity because he will murder Mr. MacRay or Claire. Just like he entered the “family business” because of his father, he cannot leave it because of his father, illustrating the vicious cycle within communities like Charlestown. When Doug murders Fergie, he is not only killing him so that he is free from the business, but also to ensure that he is free from his family, community, and Irishness.

The corrupting patriarchal or matriarchal influence complicates the tension between the masochist and the narcissist because it further illuminates the differences in

their masculinities. While the narcissist is susceptible to the patriarch's influences, the masochist's growth comes from being able to resist. This type of tension is very specific to the Irish-American iterations of the double-protagonist genre because of the inherently patriarchal nature of this culture.

In summation, a critical part of the double-protagonist genre is the negotiation of power between the protagonists. These two patterns demonstrate key recurring traits of Irish-American filmic communities. First, the fear of homosocial bonds causes conflict to be triangulated through women. However, the inherent closed-off and incestuous nature of the communities makes the alternate protagonist spiteful towards the love interest. Additionally, women are mostly relegated to roles of emotional support for the masochist. Second, the patriarchal nature of the Irish-American community makes the two men struggle to fight off the influence of a corrupting older figure. Ultimately, the dominant protagonist is able to overcome these conflicts through some sort of American escape route.

## VI.) The American Escape Route

MICKY WARD

He's taught me everything I know. He's been in my corner, I can't do it without him.

O'KEEFE

You're already doing it without him.

The catharsis in these films comes from the masochist breaking ties with the narcissist, who is still involved with or who has succumbed to the perils of drug abuse, alcoholism, and/or organized crime. Yet, there is a further significance in the Irish-American iterations of these films. The dominant protagonist becomes involved in something symbolically “American,” and that is what is able to pull him away from his alternate and greater community. As a result, the masochist leaves behind or sacrifices his Irishness in order to break free from the narcissist.

*Black Irish* ends how it begins — with baseball, although now, Cole has gone from playing alone to pitching for his varsity team in the state championship. Baseball epitomizes idyllic Americana. However, the McKay's want Cole to be a priest, which is the most respectable profession for an Irish Catholic. Cole's hesitancy about the vow of chastity prevents him from pursuing this career, and thus the film illustrates a post-Boston priest scandal view of Catholicism. Mrs. McKay, who is Irish, disagrees with his choice, asking Cole “why worry about something as trivial as baseball when you know your future lies in the priesthood.” Therefore, the film sets up tensions between his Irishness and his American dreams.

While baseball was initially a form of escapism from his dysfunctional family, Cole becomes a talented pitcher. Yet it cannot go without mention that Desmond too was once a talented baseball player — a fact that Cole's coach is worried about. He goes as

far as to warn Cole about the power of genetics. As an independent film, *Black Irish* does not provide the closure found in Hollywood. It ends as the game begins, so it is unknown whether they win or if Cole goes on to play professionally. But between the fact that a professional scout and a dying Desmond come to watch Cole play, which is the exact parental approval that Cole has been craving, it can be insinuated that baseball frees him from his toxic situation. It will be his ticket out of Southie and a way of distancing himself from his Irish-American roots. While Cole has found his ticket, Terry will be going to prison for a long time for trying to kill Joey. His drug dealing and abuse prevented him from being able to leave Southie.

Similarly, Micky of *The Fighter* uses his sport to gain independence from his Irish-American family. However, unlike baseball, Irish-Americans have been boxing since they first came over from Eire. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the boxing greats were Irish. However, there have been less and less since African-Americans began to dominate the sport in the 1920s. Eoin Cannon, a contemporary scholar of Irish-America, says that “Irish-American fighters still have a marketable image because of their symbolic representation of being heroic,” but author Steve Farrell suggests that Micky Ward might be one of the last great Irish-American fighters (Farrell 12-13). This demonstrates how the Irish have lost the stronghold over the sport, a tension shown in *The Fighter* through Micky’s obsession with the race of his opponents.

Yes, Micky permits the Eklunds and Wards to continue to support him, and Dicky is even in the ring with him during the climatic last fight. But he has allowed himself to be managed and coached by a team of supporters who are not all Irish-American. Mike Toma, who resides in Vegas, a city not associated with Irish-Americans, first tempted

Micky. In typical a narcissistic protagonist fashion, Dicky scoffs at this idea because “You can’t trust that guy, Micky. He ain’t family.” Eventually, however, Micky agrees to let Sal Lonano, an Italian man, manage his career. It is only after he makes this choice that Micky earns his first career title. Even though his family is still in his literal and figurative corner, Micky’s success arguably comes from accepting help from people outside of his own cultural heritage. This not only reflects him moving towards the American Dream, but also towards a more globalized America. It is implied that Dicky will be clean for now, but since he is staying in Lowell, it might not be sustainable (and in reality, it was not).

Doug is the only masochist protagonist whose has a physical escape route. In the final scene of *The Town*, he is happily living in Florida. His move to Florida, a state that has little to no demographic connection to Irish-America, signals his attempts to distance himself from his culture (Boston.com). When Doug finally decides to leave, he says that he is “putting this whole fucking town in the rearview mirror.” The metaphor of the car rearview mirror demonstrates how he wants his move to be permanent and his Irish-American life to be nothing but a memory. It is also the first time that he has left Boston, which shows how difficult it is to break free of the vicious cycle of criminality in the insular Charlestown neighborhood. His final note to Claire, in which he remarks that he’ll “see [her] again. This side or the other” proves how serious he is about leaving his Irishness aside. It implies that he would rather die than get stuck in Charlestown. Conversely, it should also be noted that in his final moment before he surrenders to the police, Jem takes a sip of a Coca-Cola. This detail of an iconic American product signals Jem’s acknowledgment that perhaps he could have been successful if he had stepped

outside of the realm of Irish-America. Unfortunately for Jem, the film argues that it was too little, too late, and he gets his wish of “holding court on the street.”

Similarly, Billy of *The Departed* wants to physically escape from Boston. Several times during the operation, Billy threatens to Queenan and Dignam that he is going to run. In one scene, he is even shown at the airport. This exposes his desperation to get out of Irish-American Boston. However, his death prevents him from getting his freedom. However, the film provides hope in the form of his unborn son. Madolyn is not an Irish-American character, and in consequence their son is already a product of cultural diversity. He represents the hope for the future that Billy so desired. Conversely, Colin is murdered by a revenge seeking Dignam. The camera displays his dead body and then pans up to the window, which features the capital building. A rat moves across the window, thus symbolizing that Colin’s narcissistic life prevented him from achieving what he truly wanted. In the end, he is nothing more than a “rat.”

Whether it is symbolic escapism through an American activity or a physical relocation to a new city, the masochist is able to prevail over the narcissist by shirking off the stronghold of his Irish-American community. By making the more Irish-American protagonist troubled and having the other move away from his roots, the Irish-American double-protagonist films appear to argue that there is something ruinous about Irishness and Irish narcissistic masculinity. As follows, this thesis will end by looking at how contemporary Irish-America has influenced these narratives.

## **VII.) Conclusion**

This thesis has delineated the specific ways that Irish-American double-protagonist films distinguish themselves from the rest of the genre. While all of the films in the genre argue that masochism is the correct mode of masculinity, these four narratives present Irish-America as the cause of the alternate protagonist's cult of narcissism that leads to his downfall. As a result, the dominant masochist must look to something uniquely American to save himself. Therefore, these films suggest that there is an inherent toxicity in contemporary Irish-America. A few critics have postulated why both double-male protagonist films exist and why Irish-American films focus on the relationship between criminality and fraternalism. Now, this thesis will build off of their work to present a few theories about why this specific subgenre is popular. In summation, these films hold a mirror to the current conditions of Irish-America.

### **Greven's Opinions**

As mentioned in the introduction, Greven believes the genre exists for two reasons. The first is strictly monetary; two A-List stars are likely to sell more tickets than one. For three out of the four films in this paper, this certainly could be true. Additionally, Greven argues that genres like the buddy film, film noir, and the western had been toying with the concept of split modes of masculinity for some time. Now that the economic conditions are right, Hollywood can realize the next stage of male-male representation (Greven 25-30). While these points are true, for the Irish-American iterations, there are more specific, multifaceted reasons why the community has been presented in such manner.

### **Globalization's Effect on Irish-American Communities**

Globalization has become a buzzword in the past two decades to describe how the world is growing more interconnected through trade, investment, and technology. Christoph Linder's article "Globalization and Film Style: An Introductory Note" discusses how the investment in globalization has not strictly been economic and political, but also social and cultural. Accordingly, film has proven to "both an agent and critic of this development" (Linder 1). Since these films contend that the exclusivity of Irish-American communities is corrosive, they could be read as an argument for accepting globalization and the multitude of other perspectives that come with it.

More specifically, film critics have postulated how Irish-American film and Irish-America in general have been affected by globalization. Feargal Cochrane has written an entire book on the subject, in which he argues that forces of globalization and modernity have brought relations between Ireland and America to a transition point because Irish-America is changing in significant ways. Cochrane notes that the once tight-knit migrant communities have become less dense as Irish-Americans have integrated themselves politically, economically, and culturally to American society. He argues that as a result of the integration of Irish-Americans into American society, the relationship between Ireland and America is now not as strong. Additionally, due the institution of harsher immigration policies following 9/11, current Irish immigrants experience a vastly different climate than their predecessors and in turn have a difficult time connecting to Irish-Americans, which also contributes to the weakening of the Irish and Irish-American bond (Cochrane 3-5). With the Irish-American diaspora growing less concentrated, this provides a new context to why there is a "no outsider" current running through these films.



Diane Negra expands on this phenomenon, explaining that some of the city landscapes in contemporary Irish-American film “correlate very precisely in some cases with dynamics of gentrification and tourism at work in traditional Irish-American neighborhoods” (Negra 288). She cites a 2006 *USA Today* article called “Lattes, Lofts, Invade the Mean Streets of Southie” which says that the “insular enclave of blue-collar values and meat-and-potato tastes — is being overrun by yuppies and tourists” (Negra 288). She quotes Tim Seiber, who argues that in the “post-industrial phase of globalization, there’s not much place for the old ethnic communities” (Negra 289). Negra even mentions examples of this in *The Departed*: for instance, the local store where Costello first meets Colin is later owned by a Pakistani man, and Costello conducts his business towards the end of the film in a French restaurant instead of the old Irish pubs (Negra 289). As a result, he is losing his Irish stronghold on the community due to the unstoppable forces of globalization.

To expand upon Negra’s observations, the forces of globalization are seen even more obviously in *The Departed*. Even though Costello is posited from his first line as symbolic of the racist old order, an entire plotline centers on Costello doing business with Chinese businessmen. Outsourcing the production of some of his business evidences that even organized crime is being affected by globalization. Yet, Costello maintains his distasteful othering when he refers to them as “Bruce Lee and the Karate Kids.” This plotline could also be a nod to the Hong Kong film that *The Departed* is based on, *Infernal Affairs* [Lau and Mak, 2002]. But even that reading proves that film is a medium of cultural exchange. However, more than that, it shows that even older members of the Irish-American community bow to the forces of modernity, whether they want to or not.

Additionally, these forces are seen more subtly in *The Town*. Krista brags that she got in a fight with “some Somalian,” which she is proud of because “yuppies don’t think there’s any more serious white people in Charlestown.” Since Krista is seen as an extension of Jem, and thus a product of the cult of narcissism that promotes othering, she has a combative reaction to globalization. The masochist Doug is aghast by this comment. His move to Florida, which according to the recent census is home to the least densely populated Irish-American city, Miami, demonstrates that he is part of the Irish-American diaspora that Cochran explains (Boston.com).

As previously mentioned, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Irish had a stronghold on American boxing (Farrell 12). However, that clearly has changed. The biggest boxing match in 2015, Floyd Mayweather Jr. versus Manny Pacquiao, billed as The Fight of the Century, was between a Black man and Filipino man (CBS Sports). This verifies that the sport has been affected by globalization. In *The Fighter*, Micky’s family is obsessed with the ethnicity of his opponents. Dicky, Alice, and even Micky mention multiple times that his rival Saul Mamby is a “Black Jew.” It appears that they think that the ethnicity and the cultural heritage of the fighter affect his ability. Dicky’s “girlfriend” Karen is Cambodian, but he shows a lack of respect for her and her culture when he tries to prostitute her out and when he tries to scam members of the Cambodian community with a pyramid scheme. When the family accuses him of being racist, he defends himself by saying that he dates Karen, which is typical reaction of a “non-racist.” Yet, Micky ultimately proves himself to be past othering when he lets Lonano manage his career.

Of all of the films, *Black Irish* presents the healthiest relations with non-Irish individuals as it depicts the changes that are occurring in Southie. Perhaps it is because it

is an independent film, which attracts more diverse filmmakers and audiences. As previously mentioned, it could also be because Mrs. McKay emigrated to the U.S. in her twenties, and therefore the family did not witness all of the historical events in Southie that has caused older members to feel a fierce protectiveness over the enclave. Terry's best friend, Anthony, is Latino. Cole gets a job at an Italian restaurant called Ristorante Marcellino's. Other than the Black population of Boston, the Irish have historically clashed the most with the Italian population, resulting in brutal gang wars. The fact that Cole works for the Italian Joey substantiates that he is representative of a new generation that does not hold onto old grudges. For that matter, both McKay boys signal a progressiveness not seen with past generations of Irish-Americans.

As these films examines the forces of globalization in Irish-American communities, one of the tensions that is explored is that the narcissist (generally) feels threatened by the changes and fights them through othering those who are different. As such, this is one reason why Irish-American filmic communities are presented as virulent in their insularity. The masochist, on the other hand, feels he must get away because his type of masculinity is not threatened by the changes and instead embraces them.

### **The Catholic Priest Scandal: A Public Relations Nightmare for Irish-America**

The 2016 Academy Award Best Picture winner, *Spotlight*, depicts how a team of journalists for *The Boston Globe* investigated the systemic practice of protecting child abusers in the Catholic Church (Forbes). The series of articles was published in 2003 and has spurred subsequent investigations around the world, which exposed how widespread the practice was. Interestingly enough, all of these films come after this scandal. While there were Irish-American double-protagonist films that came before this was made

public, the effects of this scandal are undeniable in more recent Irish-American film. As previously mentioned, the Catholic Church helped bring Irish-American immigrants to greater societal acceptance and the community is normally thought of as being engrained with the religious institution (Dezell 20). When it was discovered that priests had been sexually abusing children — members of their own Irish-American community — that community felt shame and disgust. This adds new contextualization to why the community is presented as so malignant on-screen.

The tension between the community and the church is seen all over *The Departed*. When examining Billy's family history, Staff Sergeant Dignam implies that his uncle, who is a priest, is a "perv." As previously mentioned, during a scene in an Irish-American restaurant, Costello draws a lewd photo for a nun, and tells the priests that in "this archdiocese, God don't run the bingo." Furthermore, he blatantly tells them to "enjoy your clams, cocksuckers." The exchange demonstrates that not only has Costello lost any shred of respect for the church, but also that he has no qualms about publically embarrassing them. The nuance of this scene comes from the fact that both Costello and the Church are seen as villains, thus creating the image of an incredibly venomous community that is tearing itself apart.

Perhaps most significantly, Cole of *Black Irish* initially has dreams of being a priest. However, his decision to give up this dream because he does not want to remain chaste exposes the difficulties of the job. During the confrontation scene, Desmond tells their priest that he needs to get the church a good publicist, because "the church has been taken some serious hits lately." This dialogue implicitly references the scandal. Furthermore, Desmond tells him that "McDonalds has served a few more than

Catholicism has.” This line merges the tensions of globalization and the failings of the church. When he is dying at the hospital, he looks at a fixture of Jesus on the cross, and tells Jesus that it does not look bad up there; rather it looks peaceful because there is “no disappointed wife. No kids driving you up the wall. People admire you.” He then proposes that they switch places. This exchange further proves that even in his dying days, the damage done to Desmond’s faith cannot be repaired.

In *The Town*, there are hints that the men are religious. For instance, Doug has a tattoo of a Celtic cross. However, when they attempt to rob a bank in ghoulish nuns masks, they show the perversion of the Catholic tradition. Interestingly enough, this is the image that is used in most of the promotional materials for the film. The costumes perfectly exemplify Irish-America’s changing relationship with Catholicism. While Catholicism is a lesser motif in these films, it still noticeably contributes to the image of a toxic Irish-America. The tension between these characters and the Church exposes a fragmented community.

### **Real Life Inspiration: James “Whitey” Bulger’s Influence**

While he has been referenced previously, James “Whitey” Bulger has arguably affected these narratives. He is perhaps Southie’s most infamous resident, as the leader of the Winter Hill Gang, which terrorized Southie through money laundering, drug dealing, and loan sharking. Whitey’s reign lasted from the 1970s to the 1990s, when it was publically announced that he had been serving as an FBI informant (a fact that he still denies to this day). Shortly after, he went on the lam, and was a member of the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted Fugitive List” until he was captured in 2011 (Biography.com). To

that end, his name and story became a popular case followed by many, even those outside of Southie and Boston.

Bulger's famous case perhaps inspired these films because he is a real-life version of the double male, "good brother/bad brother" dichotomy. Whitey is obviously the narcissist, but his brother William had the longest tenure as President of the Massachusetts Senate. He also served as President of the University of Massachusetts, which demonstrates that William is the law-abiding, masochist brother (Biography.com).

Furthermore, it is undeniable that filmmakers have been interested in Whitey's story. 2015's *Black Mass* is the first fictional film to directly depict Bulger's life, but other stories had been shopped around Hollywood. In fact, Matt Damon and Ben Affleck had been working on a Bulger biopic, which they might still make (The Hollywood Reporter). There is also a documentary film *Whitey: The United States of America v. James J. Bulger* [Berlinger, 2014] that tells his life story.

In consequence, prior to his capture in 2011, these films could be viewed as a nod to Bulger's life story before there was closure. Frank Costello of *The Departed* is said explicitly to be inspired by Bulger (IFC). Other than the similarities in his business, Costello serves as an FBI informant, which is a major clue that he is a stand-in for Bulger. His partner, Mr. French, is a parallel to Bulger's real-life partner Steven Flemmi (Biography.com). French's murder of a woman he is dating is a reference to the high-profile murders of Flemmi's girlfriends Debra Davis and Debbie Hussey. Small details like these would be recognizable to people who had been following Bulger's case.

Additionally, there are similarities in *Black Irish* and *The Fighter's* good brother/bad brother narratives, especially because the families do not reject the

narcissistic brother, as Bulger's family, even his brother William, did not reject him. Fergie, the mobster in *The Town*, can also be seen as a Bulgeresque figure through his murders, money laundering, and terrorizing of Jem and Doug. Therefore, this example suggests that Southie's most infamous resident has inspired filmic representations of Irish-American crime. Not only that, but it proves that the connection between fraternalism and criminality is not simply fictional, but has happened in history as well.

### **Irish-America's Compliance**

In all of these films, there are Irish-American or even Irish filmmakers, whether they are the director, producers, screenwriters or actors. In fact, the resurgence of Irish-American films of the 1990s could be correlated to the Celtic Tiger, a period where Ireland's economy experienced rapid growth before collapsing (McCourt 380). During that time, Irish filmmakers like Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan became more popular in the U.S., proving a cultural trade through globalization. Jordan's film *Interview with a Vampire* [Jordan, 1994] is a double-protagonist film, surprisingly without Irish characters. Hence, Irish and Irish-Americans have used the pattern alike since the 1990s. Why would Irish and Irish-Americans then condone a pattern of portrayal that makes Irish-America into a breeding ground for pernicious narcissistic masculinity? Because, since the days of vaudeville theater, they have been complicit in their filmic and stage representations. While this new pattern is a result of contemporary film, the tensions have been building since American cinema's outset.

To review, Irish-Americans perpetuated stereotypes during the vaudeville era because they wanted to be accepted, but those tropes have stuck around. Even the recurring vaudeville character Paddy has parallels to the narcissistic alternate. His

romanticized view of the past could be likened to the narcissist's desire to keep his community closed-off from outsiders. Additionally, his weakness for drink is in keeping with the troubling addictive behaviors of characters like Dicky. During the advent of sound, the "sinner and the saint" dichotomy emerged, which created the idea that Irish-American men were generally one or the other; ergo, the doubling of these characters is nothing new. Irish-America's most iconic representation, *The Quiet Man*, celebrates the correlation between masculinity and violence. In the 1980s, the good brother/bad brother dynamic emerged with *True Confessions*. Since the 1990s, Irish-American film has become intertwined with narratives of anger and masculinity, which is why gangster films are now popular again. Furthermore, critics of Irish cinema like Diane Negra, Ruth Barton, and Geraldine Meaney have all discussed the connection between masculinity, criminality, and fraternalism in their work. As such, they postulate why this is so popular right now. Negra speculates that these narratives reflect Irish-American media pundits, such as Chris Matthews, Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity (Negra 279).

To contradict this, however, those aforementioned examples prove that the seeds of these representations were planted long ago. The history of Irish-American film has had doubling, crises of masculinity, violence, sinners, saints, gangsters, priests, and fraternalism; the difference now is that these tensions have all developed into one clear pattern. The reason that this pattern exists, apart from the previously delineated contemporary conditions of Irish-America, is due to the fact that Irish-Americans have a history of promoting stereotypes about their own culture. With all of the contextualization of double-protagonist films, this simple fact should not be forgotten.



This thesis has argued that there now exists a clear pattern of Irish-American double-protagonist films. These iterations differ from the overall genre in recurring ways, most importantly through the creation of a toxic, insular Irish-America. In this setting, the men's adverse modes of masculinity clash, which is exacerbated by women and corrupting patriarchal figures. While the masochist is crafted to have admirable traits, which is reminiscent of the heroic way that Irish-American first responders were treated after 9/11 (Sheridan 52), it is still troubling that he feels the need to leave behind his cultural roots to be successful. It is equally problematic that the ne'er do well narcissist flounders because he maintains his ties to Irish-America. I have argued that the baneful manner in which Irish-America has been presented on film reflects the tensions and scandals that have truly rocked the community. But even if Irish-America comes to accept the forces of globalization and the media frenzies of the priest scandal and Bulger fade away, this pattern will continue to exist. Like Greven argues, these films are made primarily because of the hope for Hollywood financial gain. *The Departed*, *The Fighter*, and *The Town* all received critical and economic success, respectively earning 289.9 million, 129.2 million, and 154 million at the box office (IMDB). *Black Irish*, however, did not do well with critics or the box office. That film withstanding, the rest have proven to be both lucrative and popular. For this reason, the pattern of Irish-American double-protagonist films will most likely continue because the economic conditions are right and because Irish-Americans remain complicit in promoting these narratives.

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