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Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra anglistiky

Bakalářská práce

# An Analysis of the Film Adaptations of Gothic Irish Novels by William Trevor and Patrick McCabe

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České Budějovice 2024

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Magdalena Holá

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor PhDr. Christopher Koy, M.A., Ph.D., for his professional guidance, useful advice, help with the book analysis, and literature recommendations.

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the film adaptations of Irish Gothic novels penned by William Trevor and Patrick McCabe, focusing on *Felicia's Journey* and *The Butcher Boy*. The bachelor thesis covers the successful transfer of Gothic elements to the visual medium, discussing atmospheric settings, psychological complexity and the delicate balance between fidelity to the original and creative innovation. The thesis offers valuable insights into the intersection of literature and film but also acknowledges its limitations, particularly regarding subjective interpretations and the evolving landscape of cultural representation in narrative.

## **Anotace**

Tato práce se zabývá filmovými adaptacemi irských gotických románů napsaných Williamem Trevorem a Patrickem McCabem se zaměřením na knihy *Feliciina cesta* a *Malý řezník*. Bakalářská práce se zabývá úspěšným přenosem gotických prvků do vizuálního média, pojednává o atmosférických prostředích, psychologické složitosti a křehkou rovnováhu mezi věrností originálu a kreativní inovací. Práce nabízí cenné vhledy do průniku literatury a filmu, ale také uznává jejich omezení, zejména s ohledem na subjektivní interpretace a vyvíjející se krajinu kulturní reprezentace v narativu.

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## INTRODUCTION

The transformation of written literature into movies is not a modern trend, it has been happening for many years and become increasingly popular in recent times. Adaptation studies gained significance within academia, with quite a number of research and discussions carried out on this subject. In this context, I seek to analyse the film adaptations of two Irish Gothic novels: *Felicia's Journey* by the well-respected author William Trevor and *The Butcher Boy*, an Irish bestseller by Patrick McCabe, and their corresponding film adaptations. In this thesis, I intend to investigate problems and possibilities arising from changing a book into visual media, and how this process has been handled by the two films' directors to achieve successful adaptation.

The Literature of Ireland is not what one might expect — it's a blend of various styles and influences. It has always been diverse due to the different languages spoken on this island. Ireland's writers have made significant contributions to the evolution of literature worldwide. They produced an impressive range of works, some even receiving the highly prized Nobel Prize. William Trevor and Patrick McCabe are two of the most distinguished Irish authors of the 20th century. Their works have been thoroughly researched and globally appreciated and criticized by scholars for their psychological depth as well as literary complexity.

*The Butcher Boy* and *Felicia's Journey*, two Gothic novels, are among the most famous in Irish literature. They mainly explore the inner states and emotions of humans. In *Felicia's Journey*, an Irish girl goes to England in search of her unborn child's father. The *Butcher Boy* is a chilling story which demonstrates how a young boy becomes insane through a series of traumas he has to face: abuse, death and social rejection. These novels were adapted into films and both were praised highly by critics.

The work of turning a written piece into a movie is full of obstacles and opportunities for the filmmakers. The difficulties stem from a proper implementation of written medium into visual one. Irrespective of the philosophical or artistic skill that an artist might possess, making a movie is in itself an active process with countless dilemmas and roadblocks. They arise from the film's unity to written work, i.e., how the written medium can become visual in its proper implementation. The opportunities arise from

the filmmaker's capacity to enhance and expand the original work with their views, beliefs and unique personal vision for the films. Due to its complex themes, intricate narratives and sombre imagery, Gothic literature in particular presents unique challenges for adaptation.

This thesis aims to determine in what way "Felicia's Journey" and "The Butcher Boy" managed to overcome these limitations. By comparing original works with their adaptations, we can obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the adaptation process has effects on both literary and cinematic works.

## **1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter focuses on the film plot and analysis of two Irish Gothic novels: *Felicia's Journey* by William Trevor and *The Butcher Boy* by Patrick McCabe. In this chapter, we conduct a literature review that situates the study concerning adaptation studies, Gothic fiction, Irish literature and film.

### **1.1. Adaptation Studies**

Adaptation studies is a multi-disciplinary field, which examines how works of art are translated from one medium (like print or audio) into another (film, television, etc), but mostly literary works are used for this process. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation entails a transformational and negotiating process between the primary text and the adaptation, but also a complex relationship between a person creating an adaptation and original material. "... what is involved in adapting can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents" (Hutcheon, 2006: 18).

Textual analysis is among the many approaches to adaptation studies. For example, Thomas Leitch completely ignores adaptation studies and argues that it should be regarded as a process of interpretation: the adapter will create a new and separate work reflecting his or her vision and values. He states that many adapters should ignore adaptation studies for their limitation: "all these statements, including Nair's, ignore fifty years of adaptation theory in their uncritical adoption of the author's intention as a criterion for success— both the novel and any possible film adaptation" (Leitch, 2007:2).



## 1.2. Gothic Fiction

First recorded in the late 18th century, Gothic fiction saw parallels in the societal, governmental, cultural and artistic realms. Rising amidst the backdrop of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, Gothic literature originated as a response to the sudden and chilling cacophony of change, that often left people scared and uncertain. Its eerie fortresses and mysterious scenery reflected the decaying certainties of a rapidly changing world, providing readers with a powerful combination of diversion and self-contemplation (Botting, 1994: 21-24).

The word Gothic, meaning barbaric or brutal first associated with the Dark Middle Ages, and started to have a certain pull amongst the population. Gothic fiction started to be sought out not only by readers but writers as well (Ousby, 1993).

Given the anxieties and phobias of the period in which they were written, Gothic stories typically explore forbidden topics such as human sanity, macabre horror and gore. Typical examples of Gothic fiction are *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, they are also some of the first recorded examples of Gothic fiction.

Gothic fiction is traditionally classified as literature of the so-called lower genre. Since the beginning of Gothic novels, they were aimed at a wide readership and were supposed to provide primary entertainment, while critically, they were not taken seriously. This attitude changes in the era of postmodernism.

Gothic fiction was adapted to film, television opera, the theatre and many other media throughout both the nineteenth and twentieth. Gothic elements and themes have also infiltrated science fiction, fantasy and romance. As Fred Bottin writes in his book, Gothic design represents a profound cultural drive to traverse and understand excluded areas of human experience and emotion. "Gothic signified a trend towards an aesthetics based on feeling and emotion and associated primarily with the sublime". (Botting, 1996: 2).

### **1.3. Irish Literature and Film**

The Irish literary tradition in the world of literature is famous for its individual and withering national voice. Beginning with the earliest epic sagas such as "The Tain", which is regarded as the Irish national epic, right down through works by authors including James Joyce, Flann O'Brien or Seamus Heaney. Irish literature has examined the entanglements and complexities of Ireland's distinctive experience. In works of literature from the earliest Irish drama to today's literature, Irish writers explore the great themes of Irish identity, nationality and history. (Carter & McRay, 2016: 436).

However, the history of Irish films is much shorter than its literary counterpart. Nevertheless, it has also gained recognition for its unique perspective and narrative style. Irish filmmakers, among them Jim Sheridan, Neil Jordan and Lenny Abrahamson have also all been successful in their own right. Irish films investigate many topics-- ethnic identity, political differences and cultural and economic division (McLoone, 2000: 15).

In recent years, Irish literature and film have been attracting more attention, particularly on modern issues. Immigration, ethnic identity and political contention have all been topics covered in Irish literature, which is famous for its unique perspective on these subjects. In addition, Irish cinema has examined the disparities in social and economic development, the consequences of globalization, as well as how British colonialism affected Irish citizens lives (Barton, 2019: 29).

### **1.4. Trends and Themes**

A prominent trend in Irish literature and film is the study of British colonial history and cultural events that affected Irish society. Ireland's past is full of colonization, political battles, and religious conflicts, which are important subjects explored in Irish literature and film. The play "Translations" by Brian Friel looks into how English colonisation affected the Irish language and culture. A second instance is "Michael Collins" by Neil Jordan, this movie narrates the story of the Irish revolutionary leader and his part in fighting for Ireland's freedom from Great Britain (Barton, 2019: 224).

A very strong pattern in Irish media is looking into cultural identity tied to national identity. Ireland's culture has been shaped by Celtic mythology, Christianity and English

elements - this mix makes a rich and varied heritage. The country's literature and movies have explored the conflicts among these different factors along with how global changes impact Irish identity. An instance could be Sebastian Barry's "A Long Long Way" (2005), the story is about an Irish soldier in World War I who is conflicted about his service in the British army as an Irish person.

Most recent literature and films in Ireland have started to address the new emergence of issues that modern Irish society faces. These problems include lack of work, poverty as well as leaving one's country to find better opportunities elsewhere - this topic was tackled by Roddy Doyle in his book *The Commitments* and Ken Loach's movie "Jimmy's Hall" (McLoone, 2000: 89-91).

## **2 PATRICK MCCABE**

### **2.1. Biographical Information**

Patrick McCabe was born on March 27, 1955, in Clones, County Monaghan, Ireland, just a stone's throw from the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Eire. McCabe grew up in a deeply religious family. He was the third of seven children. McCabe went off to school at St. Macartan's College in Dublin. Before turning to literature to make his way in life in Ireland, McCabe taught children with special needs in London (O'Mahony, 2003).

Published in 1980, the novel *Music on Clinton Street* was the first work to come from McCabe. However, his third novel *The Butcher Boy*, which hit the bookstores in 1992 finally gave him the high recognition that had eluded him till then (O'Mahony, 2003).

McCabe has also taken to the stage as well as a pen. His novel *The Butcher Boy* came to life on stage in Dublin for the first time in 1992. McCabe has also written several plays that have been performed in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Works such as *Frank Pitt Greets* and *The Dead School* were written as plays first, then turned into books.

Patrick McCabe's personal beliefs have been the subject of speculation by critics and scholars alike. Although he has not discussed his faith in more than abstract terms, his writing shows a degree of doubt about organized religion and an interest in the darker

aspects of human nature. In numerous works, the Catholic Church is depicted by McCabe as an oppressive force that fosters social and cultural norms which constrain individual freedom, creativity, self-direction and identity. Francie Brady, the protagonist of *The Butcher Boy* (1992), for example, experiences a crisis of faith in the wake of his mother's death and turns to violence as an outlet for all his anger and frustration with the Church and society at large.

Another case in point is the protagonist of *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), Patrick "Pussy" Braden, who finds her way around new concepts such as the rise of feminism, gay rights, and the secularization of Irish society. The book is also a study of marginalization and the exclusion of certain people from society. It is an attack on the power structures that subject women to strict sexual norms and deny them their humanity. As McCabe states in the interview: "It's meant to be a small hand-grenade of a book, but a burlesque as well. I remember the 70s of that time and those lurid glam-rock colours alternating between horror and frivolity" (O'Mahony, 2003).

During his tenure, McCabe has repeatedly been praised by critics and readers alike. He has received a wide variety of awards and honours including Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book of the Decade, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and a nomination for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. (O'Mahony, 2003).

The historical context of Ireland's relationship with Catholicism plays a big role in McCabe's representation of religion and its influence on Irish society. Until the last decade of the 20th century, Irish society was ruled by the Catholic Church. The Church exerted a tremendous amount of influence on the social and political decisions that were made in Ireland. At the end of the 20th century, things began to change. Now the Church's power was being challenged in a series of social and cultural changes – the rise of feminism, and gay liberation movements (Brown, 2011: 452, 444).

## **2.2. Writing style and themes**

McCabe's style of writing is characterized by grim humour heavily salted with bleak sarcasm and stream-of-consciousness narration. His stories often focus on bizarre yet troubled main characters trying to come to terms with their tragic lives. McCabe's work is also seen as an exploration of the human psyche and a search for truth: "What is strikingly new in McCabe's fiction is the degree of pathological trauma and destructive psychosis on display, and the mixture of comic exhilaration, tinged by pathos, with which such dysfunctionality is narrated" (Harte, 2009: 206).

McCabe's use of local vernacular language and dialect, in particular in his representations of working-class Irish communities, is also a notable aspect. This has been compared to authors like James Joyce and Flann O'Brien, but not into access like Synge's plays. Another recurring theme is the effects of violence and trauma on individuals and communities. The real challenges and difficult situations that people face in rural Ireland for example, poverty, family violence or drug abuse, are often reflected in his works. (Harte 2009: 205-206).

## **3 WILLIAM TREVOR**

### **3.1. Biographical Information**

William Trevor Cox was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, Ireland, on 24 May 1928. He originally went by his full name, William Trevor Cox, but later took on the pen name Trevor. He was brought up as a Protestant at St. Columba's School in Dublin, where he wrote short stories.

Trevor moved to England in 1950 and continued writing while working variously as a teacher, editor, and art gallery attendant. In the year of 1958, his first novel *A Standard of Behaviour* (1958) came out, and the short story collection *The Day We Went Drunk on Cake and Other Stories* (1967) followed shortly after (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 9).

Across his career, Trevor published several other novels and volumes of short stories for which he was loudly acclaimed. This was publicly acknowledged when he was bestowed the Order of Britain (OBE) in 1977 and knighthood in 2002.

As a consequence of growing up in Ireland and settling in England, Trevor's fiction came to bear striking national seams. Often his stories would be concerned with dislocation, isolation, and a search for identity. Gaps left by this heritage were never far from his mind. Trevor was renowned for his mastery of understated prose and his ability to convey profound emotion and insight through ostensibly simple stories or plots (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003).

During Trevor's childhood, his mother was a Catholic and his father was a Protestant who converted later in life to Catholicism like Trevor's mother. Trevor underwent a Catholic education at a Jesuit school. His time there greatly strengthened his feelings about faith, and he carried this influence of Catholicism into his literary work (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 2).

Trevor was known to be a private person who stayed away from the public eye throughout his life. Instead of giving interviews or making public appearances, he usually left it up to his books to tell their own stories. Trevor passed away at the age of 88 on November 20, 2016, leaving a legacy as one of Ireland's greatest and best-known authors of the twentieth century (Porter, 2016).

### **3.2. Writing Style and Themes**

Williams Trevor's writing style can be described as refined and understated. His stories are heavily driven by richly developed characters. In a number of his tales set in small, rural communities, the protagonists struggle to navigate complex personal conflicts such as in his novel *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002) (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 7).

In Trevor's works the tension between past and present, and the pursuit of identity are recurring themes. Many of his characters are deeply involved in their personal histories or the legacy of their families and communities, and they must consider how to move forward despite the obstacles that they encounter in their lives.

The examination of the lives of ordinary people and the calm moments of beauty and grace found in everyday life is a second recurring theme in Trevor's writing. Trevor was also renowned for using cynicism and satire to remark on the social and political issues of his time including Anglo-Irish issues and Protestant-Catholic tensions. As Fitzgerald-Hoyt notes: "This Ireland is bounded by neither gender nor religion, for men and

women, Protestant and Catholic, find themselves in similar constraints” (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 31).

William Trevor earned praise for his elegant and simple style of writing and his character development. Known mostly as a master of short stories, Trevor can create an entire intricate and utterly incredible world in the space of a short story. The characters he writes about tend to live in small communities where everyone knows everyone else's business. As they struggle with their predicament and how much of it comes from their past. Trevor's work delves into the struggle between the past and present. The dark humour and satire he employs to comment on social and political issues adds depth and likeability to his writing (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 6).

## **4 THE BUTCHER BOY BY PATRICK MCCABE**

### **4.1. Plot Summary and Analysis**

The *Butcher Boy* was written as a Gothic novel in 1992. The plot mostly takes place in a small Irish town during the 1960's and concerns its main character Francie “Francis” Brady, a boy whose dysfunctional family, particularly his abusive father, moulded his sick character. The book is divided into three parts, each reflecting a different stage of Francie's life as he sinks steadily deeper into mental instability.

In the first chapter, Francie is introduced as a mischievous and troubled child. He lives with his continuously fighting parents, and his alcoholic father frequently abuses and belittles him. Francie finds solace in his companionship with his best friend Joe Purcell and in his creative mind where he often escapes to avoid reality.

Francie throughout the story becomes obsessed with his neighbours. Francie's obsession with the Nugents family is so prominent that he wishes he was one of them. He views them as better, more sophisticated people than him and is jealous of their lifestyle. He even stalks them:

“Philip was sleeping in his mother’s bed. His head was tilted back on the pillow with his mouth open. She was sleeping soundly her chest rising and falling as if to say there’s no trouble

at all in my dreams I have by son beside me and my dear husband will be home tomorrow “ (McCabe 1992, 40).

Francie runs from home after his drunk father belittles Alo, Francie's uncle, who is a local celebrity and the only family member that Francie looks up to. After he returns home, he discovers that his mother committed suicide. This event leads to a mental breakdown. He starts spiralling and associates this event with his neighbours, Nugents, whom he simultaneously hates and obsesses about. When they are out of the house, he breaks in, pretending to be a pig, destroying things in their house and defecating on the bedroom floor. This action lands him in a religious reform school (McCabe, 1992: 55-54).

“He went at it then for all he was worth and then there it sat proud as punch on the carpet of the bedroom, the best poo ever. It really was a big one, shaped like a submarine, tapered at the end so your hole won't close with a bang, studded with currants with a little question mark of steam curling upwards. Well done, Philip, I cried, you did it! I clapped him on the back and we all stood round admiring it. It was like a rocket that had just made it back from space and we were waiting for a little brown astronaut to open a door in the side and step out waving” (McCabe, 1992: 54).

Part two takes place as Francie is discharged from reform school as a teenager. He struggles to adjust to the new reality after returning to his hometown and discovering that his former life has changed. His instability increases, and his behaviour becomes more erratic.

After the death of his mother, repeated abuse and loss of his best friend Joe, who gave up on him, he snaps and becomes obsessed with exacting his bloody vengeance against people he blames for everything. The Nugents.

Part three sees Francie's mental stability reach its breaking point, and the novel concludes with a violent murder and mutilation of Mrs. Nugent.



“She groaned and said please I didn't care if she groaned or said please or what she said. I caught her round the neck and I said: You did two bad things Mrs Nugent. You made me turn my back on my ma and you took Joe away from me. Why did you do that Mrs Nugent? She didn't answer I didn't want to hear any answer I smacked her against the wall a few times there was a smear of blood at the corner of her mouth and her hand was reaching out trying to touch me when I cocked the captive bolt. I lifted her off the floor with one hand and shot the bolt right into her head thlok was the sound it made, like a goldfish dropping into a bowl. If you ask anyone how you kill a pig they will tell you cut its throat across but you don't you do it longways. Then she just lay there with her chin sticking up and I opened her then I stuck my hand in her stomach and wrote PIGS all over the walls of the upstairs room” (McCabe, 1992: 160-161).

After the murder, Francie successfully avoids the law for some time and is on the run, making fun of the police from afar.

“They brought more police in you could hear them poking about night noon and morning and the sniffer dogs wuff wuff on the bank of the river time was running out for the deadly Francie Brady! Oh no it wasn't it was running out for fed-up Fabian and his men for all they had found was a dead cat in the ditch and you could hardly take that back to Scotland Yard. Well done Detective Fabian! You didn't catch Brady but you did catch this -- a maggot-ridden old moggy! Congratulations!” (McCabe, 1992: 169).

But in the end, he is captured and after revealing where he put the body of Mrs. Nugent, he is finally imprisoned.

## **4.2. Gothic Elements and Themes**

The novel is full of gothic themes such as violence, trauma, and the supernatural. In the novel, the violence is raw and brutal, for example, Francie's murder of Mrs. Nugent is horrifically gory. Such events as Francie's mother taking her own life, his father's eventual death, or the abuse by the priest at reform school all add to his eventual decline into madness. The supernatural element in the novel is not so tangible, it is an abstract transformation of Frank's fantasy that has included bog men, superheroes and aliens.

The supernatural elements in the novel are more abstract than others and all of them are happening in the protagonist's colourful yet sick imagination:

“Tinny voice the mayor squared up to the alien leader and told him he'd never get away with it. Every army on earth will fight you he says. But the alien just laughed. He had a human body that he stole off some bogman of a farmer that gave him a lift but you knew by the twisted sneer that inside he was a fat green blob with tentacles like an octopus and his face all scales”  
(McCabe, 1997: 36).

All through *The Butcher Boy*, Gothic elements and themes are abound. One of the most prominent and omnipresent of these themes is the book's setting. The small Irish town is shown as a small, sullen place where everyone is imprisoned by their lives.

Francis, as the protagonist, is yet another embodiment of various gothic cliches: the double, madman, outsider. Furthermore, his mental state is shaky at best (classical Gothic trope). Unreliability infects Everything Francie says about himself - which brings up the matter of viewpoint. Francie is depicted as mentally unstable, and he is portrayed as an unreliable narrator.

## **4.3. Historical and Cultural Contexts**

The main backdrop of *The Butcher Boy* story falls within Ireland between the 1950s-1960s. It was a period of vast social change. The novel concerns itself with the poor working-class people of Ireland who are trying to adapt to a shifting world. At that time, a lot of young Irish people chose to move abroad to seek their fortune and

stability. Prices were high and wages low; there was no prospect for the future (Brown, 2011: 392).

The novel also explores the impact of "The Troubles", a conflict in Northern Ireland between its Protestant unionists and Roman Catholic nationalists. The conflict lasted nearly thirty years and it is still felt by Irish people today: "Located on the northwest periphery of the European continent, far from the center of European affairs, Northern Ireland was, and would likely have remained, distant from the thoughts of most scholars had it not been for the outbreak of the "Troubles." During the period from 1969 until 1994, Northern Ireland became the scene of the worst political violence in Western Europe. The conflict yielded a death toll of 3,281 deaths (through 1998) and tens of thousands were injured" (Woodwell, 2005: 161).

Not "The Troubles" as such, but their presence in the background can be felt throughout the narrative. Francie's impetuosity and dualism of his character can also be seen as a metaphor for the instability and severance of Irish politics.

#### **4.4. Critical Reception and Interpretations**

The Booker Prize and the Irish Times Irish Literature Prize for Fiction were awarded to *The Butcher Boy* after its release. In 1992, it received a warm reception by the critics for its vivid representation and social commentary on working-class life in Ireland. Delving into the complicated mix of psychological conditions and human experience, the film does not cease to show a loving sympathy towards those who undergo such alternating life events.

Praise of critics varies. Some concentrate on its Gothic elements and portrayal of mental illness, trauma, or violence in general. Donna Potts notes in her article "From Tír na nÓg to Tír na Muck: Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," that "Most reviews of the film and the book emphasize the highly personal nature of McCabe's subject – the private mental deterioration of young Francie Brady" (Potts 1999: 83).

Other critics have analysed the social, and political commentary of the *Butcher Boy*. Ibrahim Ismael contends in his essay "Patrick McCabe's Bog Gothic Novel: A Reading of *The Butcher Boy*" that "*The Butcher Boy* deals with such gothic motifs as cultural

anxieties over social and economic transformations, family disintegration, institutional abuse, madness, and violence" (Zaid, 2020: 87).

*The Butcher Boy* has also been compared to *Ulysses* by James Joyce due to its use of stream-of-consciousness narration and investigation of the inner lives of its characters. It is known that McCabe was inspired by the works of James Joyce, so this comparison is deserved.

## **5 FELICIA'S JOURNEY BY WILLIAM TREVOR**

### **5.1. Plot Summary and Analysis**

The book's plot primarily revolves around a young Irish woman named Felicia who travels to England to find her English boyfriend and father of her unborn child, Johnny Lysaght. The book falls into two parts: the first traces Felicia's way to England, while the second depicts a moment when she meets and interacts with Mr. Hilditch, a disturbed middle-aged catering manager.

The book introduces Felicia as a naive and innocent young woman in love with a man from her village and also expecting a baby with him. Despite the protests of her deeply religious father, she travels to England. In this part of the book, we can see Williams Trevor's subtle commentary about Anglo-Irish relations, when Felicia's father is speaking about Johnny Lysaght, who left the Irish village to join a British army.

"You will not live in this house and keep company with a member of the occupying forces. This family knows where it stands, and always has done. ... For eight centuries, not an hour less, the Irish people have known only the suppression of language, religion and human freedom. A vision was born on the streets of Dublin seventy-five years ago during those Easter days. It was not fulfilled, the potential has not been realized: "you have only to look around you. On top of that the jackboot of the British bully is still in six of our counties; there is still the spectre of death and torture on the streets of towns as humble as our own. No child of mine will ever be on that side of things girl" (Trevor 1994, 58).

With the money she stole from her great-grandmother, Felicia travels to England only to discover that Johnny has moved on with another woman and is no longer interested in her. Felicia, lost and alone, traverses the streets of Birmingham in search of a means of survival.

In the second segment, Felicia meets Mr. Hilditch, a catering manager who offers her employment and a place to live. Initially, Mr. Hilditch appears to be a kind and charitable individual, but there is something odd and cold about him. It quickly becomes apparent that he harbours malicious and murderer's intentions for the young girl. In a startling and tragic climax, he becomes obsessed with Felicia and begins to manipulate and control her (Trevor, 1994).

He starts to have sexual fantasies about the young girl and he ends up comparing her with his deceased abusive mother. Thanks to this comparison he decides that he needs to kill the girl as he did with many other women before her.

“‘I was the world to them. In their time of need they counted on me.’ She knows the girls are dead. There is something that states it in the room, in the hoarse breathing, in the sweat that for a moment touches the side of her face, in the way he talks. The dark is oppressive with their deaths, cloying, threatening to turn odorous” (Trevor, 1997: 155).

Felicia realises what Mr. Hilditch is planning for her and she decides to escape. The climax of the book ends in Mr. Hilditch's suicide. After Felicia's escape, he realises that he has become a monster and his personal demons catch up to him.

“Its green, lozenge eyes pass over the crockery of the dresser and the white enamel of the electric stove, over wall cupboards and shelves, the taps above the sink, the wooden chairs, the table on which another chair is overturned, a human body hanging. This is suspended from the single ham hook in the wooden ceiling by a length of electric flex, the head slung forward awkwardly, the mound of flesh beneath the chin wedging the sideways tilt. It isn't of interest to the scavenging

cat. Nothing is of interest except a saucepan on the stove, with a little milk left in it" (Trevor, 1994: 201).

Felicia finds herself without a place to go and ends up homeless but alive and with a new sense of liberation.

"There is nothing fixed about certainly the heroine's physical, psychic, or spiritual state at the novel's end. Although she remains in England, Felicia is metaphysically beyond "home" and "nation" beyond rigid Notions of territoriality, especially as embodied in inherited nationalist and imperialist Discourses" (Harts, 2012: 438).

## **5.2. Gothic Elements and Themes**

Gothic elements and themes run through this novel. Felicia experiences disorientation and bewilderment as a result of the novel's setting, the urban landscape of the foreign and vast city of Birmingham. The city is portrayed as a place of peril and corruption. Birmingham is crowded with questionable characters lurking around every corner. The dark streets of the city added to this sinister and gloomy atmosphere. As Del Río Álvaro notes about Trevor's writing: "He frequently deals with melodramatic and gothic themes and plots, and yet, being a master of understatement, he manages to transform these excessive ingredients into stylised and restrained narratives that border on the tragic and the elegiac." (Del Río Álvaro, 2007: 2).

Mr. Hilditch, the book's main antagonist, exemplifies numerous gothic archetypes. Such as a stranger, madman and a villain. Mr. Hilditch has a respectable public persona and a dark private persona full of secrets. He views Felicia as a replacement for his deceased abusive mother, resulting in increasingly erratic and psychotic behaviour ending in the decision to murder her: "His own sexual fancies make him change his perception of Felicia, and, as has previously been the case with the other girls, the moment he thinks she knows about his shame and secrets, he takes the decision to get rid of and bury her –both literally and figuratively– in his private Memory Lane, in his back garden where the laurel roots creep" (Del Río Álvaro, 2007: 10).

Another of the prominent elements it's Felicia's slow loss of innocence and naivete that she possessed at the beginning of the story:

“The innocence that once was hers is now, with time, a foolishness, yet it is not disowned, and that same lost person is valued for leading her to where she is” (Trevor 1994: 207).

### **5.3. Historical and Cultural Contexts**

Set in the 1990s, *Felicia's Journey* takes place at a time of great social and cultural shift in Ireland and England. The novel tells the story on the background, of how people in the working class of Ireland have to adjust to changing times, with many youths going to England for a better future than they could hope for in their home country. The novel, similarly to *The Butcher Boy*, examines the impact of the “Troubles” on the lives of everyday people, making references to the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Woodwell, 2005: 161).

The novel is set after the Second World War finished. This period was marked by big economic changes, such as post-war reconstruction projects. This was followed by a notable urban development in England; there were changes in industry and patterns of work, with the beginnings of modern consumerism (Brown, 2011: 392).

### **5.4. Critical Reception and Interpretations**

*Felicia's Journey* has received positive reviews and has been praised for its investigation of dark themes through a moving and character-driven narrative. Writing for The New York Times, Michiko Kakutani remarked that "Writing with easy omniscience that gives him complete access to his characters' thoughts, yearnings and self-deceptions, Mr. Trevor builds suspense that depends less on plot mechanics than on the ebb and flow of his people's emotions. With *Felicia's Journey*, he has delivered a perfectly executed and chilling little tale about the loss of innocence and the high price of blasted dreams" (Kakutani, 1995).

The novel was also praised for its subtle commentary on Anglo-Irish relations: “What sets *Felicia's Journey* apart from Trevor's earlier works is that while he adheres more closely to the sensationalism of the thriller — we follow in the steps of a psychologically disturbed man as he stalks his intended victim and is drawn into the

escalating suspense as she attempts to escape him — he does so to construct his subtlest, most deeply ironic reading of Anglo-Irish relations.” (Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 2003: 161).

*Felicia's Journey* won a Whitebread Book of the Year award.

## **6 THE FILM ADAPTATIONS**

### **6.1. The Butcher Boy**

#### **6.1.1. Adaptation strategies and choices**

*The Butcher Boy* was adapted in a year 1997 by a famous filmmaker Neil Jordan, who at the time had some experience with adapting novels into successful movies such as “Michael Collins” (1996) and “Interview with a Vampire” (1994).

Jordan closely collaborated with the author of the book Patric McCabe and all his decisions were approved by him. He made several modifications to the source material such as emphasis on Francie's mental state is a significant difference in the movie. While the novel is told from Francie's point of view, the film depicts Francie's descent into lunacy from a more objective perspective. Several new sequences, not present in the novel are included in the film, such as the dream sequence in which Francie imagines himself flying as a superhero. Jordan also omitted some subplots and characters from the book for the sake of more fluent pacing in the film (Dwyer, 2018).

One of the major plots that is left out of the film, is Francie's determination to become a part of the Nugent family. This plot point is heavily present in the book and it's an interesting choice to not put him in the film at all. Zucker comments on this decision: “Interestingly, Jordan does not focus on Francie’s desire to ‘be a Nugent’ as McCabe does in his novel. In the novel, McCabe goes so far as to 95 have Philip say, ‘He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francis Nugent...On can only hypothesize that this scene may have been too shocking to film. As screenplay generally require more focus on the specific objectives, goals, and desires of a character, Jordan may have felt the wanting-to-be-a-Nugent plot line was a dispersal of focus in terms of Francie’s arc in the story” (Zucker, 2003: 206-207).



The use of visual symbolism to convey Francie's emotional state is another noteworthy adaptation choice. The recurring image of the Virgin Mary symbolises Francie's desire for a maternal figure that he misses in his alcoholic and emotionally distant mother, his profound Catholic remorse and his distorted view of the religion. "From time to time, a glowing and foul-mouthed Virgin Mary (played by singer Sinéad O'Connor) appears to chat with the disturbed little boy" (O'Sullivan, 1998).

Neil Jordan successfully implemented gothic elements and motifs that were prevalent in the book and they contributed to "The Butcher Boy's" eerie and atmospheric tone. The film's investigation of madness, isolation, and violence recalls to original material.

The film was set and filmed in the novel's author's hometown of Clones, just below the border to Northern Ireland, which was a great choice in view of the fact that the town is an embodiment of gothic cliché.

#### **6.1.2. Gothic Elements and Themes in the Film**

There are a lot of Gothic elements in the movie "Butcher Boy." The most striking of these is the insanity of the main character, isolation and revolting violence pervasive throughout the film. The fact that Francie goes mad and incoherent is another example of such an element.

The film's style another major classic gothic element is the location. A small town in rural Ireland will bring forth feelings such as isolation and mystery, even claustrophobia. A third important gothic device in the film is visual symbolism, including repeated appearances of the vulgar evil Virgin Mary and Francie's visions of his best friend Joe.

Another gothic dimension added to the film is the musical score. It brings in an air of dread and anxiety. It brings a sense of tension and keeps the audience on the edge throughout the whole movie.

#### **6.1.3. Reception and Construal**

When "The Butcher Boy" was released, both critics and audiences praised it. The film was complimented not only for good acting performances but also for the innovative use of cinematography and interesting treatment of topics including mental illness and

abuse. As Andrew O'Hehir writes in his review of the film: "Jordan's adaptation of *The Butcher Boy* (co-written with McCabe) remains a compelling exploration of the permeable border between normal childhood and full-on insanity. But the literalness and apparent objectivity of the film medium occasionally give this movie the flavour of an after-school special purveying didactic lessons about abuse and victimization" (O'Hehir, 1998).

The movie has been praised by many critics for its depiction of the complex relationship between Catholicism and Irishness, and how this relationship affects the character's everyday lives. The film was also praised for its respectful portrayal and look at how Ireland's youth live due to institutional poverty and social exclusion:

"Jordan is far more comfortable and convincing on home turf, in his acrid, economical re-creation of Irish provincial life, with all its cruel gossip, hypocritical religiosity and dank little secrets. Like almost everyone in Ireland of the time, the characters in *The Butcher Boy* get from one depressing day to the next by yearning for a lost, happier age, which they're dimly aware never really existed" (O'Hehir, 1998).

Scholars and critics have provided a range of interpretations and analyses of the film's themes and significance. Others have analysed the film's engagement with Irish history and politics, while others have analysed the film's depiction of childhood purity and its loss: "This final scene lends a heartbreaking resonance to the rather arch, elliptical tale that has gone before -- we see the adult Francie (the rumpled Rea again, in ill-matched contemporary clothing), broken and mystified by what he has done and had done to him, and we realize that even his terrible crimes have not destroyed his innocence" (O'Hehir, 1998).

The film has been also commended for its dark humour and satire. Humour was handled very tastefully and serious themes in the film did not suffer because of it, quite the contrary. The occasional humour highlighted the serious themes and it also made a breathing space for the audiences in an otherwise very emotionally heavy array of scenes.

"The Butcher Boy" won several prestigious film awards, including Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival for Jack O'Connell, Best Director at the San Sebastian Film Festival

for Neil Jordan, and four Irish Cinema and Television Awards, including Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Script.

#### **6.1.4. Comparison of the Novel and Film Adaptations**

Film adaptations and the novel *The Butcher Boy* have many similarities regarding characters and plot. Francie Brady, a troubled young boy who becomes increasingly violent while trying to survive despite life's most daunting obstacles, is the protagonist in both versions of the story. However, the adaptation also holds a lot of difference from the book.

In the novel, the depiction of Francie's mental state is quite different from what is portrayed in the movie. The novel version of Francie's mental illness comes mostly through his dialogue, but in the movie visual cues such as a change in expressions and body language became the primary indicators of Francie's spiralling mental state.

Another vital difference is narrative structure. The novel is written in a nonlinear, stream-of-consciousness style from Francie's perspective, whereas the film's narrative structure is more conventionally linear, as O'Hehir notes: "What is lost is the novel's central Beckettian ambiguity: Francie never makes excuses for his heartlessness, and McCabe doesn't exactly imply them -- although Francie's upbringing is certainly dismal enough." (O'Hehir, 1998)

Even with these many differences, the story keeps its primary tone and narrative intact.

#### **6.1.5. Significance of the Adaptation**

In the Irish literary and cinema community, "The Butcher Boy" has value simply on account of its existence. Since the storytelling of *The Butcher Boy* is so complex, it was thought impossible to adapt into the film media.

The book has been acclaimed for its unique stylistic tack and its penetrating portrayal of the dilemma facing Irish immigrants in the diaspora whereas the film has been praised for its brilliant performances and how well and vividly it captures Francie's mental breakdown. The adaptations therefore provide a valuable practicum in the study of adaptation itself.

Another significance comes in the opportunity to examine both the novel and movie versions of “The Butcher Boy”, as we can gain insight into how different media handle adaptation of a given source as well as the techniques.

It is also argued by the author of the novel himself, that Neil Jordan brought tenderness and sweetness into the movie, which was missing in the novel.

## **6.2. Felicia's Journey**

### **6.2.1. Adaptation strategies and choices**

*Felicia's journey* is adopted by the director Atom Egoyan into a psychological thriller which hit the cinemas in 1999. Egoyan kept most of the original material intact, but he also made the story and the nuances of the book more direct and in the viewer's face.

The film adaptation of the novel keeps many of the book's themes: a longing for love, betrayal and dangers of placing one's trust in the wrong person, while also incorporating its own distinctive visual and auditory elements that enhance the emotional impact of the story. It also tries to amplify its Irishness to the maximum, with the nonspecific Irish tunes and visions of Ireland that Felicia experiences.

The transformation of William Trevor's novel into a well-received movie has had a major impact on the enhancement of Irish cultural identity and artistic achievements. The film version's success demonstrates the possibility of transposing Irish literature for international cinema, and so offers hope for collaboration between Irish writers and film-makers in future since previous versions of Joyce and others were flops in box office terms.

### **6.2.2. Gothic Elements and Themes in the Film**

The depths of the human mind are explored and we discover Felicia's inner turmoil as she embarks on a search for happiness. Her psychological suffering provides an exquisite background for Gothic film, reflecting Gothic tradition with a morbid fascination with darker recesses of the mind.

Visual symbolism has always served as a powerful Gothic technique. Symbolic elements appear, adding to an aura of obscurity hanging around. Closely woven with

Felicia's pilgrimage, the symbols only serve to underline her inner dilemma further and bring an other-worldly layer of meaning to its story.

Religious overtones solidify the Gothic atmosphere of the story as Felicia struggles with such life themes as sin, repentance, and spiritual longing. The interaction between religious iconography and Felicia's search for salvation gives the film a greater depth of interpretation. It also locates film within the Gothic tradition's exploration of supernatural and moral consequences.

### **6.2.3. Reception and Construal**

The responses from the audience were diverse, reflecting the intricate narrative and themes held by the film. Viewers' interaction with gothic elements, such as psychological explorations and visual symbolism, varied from person to person. Some people have praised the film for its subtle treatment of the human psyche. Others have found the gothic elements to be a rather disorienting and dissonant experience, making up a world bursting with unease.

Critics have played a major part in interpreting "Felicia's Journey." Critics have delved into the film's correlation with the broader Gothic tradition and its adept utilization of cinematic techniques: "There is an extreme creepiness in Hoskins' measured performance as he carefully calibrates his words and thoughts. But it is a discomfiture that Egoyan creates slowly, adding (as is his style) bits of information and detail that gradually augment the film's underlying sense of menace and mystery" (Baumgarten, 1999).

### **6.2.4. Comparison of the Novel and Film Adaptations**

The narrative structure and tone of the novel did not transfer fully into the film adaptation. In the book, the chapters alternate between Felicia's and Hilditch's viewpoints, following a more traditional linear approach to storytelling. Furthermore, it is a more self-contained tone that requires the reader to engage more fully with the characters' minds and motives. In contrast, the film is fragmented and non-linear, accentuating its disorienting sense with flashbacks and visions. Increasingly ominous music emphasizes the horror aspects of the film. Another major difference between

the two versions is character depiction. In the novel, Felicity is depicted as a sedately naive girl who is easily put under Hilditch's manipulation.

In the film, Felicia is bolder and more forward, actively seeking Hilditch out and engaging in psychological combat with him. Hilditch is portrayed as a one-dimensional villain with less emphasis on his background and motives. The character of Hilditch loses its layers of complexity and he just seems to be incomplete in terms of development.

Perhaps the most controversial distinction between the novel and film adaptations is the ending where Felicia is thinking about the other girls who were killed: "Egoyan, with his insistence on the importance of Irish oral memory, speaks in an interview of the importance of Felicia's witness to the lost lives of Hilditch's victims.....Trevor makes no claims about a peculiarly Irish cast to the recollection, or indeed to the notion that the postcolonial Irish are peculiarly vulnerable in this English demimonde of the homeless " (Peter 2002, 338).

#### **6.2.5. Significance of the Adaptation**

There are many reasons why the film adaptation of *Felicia's Journey* is important. Above all, it is a significant addition to Irish literature and the film industry. While the novel was written in the mid-1990s, the film adaptation was released in 1999, a time of occurring changes in Irish society and culture. The adaptation can be viewed in the context of its time and provides insights into the cultural anxieties and concerns of late 20th-century life.

Besides its artistic worth, an adaptation of *Felicia's Journey* has cultural and social importance. The story addresses social class, gender, sexuality, violence particular issues and provides a nuanced and empathetic depiction of characters who are frequently marginalised and stigmatised in society. As a result, the adaptation has the potential to challenge and subvert prevalent stereotypes and prejudices, and at the same time bring more sympathetic understanding to viewers.

"*Felicia's Journey*" has been cited as an influence on the neo-noir and psychological thrillers that have emerged since.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In researching the film adaptation of books, it is important to recognise the inherent limitations that determine the scope and applicability of the thesis. There is a prominent subjective element when it comes to adaptations. Every filmmaker who creates an adaptation has his own personal views, experiences and vision for his work there so it's quite difficult to objectively say that adaptation was a success or failure. Despite all efforts to be objective, the diversity of audience reactions leads to a possible bias.

Also, the conclusions drawn in this thesis are bound to a specific time frame, cultural context and country. The dynamic development of literature and film, which is characterised by constantly changing technologies and cultural trends, suggests that these results do not fully capture future developments in this field. Furthermore, the focus on Irish Gothic novels, which are closely associated with Irish culture, puts my analysis in this specific cultural context. At the same time, however, this may limit the generalisability of my findings to a broader international or cultural landscape. These limitations emphasise the need for a nuanced interpretation of my results.

As for future research in this field, thanks to the ever-changing technological landscape, it is no longer limited to film and television. Videogames are starting to be a very complex form of adaptation, which offers an even deeper level of immersion for audiences, than film or television.

### **Summary of Findings**

The result from this thesis shows, that both filmmakers successfully translated the original material into the film medium and kept most of the complexities of these novels, such as gothic elements, psychological complexity, grotesque imagery and atmospheric settings.

A large part of this Bachelor's thesis was dedicated to the two novels from which the adaptations were filmed. This was necessary for a correct understanding of the two adaptations and for presenting the original story and the author's intentions. Without the original material, the filmmakers would have no direction, vision or story.

I felt it necessary to give a big part of this thesis to the books, so the reader could imagine how difficult it is for the filmmakers to adapt such complicated storylines, characters and places correctly.

When it comes to the adaptations themselves, in my opinion, and based on my research, I would say the adaptation of *The Butcher Boy* is a slightly superior adaptation to *Felicia's Journey*. I reason that the adaptation of *Felicia's Journey* loses a lot of ambiguity that is in the book. It tells and shows the viewer too much and it doesn't let the viewer figure out the plot by himself.

The biggest example of this is the character of Mr. Hilditch. In the book, Mr. Hilditch is revealed to be a villain late into the story and it serves as a slow burn of the character because his intentions and motifs are also revealed at the end. In a movie, from the moment a viewer is introduced to Mr. Hilditch, something is amiss. We are shown through the film why he behaves and acts eerie. If I had to speculate, I would say filmmakers did this to simplify the story for the everyday viewer so they can better predict what's going to happen next in the film.

Also, the intensity that is present in the book is dialled down for the movie and it feels like there's something missing. It softens sexual undertones that are more prevalent in the book, Mr. Hilditch's abuse suffered at the hands of his mother and even the ending is not as heavy as it is in the book. This was most likely done for better digestion of the story by the everyday audience and to avoid controversy. I'm not implying that because of this, the film is not a good adaptation, but I would argue that "Butcher Boy" dealt with its original material slightly better.

When it comes to "Butcher Boy", even with its many changes and artistic liberties that filmmakers took, it stands as a complete story that didn't suffer the same fate of being slightly watered down as "Felicia's Journey".

This thesis tried to reflect on the advances of our understanding of the challenges and opportunities when it comes to adaptations but also invites further exploration in the area of gothic literature and its adaptation.



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