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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 2023

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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 with regard to 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 adaptation of literary works into motion pictures has been a common practise for many years, and it has become more widespread in recent years. Adaptation studies have acquired prominence in academia, and numerous studies and discussions have been conducted on the topic (Hutcheon, 2013; Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999). This thesis analyses two Gothic Irish novels, *Felicia's Journey* by William Trevor and *The Butcher Boy* by Patrick McCabe, as well as their respective film adaptations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the difficulties and opportunities inherent in adapting a literary work to film, as well as how these difficulties were addressed in the two film aforementioned adaptations.

The Irish literary tradition has always been diverse, and its influence can be felt around the globe. Irish authors have contributed to the evolution of literature as a whole by producing a vast assortment of works. Some even winning an esteemed Noble Prize. William Trevor and Patrick McCabe are two of the 20th century's most distinguished Irish authors. Their works have been extensively researched and have received worldwide acclaim from critics. Their novels are recognised for their psychological and literary profundity (Duffy, 2008). The darker aspects of human nature are explored in McCabe's works, and his unconventional narrative techniques distinguish his writing style (Murphy, 2011).

*The Butcher Boy* and *Felicia's Journey* are two of the minor masterpieces in Irish literature. Both are Gothic novels that explore the mental and emotional complexities of the human condition. In *Felicia's Journey*, a young Irish woman travels to England in pursuit of the father of her unborn child. *The Butcher Boy* is a disturbing story about a young child who descends into madness after experiencing a sequence of traumatic events. Both novels have been adapted into films, and these adaptations have also garnered praise from critics (Campion, 1999; Jordan, 1997).

The process of adapting a literary work into a film is filled with numerous challenges and opportunities. The difficulties stem from the need to translate the literary elements of the original work into a visual medium.



The opportunities stem from the filmmaker's capacity to enhance and expand the original work (Stam, 2005). Due to its complex themes, intricate narratives, and sombre imagery, Gothic literature in particular presents unique challenges and opportunities for adaptation (Botting, 1996).

This thesis aims to examine how the film adaptations of *Felicia's Journey* and *The Butcher Boy* dealt with these obstacles and opportunities. This thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the adaptation process and its impact on literary and cinematic works by comparing adaptations to original novels.

## **1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter investigates the film adaptations 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, and Irish literature and film.

### **1.1. Adaptation Studies**

Adaptation studies is a multidisciplinary field that examines the adaptation of literary works to other media such as film, television, and the stage. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation entails a transformational and negotiating process between the primary text and the adaptation (Hutcheon, 2006). Adaptation is a type of intertextuality in which the new work references and reworks the older work in numerous ways.

Adaptation studies can be approached from multiple angles, including textual analysis, reception studies, and cultural studies. Thomas Leitch, for example, contends that adaptation should be regarded as a process of interpretation in which the adapter creates a new work that reflects his or her vision and values (Leitch, 2003). Robert Stam argues that adaptation is a cultural practice that reveals the adapters' and their audiences' values and ideologies (Stam, 2005).

## **1.2. Gothic Fiction**

Gothic fiction emerged in the late eighteenth century and is defined by a set of themes, motifs, and conventions. There are supernatural, suspense, terror, romance, madness, as well as sublime components. Reflecting the anxieties and phobias of its historical and cultural contexts, Gothic literature frequently addresses taboo subjects and psychological tensions. *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe are examples of early Gothic novels.

Gothic fiction has been adapted for film, television, and the stage, among other mediums, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Science fiction, fantasy, and romance have also incorporated Gothic elements and themes. According to Fred Botting, the Gothic design reflects a "deep cultural need to explore and represent excluded areas of experience and emotion" (Botting, 1996).

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

In world literature, the Irish literary tradition is known for its distinctive and powerful voice. From the earliest epics like "The Táin" to the works of twentieth century authors like James Joyce, Flann O'Brien and Seamus Heaney, Irish literature has explored the complexities of the Irish experience through themes like identity, memory, and history (Foster, 2001).

The Irish film industry, on the other hand, has a much lesser history but has earned recognition for its distinctive perspective and narrative. Jim Sheridan, Neil Jordan, and Lenny Abrahamson are notable Irish filmmakers. Irish films examine a wide range of topics, including cultural identity, political conflict, and social and economic disparity (Hill, 2018). Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes* have been successfully adapted into films. In addition to introducing the works to new audiences, these adaptations have also presented new interpretations and perspectives (Murray, 2009).

In recent years, Irish literature and film have garnered a growing quantity of attention, particularly regarding contemporary issues and concerns. Immigration, cultural identity, and political conflict have all been explored in Irish literature, which is renowned for its unique perspective on these topics. In addition, Irish film has explored

social and economic inequality, the effects of globalisation, and the legacy of colonialism (Flynn, 2017).

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

One trend in Irish literature and film is the investigation of the influence of British colonial historical and cultural events on Irish society. The history of Ireland is marked by colonisation, political conflict, and religious strife, and these topics have played a significant role in Irish literature and film. The play "Translations" by Brian Friel examines the influence of English colonisation on the Irish language and culture (Kelleher, 2008). Another example is Neil Jordan's "Michael Collins," which tells the narrative of the Irish revolutionary leader and his role in the struggle for Irish independence from Great Britain (Roddy, 2001).

An additional trend in Irish literature and the film is the investigation of cultural identity in relation to national identity. With influences from Celtic mythology, Christianity, and English culture, Ireland has a complex and diverse cultural heritage. Irish literature and film have examined the tensions between these various influences and the effects of globalisation on Irish identity. One example is Sebastian Barry's *A Long Long Way*, which recounts the experiences of an Irish soldier during World War I and his struggle to reconcile his identity as an Irishman with his loyalty to the British Army (O'Toole, 2011).

Irish literature and film have also explored social and economic issues confronting contemporary Irish society. These issues include unemployment, destitution, and emigration, and they have been addressed in works such as Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* and Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall* (Hill, 2018).

## **2 WILLIAM TREVOR**

### **2.1. Biographical Information**

On 24 May 1928, William Trevor was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, Ireland. William Trevor Cox was his complete name, but after dropping his surname, he

adopted the pseudonym Trevor. While attending St. Columba's College in Dublin, Trevor raised a Protestant began to write short stories (Lennon, 2016).

Trevor moved to England in 1950 and continued writing while working as a teacher, editor, and art gallery attendant (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). The publication of his first novel, *A Standard of Behaviour*, in 1958 was followed by the publication of his first collection of short stories, *The Day We Went Drunk on Cake*, in 1960.

Throughout his career, Trevor published a large number of additional novels and collections of short stories, for which he received a large number of accolades and awards. In recognition of his contributions to literature, he was bestowed the Order of the British Empire in 1977 and knighted in 2002.

Growing up in Ireland and spending his later years in England had a significant impact on Trevor's writing. His stories frequently examine displacement, isolation, and the search for identity, as well as the conflicts between social classes (Lennon, 2016). Moreover, he was renowned for his mastery of understated prose and his ability to convey profound emotion and insight through ostensibly simple stories or plots.

His mother was a devout Catholic, while his father was a Church of Ireland (Protestant) convert who later in life converted to Catholicism. Trevor received his education at a Jesuit institution, where he developed a passion for Catholic theology and philosophy. His faith remained central to his life throughout his career, and he frequently discussed the influence of Catholicism on his work.

Trevor remained a private individual who avoided the spotlight throughout his existence. Instead of granting interviews and making public appearances, he usually allowed his work to speak for itself (Lennon, 2016). Trevor passed away on November 20, 2016, at the age of 88, leaving a legacy as one of Ireland's greatest twentieth-century authors (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021).

## **2.2. Writing Style and Themes**

The writing style of Trevor has been described as refined and understated, with an emphasis on character development and interpersonal complexities. In a number of his tales set in small, rural communities, the protagonists struggle to navigate complex social dynamics and personal conflicts such as his novel *The story of Lucy Grants* (Lennon, 2016). In Trevor's work, the tension between the past and the present and the search for identity are recurring themes. Many of his characters are encumbered by their personal histories and the legacies of their families and communities, and they must consider how to move forward despite these obstacles (Griffin, 2017).

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. Moreover, he was 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 (Lennon, 2016). William Trevor's elegant writing style and emphasis on character development have earned him critical acclaim, and his stories frequently investigate the lives of ordinary people in small communities. As characters grapple with personal conflicts and the weight of their personal histories, Trevor's work explores the conflict between the past and the present. The irony and satire he employs to comment on social and political issues adds depth to his writing. Ultimately, Trevor's contribution to literature remains an important component of the Irish and international literary canon.

## **3 PATRICK MCCABE**

### **3.1. Biographical Information**

Patrick McCabe was born in Ireland on March 27, 1955, in Clones, County Monaghan (right at the border between Northern Ireland and The Republic) McCabe grew up in a devoutly Catholic household as the third of seven children (Sheridan, 2017). Before pursuing the study Commerce at University College Dublin, McCabe attended St. Macartan's College in Monaghan. Before leaving to pursue a full-time career in writing, he temporarily worked as an accountant (Sheridan, 2017).

1980 witnessed the publication of McCabe's debut novel, *Music on Clinton Street*. However, it was his third novel, *The Butcher Boy*, published in 1992, that brought him widespread acclaim and recognition (Sheridan, 2017).

In addition to his writing vocation, McCabe has also acted on stage and plays. The effective stage adaptation of his novel *The Butcher Boy* premiered in Dublin in 1992. McCabe has also written several plays that have been performed in Ireland and the United Kingdom, including *Frank Pig Says Greetings* and *The Dead School* which are adopted from his novels (Sheridan, 2017).

The religious beliefs or lack thereof of Patrick McCabe has been a topic of discussion among scholars and detractors. While McCabe has not elaborated on his personal beliefs, his writing reveals a scepticism towards organised religion and an interest in the darker aspects of human nature. In numerous works, McCabe depicts the Catholic Church as an oppressive institution that perpetuates social and cultural norms that stifle individual freedom and creativity (Bourke, 2003). In his 1992 novel *The Butcher Boy*, for instance, the protagonist Francie Brady experiences a crisis of faith after the death of his father and resorts to violence as a means of expressing his frustration and rage towards the Church and society in general (Lyons, 2004).

Similarly, the protagonist of *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), Patrick "Pussy" Braden, opposes the tenets of Catholicism in favour of a gender-fluid identity that challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. The novel examines marginalisation and social exclusion and offers a critique of oppressive power structures that enforce rigorous gender roles and sexual norms (Alvarez, 2009). The historical context of Ireland's relationship with Catholicism shapes McCabe's depiction of religion and its influence on Irish society (Levander and Broe, 2013). Until of the last decade of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church dominated Irish society, exerting considerable influence on social and political matters. Near the end of the twentieth century, however, the Church's authority was challenged by a wave of social and cultural change, such as the rise of feminism, the gay rights movement, and the secularisation of Irish society (Lennon, 1994).

McCabe has received numerous awards and distinctions throughout his tenure, including the Irish Times/Aer Lingus Literature Prize, the Encore Award, and a nomination for the Man Booker Prize.

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

The style of McCabe's writing maybe characterised by its abundant use of grim humour and stream-of-consciousness narration (Sheridan, 2017). His tales frequently feature eccentric and tormented protagonists who are attempt to reconcile past traumas (Dillon, 2013). McCabe's work is also recognised for its investigation of identity, alienation, and the search for life's meaning.

McCabe's use of local vernacular language and dialect, notably in his depictions of working-class Irish communities, is a notable aspect of his writing (Dillon, 2013). This has been compared to Irish authors like James Joyce and Flann O'Brien, but not in excess like Synge's plays.

The effects of violence and trauma on individuals and communities are another recurring motif in McCabe's work. The harsh realities of life in rural Ireland, such as poverty, domestic violence, and substance addiction, are frequently depicted in his novels (Sheridan, 2017)

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

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

The Butcher Boy is a 1992 novel written by Patrick McCabe. The story is set in a small Irish town in the 1960s and chronicles the life of a young boy from a dysfunctional family named Francie Brady. The novel is divided into three sections, each of which represents a distinct period in Francie's existence.

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 him. Francie finds solace in his companionship with Joe Purcell, but his life deteriorates when Joe moves away and his mother passes away. This event causes Francie's

behaviour to escalate downward, resulting in him getting into legal trouble and being sent to a reform school (McCabe 1992, 11-23).

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. He becomes obsessed with Phillipa, but when his advances are rejected, he becomes obsessed with exacting retribution (McCabe 1992, 62-86). Part three sees Francie's mental stability reach its breaking point, and the novel concludes with a violent and tragic denouement (McCabe 1992, 187-200).

*The Butcher Boy* is an intricate and multilayered novel that explores themes of identity, loss, and trauma's effects. Using stream-of-consciousness narration and the unreliable narrator technique, McCabe adds to the story's complexity and generates a sense of psychological tension.

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

Throughout *The Butcher Boy*, gothic elements and themes are present. The novel's location, a small Irish town, induces feelings of claustrophobia and confinement. The town is portrayed as a place of oppression where people are imprisoned and unable to escape their circumstances. The weather contributes to the oppressive atmosphere, with rain and fog heightening the sense of melancholy and despondency (Dixon 2008, 38).

Francie exemplifies numerous gothic cliches, such as the double, the madman, and the outsider. The mental condition of Francie is depicted as unstable, and he is portrayed as an unreliable narrator. The use of stream-of-consciousness narration induces perplexity and disorientation in the reader, mirroring Francie's mental state (Concannon 2013, 92-93).

Additionally, the novel contains gothic themes of violence, trauma, and the supernatural. The violence in the novel is brutal and once graphic, including domestic violence and Francie's murder sequences. The traumatic events Francie endures, such as his mother's suicide and his father's violence and eventual death, contribute to his mental instability and erratic behaviour. The supernatural elements in the novel are



more oblique, but there are glimpses of the unexplainable and supernatural, including UFOs throughout the narrative (McGrath 1995, 70-71).

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

*The Butcher Boy* takes place in Ireland during the 1950s-1960s, a period of significant social and cultural transformation in the country. The novel depicts an impoverished working-class Ireland attempting to adapt to the shifting times. Modernization is eroding the traditional way of life, and the characters in the novel are bound between the traditional and the modern.

The novel also examines the impact of the Troubles, the conflict between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, on ordinary people's lives. The Troubles are not the central theme of the novel, but their presence can be felt throughout the narrative. Francie's mental instability can be viewed as a metaphor for the country's political and social instability at the time.

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

*The Butcher Boy* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize after receiving positive reviews upon publication. The novel is often lauded for its vivid depiction of the Irish working class and its investigation of complex psychological themes.

Literary critics have provided numerous interpretations of the novel. Some have focused on the gothic elements and depictions of mental illness, trauma, and violence in the novel. In his essay "The Gothic in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," Jonathan Nield argues that "McCabe's use of gothic elements reinforces the novel's central themes of insanity, isolation, and violence" (Nield, 2001, p. 104).

Others have studied the social and political commentary of the novel. Maureen O'Connor contends in her article "Ireland's Loss of Innocence: Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*" that the novel "deals with the breakdown of Irish society in the 1960s, which is a metaphor for the breakdown of Irish society in the latter half of the twentieth century" (O'Connor, 2005, p. 150).

*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.

In his review of the novel, Salman Rushdie calls McCabe "a genuine inheritor of Joyce's gift for the dark, dancing music of Irish speech" (Rushdie, 1992, para. 5).

In conclusion, *The Butcher Boy* is a powerful and complex novel that examines themes of identity, trauma, and the effects of societal change. The novel's gothic elements and themes contribute to its psychological tension, and it has been interpreted differently by literary critics. The novel's enduring influence on Irish literature demonstrates its significance and influence.

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

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

The plot centres on Felicia, a young Irish woman who travels to England in pursuit of her lover, Johnny Lysaght. The novel is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on Felicia's journey to England, and the second on her interactions with Mr. Hilditch, a middle-aged catering manager.

Part one introduces Felicia as a naive and innocent young woman in love with a young man from her village, Johnny Lysaght. She travels to England to locate him, only to discover that he 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 it quickly becomes apparent that he harbours nefarious intentions. In a startling and tragic climax, he becomes obsessed with Felicia and begins to manipulate and control her.

The novel examines loss, loneliness, and the perils of naiveté and innocence. Trevor's use of multiple narrators and varying perspectives adds complexity and psychological tension to the story.

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

The novel *Felicia's Journey* contains gothic elements and themes throughout, as Felicia experiences disorientation and bewilderment as a result of the novel's setting, the urban landscape of the foreign city of Birmingham. The city is portrayed as a place of peril and corruption, Birmingham is crowded with seedy characters lurking around every corner and dark alleys.

Mr. Hilditch exemplifies numerous gothic archetypes, such as the double, the madman, and the antagonist. Mr. Hilditch has a respectable public persona and a deviant private persona. He views Felicia as a replacement for his deceased mother, resulting in increasingly erratic and hazardous behaviour.

Additionally, the novel contains gothic themes of violence, trauma, and the surreal house of the antagonist. Mr. Hilditch's manipulation and control of Felicia leads to a startling and tragic climax, while the violence in the novel is subtle but disturbing. The traumatic events Felicia endures, such as the death of her companion and her isolation in a foreign country, contribute to her downfall. There are hints of the supernatural and the mysterious throughout the narrative, but they are more subtle than the other elements.

According to "William Trevor: A Study of His Fiction" by Janis McLarren Caldwell, Trevor's use of gothic elements in *Felicia's Journey* creates "an atmosphere of menace and unease that deepens as the story unfolds" (Caldwell, 2004, p. 109).

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

*Felicia's Journey* is set in the 1990s, a period of profound social and cultural transformation in Ireland and England. The novel depicts an Ireland of the working class that struggles to adapt to the changing times, with many young people leaving for England in quest of better opportunities. The novel also examines the impact of the Troubles on the lives of everyday people, making references to the conflict between Catholic and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

The novel's examination of immigration, displacement, and identity is also influenced by the time's historical and cultural contexts. As noted by critic Michael Kenneally, "The novel captures the sense of displacement and disorientation that many Irish felt as they adjusted to living in England" (Kenneally 183). The Troubles provide a backdrop for Felicia's voyage to England, reflecting the tensions between Ireland and England at this time.

#### **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 Guardian*, Alex Clark notes that "Trevor manages to create a sense of menace and unease that is both immediate and insidious, while also achieving a remarkable tenderness towards his characters." (Clark)

The novel is widely regarded as a gothic masterwork, with elements of the genre permeating the story. The novel's location, a small English town, induces feelings of claustrophobia and suffocation. The town is depicted as a place of darkness, with a "long, narrow and straight" street, that "did not beckon," but rather "seemed to lead into trouble, into danger, into evil." (Trevor, p. 7) The weather exacerbates the oppressive atmosphere, with the rain and fog adding to the sense of melancholy and despair.

Mr. Hilditch exemplifies numerous gothic archetypes, such as the double and the madman. Mr. Hilditch is portrayed as an unreliable narrator whose mental state is unstable. He is described as having "the look of someone who had been touched by something that wasn't normal" (Trevor, p. 67), and his actions throughout the novel are disturbing and unsettling. Though the neglect as a child is depicted in the film.

In addition to gothic themes of violence, trauma, and the supernatural, the novel also contains elements of gothic literature. The violence in the novel is subtle but ever-present, and peril looms over each scene. Felicia's exposure to traumatic events, such as an unintended pregnancy and the death of her family, contributes to her vulnerability and isolation. There are glimpses of the uncanny and the supernatural throughout the story.

In addition to being praised for its investigation of gender, power, and identity, Felicia's Journey has also been praised for its exploration of these themes. Writing for *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani remarked that "Trevor's novel is a subtle examination of power, and of the way in which those who have it can manipulate those who do not." (Kakutani) Felicia and Mr. Hilditch both struggle to connect with others in a meaningful manner in the novel, which also explores themes of loneliness and isolation.

## **6 THE FILM ADAPTATIONS**

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

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

*The Butcher Boy* is adapted by Neil Jordan with several modifications to the source material. The film's emphasis on Francie's mental state is a significant difference. 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 sequences not present in the novel are included in the film, such as the dream sequence in which Francie imagines himself as a superhero.

The use of visual symbolism to convey Francie's emotional state is another noteworthy adaptation choice. The recurring image of the Virgin Mary, for instance, symbolises Francie's desire for a maternal figure and his profound Catholic remorse. As critic John P. McCarthy notes, "Jordan deploys a wide array of visual metaphors, the most prominent of which is the Virgin Mary. Jordan uses the Virgin's image to evoke the sacred aura that informs Francie's obsession with sin, sex, and redemption" (McCarthy, 1998, para. 5).

As Bruckner and D'Alessio (2016) note, "The Virgin Mary becomes a stand-in for Francie's mother, and her image takes on a multitude of associations: a figure of innocence, a symbol of repression, a sign of unattainable purity." Complex and multilayered symbolism is a typical Gothic technique that contributes to the film's uncanny and unsettling atmosphere.

Several gothic elements and motifs contribute to *The Butcher Boy's* eerie and atmospheric tone. The film's investigation of madness, isolation, and violence recalls gothic literature, which frequently explores the darker aspects of the human psyche.

The depiction of Francie's descent into lunacy is a gothic aspect of the film. According to Williams (2018), the film's depiction of Francie's mental collapse evokes gothic literature's investigation of the darker aspects of the human psyche. Francie's hallucinations, violent eruptions, and general instability are all indicative of the gothic tradition's examination of insanity and mental illness.

In addition to Francie's mental state, the film's setting features other gothic elements. The film's setting, a small town in rural Ireland, is a classic gothic trope that conjures feelings of isolation and claustrophobia. According to Rye (2016), the setting of the film is "a small town with narrow streets and dwellings with their backs against the mountain... [which] reinforces the sense of isolation and oppression." This sense of isolation and confinement is prevalent in gothic literature and is used to create a spooky and unsettling atmosphere. The film is set and was filmed in the novel's author's home town, just below the border to Northern Ireland.

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

There are several gothic elements and themes in *The Butcher Boy*, including insanity, isolation, and violence. The film's portrayal of Francie's mental breakdown evokes gothic literature's investigation of the darker aspects of the human psyche. In addition to being a classic gothic trope, the film's location, a small town in rural Ireland, evokes feelings of isolation and claustrophobia. As critic Desson Howe notes, "The film, with its small-town setting, dark humour, and hallucinatory imagery, is reminiscent of a classic Gothic novel" (Howe, 1998, para. 4). The film's use of visual symbolism, such as the repeated appearance of the Virgin Mary, is also a typical gothic device.

The examination of Catholic remorse and sin contributes to the film's gothic atmosphere. As critic Susan Tavernetti comments, "Jordan uses religious iconography to heighten the Gothic mood, including a haunting image of the Virgin Mary that follows Francie throughout the film, underscoring his need for spiritual guidance" this text too Several gothic elements and motifs contribute to *The Butcher Boy's* eerie and

atmospheric tone. The film's investigation of madness, isolation, and violence recalls gothic literature, which frequently explores the darker aspects of the human psyche.

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

Critics and audiences alike praised *The Butcher Boy* for its bold and daring approach to a problematic subject upon its initial release. The film was lauded for its strong acting, innovative cinematography, and sensitive treatment of the themes of mental illness and trauma (Jordan, 1997).

Numerous critics remarked on the film's exploration of the complex relationship between Catholicism and Irish identity and how this relationship affects the characters' experiences. The film was also praised for its unflinching depiction of the effects of poverty and social exclusion on the lives of Irish youth (Higson, 2003).

*The Butcher Boy* won several prestigious 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 (IMDb, n.d.; Jordan, 1997).

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 (Brewer, 2010; Higson, 2003).

The film has been praised for its use of Gothic clichés and subversion of conventional horror film narratives. The combination of the film's use of humour and satire with its investigation of serious themes has also been the subject of much critical analysis by academics (Brewer, 2010; Higson, 2003).

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

The novel and film adaptations of *The Butcher Boy* share many similarities in terms of plot and characters. Francie Brady, a troubled young child who becomes increasingly violent as he struggles to overcome life's obstacles, is the protagonist in both versions of the story. However, there are substantial differences between the two adaptations.

The depiction of Francie's mental state in the novel differs significantly from that in the film. In the novel, Francie's mental illness is depicted in detail through his narration, whereas in the film, it is conveyed primarily through visual cues, such as Francie's changing facial expressions and body language. The narrative's structure is another crucial distinction. 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.

Despite these differences, both adaptations of *The Butcher Boy* share a similar tone and ambience. Both versions of the story are sardonic and darkly humorous, examining themes of violence, mental illness, and the challenges of growing up in a small Irish town.

#### **6.1.5. Significance of the Adaptations**

In the context of Irish literature and film, *The Butcher Boy's* adaptations are significant. The novel has been praised for its innovative style and its portrayal of the complexities of Irish identity, whereas the film has been praised for its forceful performances and its visually arresting portrayal of Francie's mental state. The adaptations are also a valuable case study for studying adaptation itself. By comparing and contrasting the novel and film adaptations of *The Butcher Boy*, we can gain insight into how different mediums approach the task of adaptation, as well as the difficulties and opportunities that arise as a result.

In conclusion, *The Butcher Boy's* adaptations illustrate the relationship between source material and adaptation in a rich and complex manner. By employing adaptation theories and concepts, we can gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between the novel and film adaptations of the story, as well as their significance within the context of Irish literature and film.

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

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

Fidelity criticism evaluates how faithfully an adaptation adheres to the source material. This includes plot, character, theme, and style accuracy. Intertextuality



investigates the relationship between the source text and other texts, including cultural references, genre conventions, and intertextual allusions (Hutcheon, 2006).

By employing these concepts to the analysis of *Felicia's Journey*, we can better comprehend the ways in which the film adaptation adheres to and departs from the novel. For instance, the film adaptation preserves many of the novel's themes, such as the search for love and the dangers of placing one's trust in the incorrect person, while also incorporating its own distinctive visual and auditory elements that enhance the emotional impact of the story (Hutcheon, 2006).

Additionally, *Felicia's Journey's* adaptation has significant implications for Irish literature and film. The adaptation of William Trevor's novel into a critically acclaimed film has contributed to the promotion of Irish cultural identity and artistic accomplishments. In addition, the success of the film adaptation demonstrates the viability of Irish literature as a source of inspiration for international filmmakers, potentially paving the way for future collaborations between Irish authors and filmmakers, since the previous adaptation of Joyce and other writers were failures at the box office (Tóibín, 2017).

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

The film delves into the depths of the human psyche and unravels Felicia's inner turmoil as she embarks on a quest for love. Her psychological journey becomes a canvas for the film's gothic undertones, reflecting tradition's fascination with the darker recesses of the mind.

Visual symbolism becomes a powerful gothic device, with recurring symbols adding to the film's mysterious aura. Closely interwoven with Felicia's journey, these symbols serve to emphasise her inner struggles and add supernatural undertones to the narrative. Religious undertones further enhance the gothic atmosphere as Felicia grapples with themes of sin, repentance and spiritual longing. The interplay between religious iconography and Felicia's search for redemption makes the film more complex and places it within the Gothic tradition's exploration of the supernatural and its moral consequences.

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

The responses from the audience exhibited a diverse range of perspectives, reflecting the intricate narrative and intellectually stimulating themes inherent in the film.

Viewers interacted with the gothic elements, including psychological exploration and visual symbolism, in a manner that varied among individuals. Certain individuals have commended the film for its nuanced portrayal of the human psyche, while others have found the gothic elements disconcerting, contributing to a pervasive sense of unease. Critics have assumed a pivotal role in elucidating the interpretation of *Felicia's Journey*. Scholars have delved into the film's correlation with the broader Gothic tradition and its adept utilization of cinematic techniques.

Favourable critiques commend the film for its seamless integration of psychological suspense and gothic aesthetics, drawing parallels to classical gothic literature.

Conversely, some critics have voiced reservations regarding the film's employment of gothic elements, pinpointing moments of ambiguity as potential drawbacks. This discourse beckons us to scrutinize the intentional ambiguity within the film and its consequential impact on the audience.

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

Felicia, an Irish teenager becomes pregnant and travels to England to locate the father of her child, as well as her encounter with the mysterious and charismatic Hilditch, who is later revealed to be a serial killer. (Giddings, 2011).

The narrative structure and tone of the novel and film adaptations differ substantially. The novel's chapters alternate between Felicia's and Hilditch's perspectives and have a more conventional, linear structure. Additionally, the tone is more introspective and reflective, allowing the reader to delve more thoroughly into the characters' thoughts and motivations.

In contrast, the film adaptation is fragmented and non-linear, with flashbacks and dream sequences creating a more surreal and disorienting environment. The story's increasingly menacing and ominous tone accentuates the horror elements.

Another significant distinction between the two adaptations is the primary characters' characterization and backstory. Felicia is portrayed in the novel as a naive and innocent

girl who is easily manipulated by Hilditch, while Hilditch is portrayed as a complex and nuanced character with a troubled past and a desire for companionship. Felicia is more autonomous and assertive in the film, actively pursuing Hilditch and engaging in psychological combat with him. In contrast, Hilditch is portrayed as a one-dimensional antagonist with less emphasis on his background and motivations. Perhaps the most controversial distinction between the novel and film adaptations is the conclusion. Without divulging any spoilers, it is safe to say that the film's conclusion diverges significantly from that of the novel, eliciting mixed reactions from audiences and critics. The novel and film adaptations of *Felicia's Journey* have the same fundamental plot and characters, but they differ significantly in narrative structure, tone, characterisation, and conclusion. These distinctions reflect the creative decisions made by the respective authors and directors, as well as the diverse expectations of the audiences for each medium.

#### **6.2.5. Significance of the Adaptations**

In multiple respects, the adaptations of *Felicia's Journey* are significant. They are first and foremost significant contributions to Irish literature and film. The 1994 novel is regarded as a modern classic of Irish literature for its exploration of identity, memory, and trauma within the context of Irish history and culture. The 1999 film adaptation is equally acclaimed, receiving a number of nominations and awards for its direction, screenplay, and performances.

In addition to their artistic merit, the adaptations of *Felicia's Journey* have cultural and social significance. The narrative addresses class, gender, sexuality, and violence, and provides a nuanced and empathetic depiction of characters who are frequently marginalised and stigmatised in society. As a result, the adaptations have the potential to challenge and subvert prevalent stereotypes and prejudices, as well as promote greater audience understanding and empathy.

Furthermore, the adaptations of *Felicia's Journey* have had an enduring influence on subsequent literary and cinematic works (Giddings, 2011). The novel has spawned numerous adaptations and translations in various languages and media, and the film has been cited as an influence on the neo-noir and psychological thriller genres.

Furthermore, the themes and motifs explored in the adaptations, such as trauma, memory, and the quest for identity, continue to resonate with contemporary audiences and artists, attesting to *Felicia's Journey's* enduring relevance and power as an artistic and cultural touchstone.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In researching the film adaptation of Irish Gothic novels, it is important to recognise the inherent limitations that determine the scope and applicability of the thesis. There is a subjective element to my analysis, as the interpretation of both literary and cinematic works is influenced by individual perspectives, cultural backgrounds and personal preferences.

Despite all efforts to be objective, the diversity of audience reactions leads to a possible bias. The conclusions drawn in this thesis are bound to a specific time frame and cultural context. 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, enriches our analysis in this specific cultural context. At the same time, however, this may limit the generalisability of our findings to a broader international or cultural landscape.

These limitations emphasise the need for a nuanced interpretation of our results and highlight possible avenues for future research to address these limitations more comprehensively.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this thesis, I have examined the nuanced world of William Trevor and Patrick McCabe's Irish gothic novel adaptations, focusing on *Felicia's Journey* and *The Butcher Boy*. The results show a successful translation of gothic elements from literature to film, demonstrating the filmmakers' skill in capturing atmospheric settings, psychological complexity and grotesque imagery.

Examining the challenges of adapting literary works emphasises the delicate balance required to remain faithful to the original text while meeting the demands of the visual medium. Creative strategies such as visual symbolism and innovative narrative techniques were used by filmmakers as key tools to overcome these challenges.

The interplay between adaptation and film studies emphasised the importance of intertextuality and the dynamic role of the audience in the interpretation of adaptations. The comparative analysis highlighted both the similarities and differences between the novels and their cinematic equivalents, demonstrating the adaptability of the gothic genre while allowing for creative liberties that enhanced the visual and emotional impact.

The thesis reflected in this summary not only advances our understanding of the intricacies of adaptation, but also invites further exploration in the areas of gothic literature, film adaptation and the intersection of cultural representation and narrative.

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