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## “Fremd bin ich eingezogen...” – An Outsider’s Vision of Ireland in Urszula Antoniak's *Nothing Personal*

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**Abstract.** The following essay analyses Urszula Antoniak's film *Nothing Personal* with a view to determining how the Irish-Dutch co-production engages with previously defined ways of understanding Ireland. The film acknowledges the long tradition of representing the country as modernity's other by drawing strongly on romantic myths about Ireland. At the same time, however, it subtly undermines the authenticity of the vision it presents and foregrounds the projections which are at work in its construction. As the film alludes to and eventually disrupts generic conventions, the foreign can be seen to explode any simplistic formula and elude the grasp of myth. Ultimately, *Nothing Personal* aims to situate the othering of Ireland in a wider context and to draw attention to a recurring pattern in European approaches to foreignness.

**Key Words.** *Nothing Personal* (Antoniak 2009), romanticism, myth of the west, Irish co-productions, romantic comedy, horror film, *Winterreise* (Schubert and Müller).

**Resumen.** El presente ensayo analiza la película *Nothing Personal* de Urszula Antoniak con el objetivo de determinar cómo dicha coproducción entre Irlanda y Holanda retoma, modifica o descarta previas representaciones de Irlanda. La película reconoce la larga tradición de representar el país como ‘la otra cara de la modernidad’, retomando los mitos románticos sobre Irlanda. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo cuestiona sutilmente la autenticidad de la visión que presenta y pone de relieve las proyecciones que constituyen esta visión. A medida que la película alude a convenciones genéricas para acabar descartándolas, se puede observar como lo foráneo rehuye fórmulas simplistas y no encaja en los mitos. En última instancia, *Nothing Personal* pretende situar la ‘exotización’ de Irlanda en un contexto más amplio e incidir en un patrón común en los modos de enfocar la otredad en Europa.

**Palabras clave.** *Nothing Personal* (Urszula Antoniak 2009), romanticismo, mito del oeste, coproducciones irlandesas, comedia romántica, película de terror, *Winterreise* (Schubert y Müller).

In the 2010 issue of *Estudios Irlandeses*, Tony Tracy (2010: 206) has questioned the centrality of European co-productions – among them Urszula Antoniak's *Nothing Personal* – to a discussion of Irish national cinema. After all, these films generally present an outsider's perspective on Ireland, despite the often considerable Irish input in terms of setting, actors and finances. In the case of *Nothing*

*Personal*, this input includes not only the contribution of Irish production companies but also Connemara as the film's main setting and the prominent Irish actor Stephen Rea. Nonetheless, films like *Nothing Personal* belong to a tradition in which Ireland and its inhabitants have been represented rather than representing themselves. All too often, these visions of Ireland have failed to challenge and

instead perpetuated already existing myths. With reference to film adaptations of Irish literary works, Sean Ryder has already alerted to the danger of “alternate – and what might riskily be called ‘native’ – ways of understanding Ireland [being] entirely obscured” (1998: 120), as Hollywood-style productions invariably reduce Ireland to the role of modernity's other. *Nothing Personal*, however, proves to be a positive exception in the sense that it is conscious of its own background as a European co-production and reflects critically upon its work of representation. While the legacy of romanticism is obviously present in the film, *Nothing Personal* manages to undermine its claim to authenticity and to subvert conventional images of Irishness.

Antoniak's film starts out from a conventional premise of romantic comedies: Anne, a young Dutchwoman, leaves behind her unfulfilling life and travels to a foreign country, where she discovers alternative values and establishes a close relationship with Martin, one of the locals. As Rosa González points out, several recent films have chosen Ireland as the destination of these “spiritually recuperative trips” (2010). In the case of *Nothing Personal*, the setting has been limited to Connemara – an unusual decision, as the director has argued in an interview, because the studios are located in County Wicklow and the conditions for filming in Connemara were far from ideal (Antoniak 2009). These disadvantages are however easily compensated for by the symbolical weight of the setting. Under the influence of English romanticism the region has persistently been associated with rurality and a frugal yet spiritually wealthy lifestyle, which could serve as an antidote to the evils of modernity (Duffy 1997: 67-69). The myth of the west has been revived as late as 1990 by Jim Sheridan's *The Field*, and *Nothing Personal* does not hesitate to avail itself of these associations. From the beginning the film therefore establishes a direct opposition between Continental Europe and Ireland: while the former is presented as being urban, modern, materialist and marked by a feeling of alienation, the latter is characterised by rurality, a pre-industrial lifestyle, spiritual values and a sense of being in harmony with one's self and the immediate surroundings. As

the plot thus develops from a conflict between ‘the modern’ and ‘the traditional’, *Nothing Personal* might be said to be based on “a structuring matrix of capitalist ideology” (Ryder 1998: 122). Between urban Continental Europe and rural Ireland lies the transitional zone of the motorway, which still offers some hints as to the time of the plot: the windmills at least seem to suggest that the film is set in the present. As soon as the character fully enters the second space, however, the markers of contemporaneity become fewer, while activities such as the cutting of turf give the impression that the action takes place in the past. Not even the radio, the only type of media featuring in the film, provides references to social, political or economic events which might help locate the action at a specific point in time but reports exclusively on sports and music.

Just as the Ireland of *Nothing Personal* is decidedly atemporal, its landscape and characters are divested of individuality and highly symbolically charged. Information relating to their past is remarkably scarce – to the point that for most of the film, the viewers do not even know the characters' names. They are certainly archetypes, as Urszula Antoniak says; but rather than seeing in them the “eternal rebel” and the “old sage” (Antoniak 2009), I would like to suggest that they represent the two oppositions outlined above: the modern Continental European subject and its projected other. Following the romantic tradition, which has dominated literary and cinematic representations of Ireland for centuries (Duffy 1997: 66-69), the landscape is used as a screen on which the female protagonist projects her desires and needs. *Nothing Personal* thus partakes of the strand of ‘soft primitivism’, which Luke Gibbons (after Panofsky) has identified in filmic representations of Ireland (1988: 198-199). This tendency manifests itself in the film's depiction of subsistence agriculture: *Nothing Personal* deliberately omits to show the precarious economic situation resulting from this form of agriculture and instead idealises it as a supposedly original way of living in harmony with nature. Although the work is physically very demanding, the female protagonist seems to perceive it mainly as a form of rediscovering her sensuality: while she is supposed to work

in the garden, she is repeatedly shown just running her hands through the seaweed, enjoying its texture. Besides, nature in *Nothing Personal* provides abundantly for the protagonists, even though the soil on the west coast of Ireland is not particularly known for its fertility. The meals which the lonely widower prepares for himself and his farm hand every day are therefore able to compete with those of high-class restaurants: freshly caught lobster is only one of the delicacies which nature offers them.

The influence of soft primitivism as a “pre-eminently ... *social* vision” (Gibbons 1988: 201) also serves to explain the presence of the pub scene, which contrasts strongly with the otherwise solitary and isolated life of the male protagonist. While the scene at first glance appears to be unmotivated and disruptive, it makes sense when considered as the counterpart of the film's initial scene, which establishes the position of the female protagonist in modern society. The beginning of the film centres on materialism as the driving force of this society, as people are shown scavenging Anne's belongings without consideration for the feelings of the former owner. The fact that the camera does not focus on individual faces but on hands invariably tugging on things creates a feeling of anonymity and alienation, which increases as the camera adopts the point of view of the female protagonist: the viewer then gets to see the people from the upper floors of a nearby building and is separated from them by a window pane. Against this urban dystopia *Nothing Personal* posits the pub scene as a vision of an ideal community. In an overly eager attempt to emphasise the contrast between the two scenes, the latter is made to include numerous close-ups of talking or laughing faces. The foreign visitor is immediately drawn into this warm-hearted community by the music of a traditional band, to whose tunes she improvises a rather wild dance. By combining the setting and the soundtrack of the scene with references to excessive drinking, *Nothing Personal* sketches a stereotypical image of Irish culture and conforms to the formulaic plot line of the type of romantic comedies outlined above. Rosa González has analysed the different elements that make up their plot and has argued that “in the majority of the cases, the turning point in

the romance ... of the protagonists ... comes in a rather banal way when they loose all their inhibitions under the influence of alcohol and/or a wild Irish dance” (2010). *Nothing Personal* seems to correspond to this pattern as the scene marks a change in Anne's relationship with the older man and in her general attitude: it is only under the influence of alcohol that she actively seeks physical contact with him; and it is from this moment on that she begins to open up and even consciously violates her self-imposed rule not to talk about anything personal.

It has already been observed that the conviviality of the pub scene contrasts with the isolation and loneliness which characterise both the everyday life of the male protagonist and Anne's journey. For most of the film the two characters are seen to be moving through a depopulated and rugged, uncultivated landscape under an overcast sky. The Ireland the viewer is presented with in these scenes bears no resemblance to the version perceived through the lens of soft primitivism: nature, which before appeared so bountiful, suddenly seems indifferent or even hostile. Frequently, the camera zooms out so as to make the characters disappear into the vast landscape. Against the background of looming mountains or the expanse of the sea and sky, they appear disturbingly inconsequential and vulnerable.<sup>2</sup>

*Nothing Personal's* depiction of the individual in nature thus also echoes what Luke Gibbons (after Panofsky) has termed ‘hard primitivism’ (Gibbons 1988: 200-202). Its influence is especially obvious in the scene which shows the two characters collecting seaweed: it immediately brings to mind a similar sequence in Jim Sheridan's *The Field* – in fact, it almost seems to be a homage to this other major exponent of hard primitivism.

In the context of the film's engagement with hard primitivism, drunkenness begins to be more than a signifier of Irishness and comes to be associated with the visitor's attempts to neutralise the influence of society and his or her desire for “a clear transparent vision free from all traces of mediation” (Gibbons 1988: 202). As the characters are said to “loose all their inhibitions under the influence of alcohol”

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1. Robert J. Flaherty had used the same technique to great effect in his *Man of Aran* (1934).

(González 2010), the films seem to belong to a tradition of literary and cinematic representations of drunkenness which stress that in becoming drunk, individuals go beyond social conventions and reveal their 'true selves'. At the same time, intoxication is presented as a way of expanding their consciousness and endowing them with visionary perception. Nicholas Warner has traced the origins of these positive depictions of drunkenness back to British romanticism, among other traditions of thought (Warner 1997: 4-5). In *Nothing Personal*, this interpretation of intoxication is foregrounded by the fact that the film ascribes excessive drinking primarily to the foreign visitor, who gets herself drunk to the point of being hardly able to walk without assistance. Although the people in the pub seem to approve of her behaviour as they cheer her on, excessive drinking is not presented as an exclusive feature of Irish culture but as motivated by the foreigner's attempt to overcome the alienating forces of modern society.

In the attempt to limit social mediation and to achieve a realist effect, the visitors in romantic literature go as far as to renounce language in the representation of their experiences, as Gibbons has observed (1988: 205). While drunken speech of itself often already defies linguistic conventions, the characters in *Nothing Personal* have yet another way of signifying authenticity without giving up on language altogether: they revert to Irish Gaelic. There are in fact only few instances in the film in which the Gaelic language is used: once on the walk home after the night at the pub, and again when the male protagonist confesses his love in a letter after his death. On both occasions, the denotation of the Gaelic phrases cannot be understood by Anne and is even dismissed by her as irrelevant: in the first case, she attributes the failure of communication in Gaelic not to her own deficient language skills but to the supposed drunkenness of the speaker. In the second, this attitude is validated by the fact that the male protagonist adds an English translation to communicate his feelings. The only function the language then seems to have is to give the speaker and what he communicates in English the connotation of sincerity and authenticity. In the eyes of the

foreign visitor Irish Gaelic is reduced to a mere complement of English, a primitive system of signs which is limited to one meaning and cannot be used in complex social, economic or political interactions.

The fact that the film fails to consider social and political dimensions is most apparent in its treatment of violence. Throughout *Nothing Personal* violence is latently present and manifests itself repeatedly in sudden, unpredictable outbursts. The viewer is confronted with it for the first time in the transitional zone of the road, when a driver assaults Anne sexually. While she manages to escape and scare off the first aggressor, the attacks continue as she moves on, and subvert the image of Ireland as a rural paradise. The pattern of the aggressor being male and the victim female is never disrupted and the gender hierarchy consolidated as Anne loses any power of agency: in contrast to the first attack, she submits quietly to Martin's violent behaviour and suffers herself to be thrown into the mud, threatened and shot at with a rifle and hit in the face with a dead rabbit. Against this background one cannot help but wonder how Antoniuk can still talk about her female protagonist being a strong character (2009). As violence breaks out in the rural idyll, *Nothing Personal* moves away from the genre of the romantic comedy and adopts the darker tones of the horror film. When Martin threatens Anne by saying that no-one would find her if something happened to her, he seems about to reveal himself to be the stock character of the psychopathic serial killer, who lures his young, innocent and often female victims into the middle of nowhere to mistreat them. Similar perversions of the spiritually recuperative trip to Ireland can be found in several recent horror films (González 2010). The idealisation of the other which is a typical feature of the romantic comedy is thus countered by a view of the foreign as an illogical and dangerous force which threatens the modern Continental European self.

*Nothing Personal* does not explore the conventions of the horror film further – but neither does it attempt to explain violence in terms of social or political conditions. Instead, it seeks its origins in nature. As two of Martin's attacks take place while he is hunting, the film suggests a close connection between gendered

violence and this second form of violence, which is sanctioned as a means of surviving in nature. The references to hunting, an activity which humankind has engaged in since it first existed, seem to argue that violence is inherent in human beings and an integral part of the original lifestyle upheld in rural Ireland. In its depiction of gendered violence, Antoniak's film strongly resembles John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), which shows the male protagonist dragging his wife out of a train in order to prevent her from leaving him, while the villagers look on approvingly and even the woman herself does not seem to object to being thus 'corrected'. By drawing an analogy between the two forms of violence, *Nothing Personal* trivialises gendered violence and makes it appear permissible. At the same time, violence is attributed to human nature and effectively depoliticised. The film contains only one object to challenge this reading of violence: a medal from World War II, which Anne finds in her employer's coat. The choice of this item to represent political violence is unusual in an Irish context, because the Irish Republic remained officially neutral during World War II.<sup>2</sup> Its inclusion therefore seems to be motivated by the fact that the event occupies a central place in the collective memory of Continental Europeans. Once again, the defining moment of the relationship turns out to be the concerns of the foreign visitor.

Romanticism as a source of inspiration for *Nothing Personal* is most obvious in the recurring references to the song cycle *Winterreise* by Wilhelm Müller and Franz Schubert. Throughout the film, the female protagonist repeatedly listens to or sings brief passages of the first song entitled "Gute Nacht"; besides, the movie takes up various motifs of Müller's lyrics and thus establishes parallels between Anne's journey through Ireland and the solitary journey of the wanderer. The journey of both protagonists is motivated by the failure of a love relationship, which alienates them from society and prompts

them to question the sense of the life they have lived so far. Both travellers set out alone and wander through a landscape which reflects their own psychological state: the desolate natural surroundings and the inhospitable climate give the viewer or listener an impression of unfulfillment and vulnerability. Untypically for wander songs, Müller's wanderer begins his journey in winter rather than in spring. Through this departure from the tradition, however, the course of the seasons parallels the development of his love relationship: as the listener learns in the first song, the relationship seems to have begun in spring and come to an end in winter, when the wanderer decides to leave. May thus does not only mark the reawakening of nature but also the period of courtship, which are both connected in the image of the flower bouquet (Schubert and Müller 1985). These parallels suggest that human life and relationships share with nature a cyclical character, although the wanderer himself rejects the idea of a new beginning and installs himself in state of utter hopelessness and despair. However, as he highlights the feeling of being a stranger which accompanied both his arrival and his departure, he also establishes a link between the two states of the relationship, the two times of the year and his own self now and then. Rather than being a reason for hope – because everything continues and nothing ever disappears –, the cyclical nature of things causes frustration.

Interestingly, the movie takes up this concept of the circularity of human affairs, as it is divided into different chapters with the titles "loneliness", "the end of a relationship", "marriage", "the beginning of a relationship" and "alone". Read in reversed order, they relate the development of a relationship in extremely condensed form. As such, they also bear some relation to the plot of the film, which chronicles the relationship between the female and the male protagonist, although, of course, marriage does not take place. Most importantly, however, the semantic and phonetic similarity between the first and the last title create a link between the initial and the final stages of the development, transforming it into a circle. In fact, the last scenes, which show Anne lying in bed in a sparsely furnished hotel room, listening to the conversations and songs of the people outside the balcony door, recall the beginning of the movie, when the viewer has seen her watching the people on the street from

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2. Although tens of thousands of Irish civilians signed up to fight in the British Army alongside 5,000 Irish soldiers who switched uniforms, the contribution of the former has been long ignored and the latter were blacklisted and severely penalised.

the window of her empty apartment. Like the wanderer of the *Winterreise*, she seems to have set out on a never ending journey, in which fulfillment and closure are continually deferred. By opting for a cyclical structure, *Nothing Personal* refuses to comply with “modernity's narrative of progress” (Ryder 1998: 128). As the captions are neither related to the episodes preceding or following them nor arranged in chronological order, their comment on the plot is only revealed at the end of the movie. For its duration, they serve to create an alienation effect, as they disrupt the filmic narrative and cause the viewer to wonder about their relation to what he or she has just seen. In contrast to the seeming immediacy of the visual images, the captions make the viewers aware of the mediated nature and the possibilities for manipulation and distortion this entails, such as the reversal of the chronological order.

The fact that the intermedial references to the *Winterreise* do not just include the repetition of certain motifs but also self-conscious recitals by the female protagonist confronts the viewer with the question of whether this is not a conscious act of self-stylisation on her part. She seems to coquet with the figure of the lonely romantic wanderer and thus also displays a certain ironic distance from him. This distance becomes most obvious when she begins to open up to her employer: as she has violated her self-imposed rule not to ask personal questions, she chooses to recite a passage of the song “Gute Nacht”. The lines, in which the lyrical I laments the harsh conditions and his utter loneliness and lack of support, could not be further from her actual situation, in which she is sharing a luxurious meal with the male protagonist. In a way, the film recreates this ironic distance by conflating the romantic song cycle, which has become part of the canon of ‘high culture’ and is remarkable for its mood of despair, with the cinematic genre of the romantic comedy, which belongs to popular culture and generally deals with a much lighter – not to say trivial – subject matter.

While *Nothing Personal* draws strongly on romantic views of Ireland, it cannot be dismissed as an uncritical repetition of the same old stereotypes. Instead of countering them with the realities of life in modern Ireland, the film seeks to destabilise the myths by exposing their artificiality and the fact that they originate

in the needs of the modern subject. In doing so, it puts into practice the suggestions made by Luke Gibbons, who argues that “it is not so much realism which offers a way out of the impasse of myth and romanticism, but rather a *questioning* of realism or any mode of representation which seeks to deny the gap between image and reality” (1988: 200). The film itself undermines the image of Ireland it presents by attributing stock signifiers of Irishness to the foreign protagonist instead of the Irish characters. In Ford's *The Quiet Man*, the character of the beautiful red-haired young woman is still Irish and embodies the romantic ideal of a simple yet fulfilling pre-modern lifestyle in harmony with nature. However, Ford's film explicitly questions the authenticity of this character and the vision of Ireland she represents, as the protagonist comments her first appearance with the words: “Is that real? *She* couldn't be!” (Gibbons 1988: 200). *Nothing Personal* adopts this approach by transferring the visual characteristics of the iconic Irish Colleen to a Dutchwoman. Apart from that, Anne also shares the former's close association with nature: she is mostly shown outside, hiking or working in an unspoilt landscape. This connection reaches its climax when she claims that it is her breath rather than the wind which animates the landscape: her claim to supernatural powers and her mystical identification with the landscape seem to make her another version of Erin, the Celtic goddess representing Ireland. At the same time, her being a foreigner highlights the inauthenticity of these connotations of women, the nation and the land. Apart from Anne's similarities with the Irish Colleen and Erin, the film also establishes parallels between its female protagonist and other figures of Celtic mythology, namely the fairies. Initially, Anne refuses to dine with her employer but instead insists upon his placing her meal on a tray outside the house – an unusual arrangement which immediately brings to mind the custom of putting out food as an offer to the fairies or ‘little people’.

Yet the female protagonist of *Nothing Personal* does not just embody icons of Celtic mythology but also central figures of Catholicism. Whereas other films show a proliferation of statues of the Virgin Mary adorning the countryside, references to religion

are largely absent from *Nothing Personal*. This absence is all the more striking because the protagonist's journey is an explicitly spiritual one and Ireland has cast itself for a long time as a Catholic country. As there is no space which the protagonist could turn to with her spiritual needs, she begins to project them onto the empty countryside: instead of chapels or grottos, the viewer is offered Anne herself – sitting in front of her tent and enveloped in a blue blanket – as a kind of self-made madonna. The film thus shows an Irish landscape peopled largely by the projections of the foreign visitor. As neither the figures of Celtic mythology nor the Irish Colleen or the Virgin Mary are presented as existing independently of the foreign visitor, it becomes obvious to what extent this vision of Ireland is constructed by her.

This point is emphasised by the fact that the vision changes markedly depending on whether she is alone or in the company of others. The film features a succession of scenes which exemplifies this change: in the first one, the viewers see Anne walking on a small path in the forest, followed by her future employer. The leaves of the trees surrounding her are dripping wet and the dominating colours are dark shades of green and brown, establishing a rather gloomy and uncomfortable atmosphere. After the conversation has ended, the female protagonist turns around to make sure that no-one is watching her and then steps off the path. In the next scene, she is shown entering a clearing. The change from a path in the forest to an open space and from company to utter solitude is made all the more striking as it is accompanied by a complete reversal of the atmosphere: the clearing is full of sunlight and the colours have become much brighter. This rapid and unexpected transition might of course be attributed to the Irish weather, which is notorious for its changeability – and yet it is undoubtedly also reminiscent of Alice stepping into Wonderland, leaving the well-trodden paths of reality and entering a parallel world all of her own making. The impression is strengthened by another, very similar transition: in this case, the first scene leaves the protagonist standing by the side of the road, while the next finds her sleeping on the beach. In the change from one scene to the other, what seemed to be the noise of cars rushing by has

imperceptibly turned into the sound of waves on the shore. The substitution of the former with the latter, which is generally valued much more positively, is in keeping with the protagonist's desire to move away from modernity towards a natural state of being. Furthermore, the fact that she is still asleep as the transition takes place strongly suggests that what we are seeing is not real but another product of her imagination, a mere dream.

*Nothing Personal* uses still other strategies to question the authenticity of its version of Ireland. In an early scene, the camera is installed inside the tent, showing first Anne, who kneels in the entrance, and then – as she moves away – the sea, which extends outside the tent. In both shots, the sight is limited not just by the camera frame but also by the tent entrance. The tent flaps, which resemble curtains on both sides of the frame, further increase the impression of the objects being placed on a stage. By adding a stage to the screen, the scene removes the viewers further from the image and reminds them of the fact that what they are seeing is just another representation and not the thing itself.

A critical distance to the romantic vision of Ireland is also achieved through ironical comments on the limited perspective of the foreign visitor. It is clear that the female protagonist arrives in Ireland with a set of preconceived notions and that she relies on the country to provide an antidote to the problems she encountered in her everyday life in the Netherlands. As she associates her personal difficulties with modernity, she is determined to avoid any contact with its products and to return to a supposedly authentic, pre-modern lifestyle. How much this attitude influences her perception of Ireland becomes apparent when she has to refill her water bottle. Seeking a state as close as possible to nature, she tries to refill the bottle at a cascade but only manages to get herself soaking wet. It is only after this initial failure that she turns around and, thus having widened her field of vision, is able to see a tap close by. As the camera zooms out, the viewer's vision changes with that of the protagonist, allowing formerly excluded aspects to come into focus. This simple device proves to be very effective in highlighting the way in which preconceived notions shape one's perception and serve to warn the viewers against blindly

accepting the images they are presented with as a faithful depiction of reality.

In the course of her stay in Ireland, Anne herself seems to develop a critical perspective on the way of life which she had idealised at the outset and found in the life of her employer. There is at least one conversation between the two which suggests such an interpretation. The only time Anne cooks for her host she prepares a rather frugal meal, consisting mainly of potatoes. In serving it, however, she uses the jargon of high-class restaurants and thus comments implicitly on his own exquisite menus, which appear exaggerated by comparison. The ironical praise of her main ingredient, potatoes, as an authentic indigenous product and “spirit of the earth”, aims to expose the mystification of a lifestyle which is more often than not a product of economic necessity rather than free choice. While the meals prepared by her Irish host clearly belong to a discourse of soft primitivism because nature is shown to provide all luxurious ingredients, Anne's parfait exposes the harsher side of subsistence agriculture.

Towards the end *Nothing Personal* also departs from the conventional plot of the romantic comedy, which typically envisions a happily-ever-after future for the foreign protagonist together with his or her local partner in their country of adoption. After Martin's death, Anne is left with the house on the island, but does not choose to stay in Ireland. The last scenes show her travelling through southern Spain and it remains unclear whether her leaving Ireland is final. Either way, the film does not provide the viewers with a sense of closure but leaves them slightly taken aback by the abrupt change of place. It is certainly difficult to explain why Spain has been chosen as the destination of Anne's final trip. However, while the existing cultural differences as well as the obvious physical distance seem difficult to bridge, the west of Ireland and southern Spain occupy almost the same space in the European imagination. Both regions are located at the margins of Europe and share a long tradition of being cast as Europe's internal others (Colmeiro 2002: 129). Like the myth of the west, the romantic construction of oriental Spain, which drew on the “non-Western substrate of Andalusia in

particular – its oriental influence, the legends of its Moorish past, and, most importantly, the continuous presence of the Gypsies“ (Colmeiro 2002: 130), continues to influence the way foreigners perceive the country even today. Through its sudden change of setting, *Nothing Personal* highlights the countries' exchangeability, which results from the fact that their social and cultural specificity is eliminated in the process of othering. Devoid of “historical and cultural baggage” (Ryder 1998: 126), the countries can then be circulated as commodities in the system of transnational capitalism. Antoniak's film draws attention to this process of commodification by depicting the financial transactions which take place as Anne checks into the Spanish hotel and letting the camera linger for a moment on her credit card.

In conclusion one can say that although *Nothing Personal* draws strongly on myths about Ireland which date back to the romantic period, it simultaneously highlights their artificiality and the projections which are at work in their construction. The behaviour of the female protagonist serves to illustrate and to problematise an approach to foreignness which casts foreign cultures and people as the reverse of what one considers oneself to be and thus as an antidote to one's own difficulties. At least three main models for Anne's journey to Ireland can be identified: the spiritual trip as the subject of romantic comedies, its perversion in the horror film and the desperate journey described in Schubert's *Winterreise*. The marked contrast between the different models is a constant source of tension in *Nothing Personal*. Ultimately, their difference serves to upset any existing formula for the treatment of the subject. The foreign resists the grasp of myth and eludes the visitor's comprehension. A quote from Schubert's *Winterreise* therefore seems best to express the frustration of the female protagonist: “Fremd bin ich eingezogen / Fremd zieh ich wieder aus” (“As a stranger I have arrived / As a stranger I leave again.”, my translation). As the film establishes parallels between the visions of Ireland and of southern Spain, it seeks to situate the construction of Ireland in the romantic imagination in a wider context and to draw attention to a recurring pattern behind the individual examples. In foregrounding its own

perspective – that of an outsider – and subtly undermining the authenticity of its own vision of Ireland, *Nothing Personal* has thus found the

approach which seems most adequate to its status as an Irish-Dutch co-production.

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