
Trans-gendering the Irish Na(rra)tion: Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto*¹

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Abstract. Occupying a relegated position as it does in Neil Jordan's filmography, it is my contention that *Breakfast on Pluto* is one of his most transgressive films. Not only does it cross the most evident boundaries of heteronormative gender roles by giving a transvestite the central position in the story, but also blends film genres as a way of vindicating hybridisation at all levels, challenging other modern categorisations as those informing Irish national identity. Thirteen years after *The Crying Game* (1992) was released, Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan returns to the intersectional issues of gender and national identity in his adaptation of Patrick McCabe's novel *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998). However, apart from the presence of a transvestite and the shadow of sectarian violence looming throughout the narrative, these films have little else in common: the dull, grey atmosphere of an obscure drama involving kidnap and murder by the IRA in *The Crying Game* contrasts sharply with the bright colours, ironic drive and parody in *Breakfast on Pluto*, a story about growing up in Ireland as an orphan transvestite who yearns for romantic true love. Moreover, while Jordan's first feature film was defined as a romantic drama with thriller hues, *Breakfast* moves between comedy and drama, the *bildungsroman* and the melodrama. This generic ambivalence goes hand in hand with Jordan's transgressing approach to the question of gender and national identity as a strategy to challenge fixed understandings of those labels as natural and given and, for that reason, the violence inflicted on the main character (and, by extension, on any Other body that does not fit those categories).

Key Words. Film, genre, gender, nation, Ireland, identity.

Resumen. A pesar de ser considerada una obra menor en la filmografía de Neil Jordan, *Desayuno en Plutón* es en mi opinión una de sus películas más transgresoras. No solo cruza todos los límites posibles en lo que a cuestiones de género heteronormativo se refiere al situar a un travestido en el centro de la historia, sino que también mezcla un buen número de géneros cinematográficos como una manera de reivindicar la hibridación a todos los niveles, desafiando,

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de paso, otras categorizaciones modernas como las que conforman la identidad nacional irlandesa. Trece años después del estreno de *Juego de Lágrimas* (1992) el cineasta irlandés retoma cuestiones interseccionales como son el género y la identidad nacional en su adaptación de la novela *Desayuno en Plutón* (1998) de Patrick McCabe. Sin embargo, aparte de la presencia de un travestí y la sombra de la violencia sectaria que se alarga por toda la narrativa, estas películas no tienen mucho más en común: la atmósfera gris y oscura de un drama turbio con el IRA por protagonista contrasta marcadamente con los colores chillones, el tono irónico y la parodia que permea *Desayuno en Plutón*, un *bildungsroman* sobre un travestido que crece huérfano en Irlanda y que lo único que anhela es el amor romántico verdadero. Mientras que Jordan definió su primer largometraje como un drama con pinceladas de suspense, *Desayuno* se mueve entre la comedia y el drama, el *bildungsroman* y el melodrama. Esta ambivalencia genérica sirve como marco formal para la mirada transgresora de Jordan en relación a la identidad nacional y de género, una estrategia que nos lleva a cuestionar esas etiquetas como naturales, dadas e inmutables y, de ahí la violencia que sufre el personaje principal (y, por extensión, cualquier Otro cuerpo que no se ajuste a esas categorías).

Palabras Clave. Cine, género cinematográfico, género, nación, Irlanda, identidad.

Thirteen years after *The Crying Game* (1992) was released, Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan returned to the intersectional issues of gender and national identity in his adaptation of Patrick McCabe's novel *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998). However, apart from the presence of a transgendered character and the shadow of sectarian violence looming throughout the narrative, these films have little else in common: the dull, grey atmosphere of an obscure drama involving kidnap and murder by the IRA in *The Crying Game* contrasts sharply with the bright colours, ironic drive and parody in *Breakfast on Pluto*, a story about growing up in Ireland as an orphan transgender person who yearns for romantic true love as much as she does for her absent mother.² Moreover, while Jordan's first feature film was defined as a romantic drama with thriller hues, classifying *Breakfast* according to genre criteria is no easy task: the film has been labelled both a comedy and a drama (imdb.com), although it shares features with the *bildungsroman* and melodrama. It is my contention that this generic ambivalence goes hand in hand with Jordan's approach to the question of gender and national identity as a strategy to challenge fixed understandings of those categories as natural and given.

Beyond Narrative Genres

Before starting my analysis, I would like to focus on the opening sequence, as I find it very telling not only for the information it provides us, but also for the way Kitten (the main character) is introduced as an unreliable narrative voice. It bears repetition how Jordan's playful mode mixes different media and genres so as to challenge received notions of gender and national identities: as an offspring of modernity, genre classification is linked to other forms of categorisations, from sexual to racial or ethnic, all of them allegedly based on scientific and rational thinking and contributing in decisive ways to the construction of modern nation-states.

² In order to respect the protagonist's gender indeterminacy, I will be using indistinctly feminine or masculine pronouns and possessives or the form "s/he", depending on the context.

This sequence frames the action (the film starts and ends at the same place and point in time) and puts forward most of what is to come later in the story.³

Thus, before seeing the main character, Patrick “Kitten” Braden, and over the black screen, we listen to the first strains of “Sugar Baby Love” (0:00:20) by, meaningfully, glam-rock band The Rubettes.⁴ The relevance of the soundtrack in the film is incontestable and the possible meaning(s) of each song multifarious: if we are to understand this song as a way to contextualise the time period in the film, that would take us to the mid-seventies, when the song became a hit.⁵ In addition, The Rubettes was one of the most famous glam-rock bands and reputed for being the first group to publicly deal with the question of homophobia. Finally, just to offer one more comment about the song in this first sequence, the name of the band as well as their music “was selected to consciously tap into ‘50s America iconography” (McCombs: allmusic.com), a decade that the main character in the film will adopt as her referent in terms of pop culture. All in all, although the film cannot be defined as a musical properly speaking,⁶ the soundtrack, far from what is common use in most productions as an enhancer of moods and emotions (Grant 2007: 11; Adorno and Eisler 1981: 17-35; Iglesias- Díaz 2013: 276-93), provides key information for understanding the characters and events in the film.

Jordan’s playful intention with genres is made more evident when, superimposed on the opening images, we are shown the first of a series of intertitles marking the narrative: “Chapters from my life by Patrick ‘Kitten’ Braden” (0:01:00). It is the first occasion when different means of expression are explicitly combined in the film (“chapters”, related to written expression or tv serials, not film), a recurrent strategy throughout *Breakfast* that challenges simplistic and excluding classification(s) and, at the same time, invites us to think how Kitten’s life (and, by extension, our own) is informed by cultural products which do not just “mirror” the world we inhabit, but contribute deeply to shaping our everyday reality and affects. Furthermore, the intertitles remit to the *bildungsroman* which, in its classic form, describes the experience of a (traditionally) male character from childhood/adolescence into maturity: in these narratives, the main character is immersed in a learning process to develop his personality, while finding accommodation in society by accepting the rules and conventions he initially tried to challenge. In recent decades, women authors have profusely taken up these “narratives of development” to unveil gender hierarchies and inequalities that the female protagonists must endure (Gómez Viu 2009: 109). It is usually the case that, in order to cope with the repressive social norms they are to live by, the main characters recur to the world of fantasy, a strategy also followed by Kitten, whose wild imagination will offer relief to the hardships of life, but also get her/him into trouble.

In this sense, fantasy plays such a pivotal role in *Breakfast on Pluto* that the film could be considered a sort of fairy tale, especially as we listen to Kitten starting her narration, laying bare the traits of this popular genre: while she is walking a baby in a pushchair, the baby becomes her audience, as is usually the case with fairy tales, and two little robins will act as Kitten’s help to co-narrate these first moments in the film. With the subtitles to translate their conversation, Jordan includes another generic twist, playing with the realistic convention inside this fantastic tale: subtitles are provided so that we can understand the little birds and have access to, as Kitten says, “every secret behind every lace-curtain window”. As we follow their flight, we hear Kitten’s voice starting her tale: “I was born in a small town near the Irish border”

³ Aware as I am that on too many an occasion critics use the analysis of the first moments in a film in order to give the clues to the “right” interpretation of the whole narrative, my intention is just to introduce the focus of my approach without implying that these concerns are the only ones deserving attention.

⁴ For more information about glam rock see for example the website www.teachrock.org.

⁵ This is the decade when the IRA was probably most active in their fight against British colonial rule in Ulster and, just to put an example, 1974 is just two years after the infamous Bloody Sunday took place in Derry.

⁶ There are practically no dance numbers and the film promotes anything but heterosexual romance, as is the case in most musical films (Grant 2007: 33; 40).

(that is, she comes, literally, from the margins of her national community), and right then, we are shown the church tower full of pigeon excrement, a first sign of Kitten's problematic relationship with the foundations of her national identity. Her (trans)gendered body challenges Catholicism, heteropatriarchy and the masculinity model Ireland allegedly needed to end with the colonial rule for good.

The introduction of this fantastic episode (and others throughout the film) serves, at least, two purposes: on the one hand, Jordan underscores the pervasiveness of fairy tales (via television, comic books, cartoons, plays, films) in our lives and the influence of fiction on our everyday practices, affects and relations (Zipes 2010: xii); on the other, by introducing a narrative voice as "imaginative" as Kitten's, Jordan is warning us about the (un)reliability of not only our main source of information in the film but, by extension, about the unreliability of any particular (and thus, subjective) narrative act. Moreover, by using this device, Jordan's film invites spectators to contribute with their own interpretation to the (never) final meaning of the story, provoking an estranging effect in order to invite us to reflect on the assigned gender roles in classical genre divisions: Jordan's mixture of genres is the formal background for the challenging of traditional and rigid understandings of national and gender identities.

In this way, Jordan sets a distance from the traditional omniscient narrative voice which guides the audience with unchallenged authority (a voice with clear parallels with the unique discourse of neoliberalism), offering an unquestionable version of the events depicted in the film. On the contrary, Jordan states from the very beginning that his narrative is under construction and leaves visible all the threads weaving the narrative. In this sense, I believe it is not coincidental that right after we see Kitten with the pushchair, Jordan includes a scaffold (0:00:35) in order to illustrate this idea visually, a strategy already used in *The Crying Game*: it is not easy answers that we will find in this film, but questions, which we will have to answer ourselves because, in terms of identity, we are all in precarious conditions (as construction workers on a scaffold). The issues dealt with in the film affect the national communities we all, more or less (un)comfortably, inhabit. Thus, before listening to Kitten's voice, the camera adopts from the opening shot the point of view of this, apparently, trendy young lady who is walking her baby (0:00:45), and by the way the camera follows her (from behind, just below her shoulder), we are invited to think that we will get the story through her.⁷ The workers at the scaffold start harassing Kitten and comedy as a film genre makes its way when the demure lady, to the workers' surprise (and ours), answers back accepting their indecent proposition and leaving them open-mouthed. Their perplexity is understandable, as Kitten tells us: "Not many people can take the tale of Patrick Braden... a.k.a. Saint Kitten..." After this incident, Patrick Braden, alias Kitten, will start telling the baby in the stroller (and us, spectators) the story of her life.

In sum, in addition to the relevance of the music in the film, the fact that the baby is Kitten's audience makes the story take the shape of a fairy tale or fable, while the thirty-four chapter titles inserted on the screen draw our attention to the very threads constituting the plot of this *bildungsroman*: the titles of the different episodes ("Chapters from My Life", "In Which I am Abandoned", "My Foster-Mother's Shoes", etc.) make the film fragmentary and episodic, a fact which provoked some criticism in certain quarters of mainstream reviewers. However, paraphrasing Edward Said's statement about his homeland (in Rushdie 1991: 166), some stories just cannot be narrated in a lineal, straightforward way, as they have been conditioned by colonial processes interrupting traumatically the chronological development of the communities where those stories are produced, a fact which is reflected in the form some of these narratives adopt.

⁷ Paraphrasing filmmaker and film theorist Jean-Luc Godard, a travelling shot is a moral issue, because it is the kind of shot which literally (and also metaphorically) accompanies the character no matter where s/he comes from or goes to.

Queering the Nation

This playful formal frame in terms of mixing film genres perfectly suits a narration that some authors resist defining as queer (Pohlmann 2008: 1), though it undoubtedly shares many features with the theoretical positions of a movement which came to challenge the modern construction of collective identities such as the nation, especially since the 1990s when the Queer Nation emerged (Berlant and Freeman 1993: 193-229; Walker 1992: 149).⁸ As Tomasz Sikora sharply points out:

Despite the long history in which queer was either absent or negatively present in the “great narratives” of modern nations, when the nationalistic discourse remained close to the rhetoric of “naturalness” with its normalizing rules of proper conduct and social bonding, Queer Nation exposes the underlying incongruity of national discourses, and consequently claims a radical redefinition of the national itself. In other words, queer nationalism re-opens national space for contestation by proposing that the conflating of the modern nationhood with the “heterosexual contract” (Wittig’s term) is a historical fact that may be revised and re-conceptualized as contingent rather than essential. Thus, not only did the Queer Nation mark a turning point in the struggles of LGBT people, but it also opened new possibilities for reshaping national discourses. (2004: 66-7)

While some understand Queer Nation in parodic terms, we should bear in mind that “queering the nation” does not mean a rejection of the national discourse, but a reconsideration of what is considered a fundamental feature of our individual identity in need of deep revision (in the LGBTQ+ movement too). The Queer Nation is a particular kind of *imagined community* whose “tactics are to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality—in short, to simulate ‘the national’” (Warner 1993: 196). According to Sascha Pohlmann, *Breakfast on Pluto* “derives its critical edge from a critique of national and gender boundaries, and is most effective where these converge” (2008: 2). Accordingly, Kitten is a transgender person who was born and inhabits the border county of Cavan and, against all odds, she will occupy the centre of this particular na(rra)tion.

Her condition as a “borderline” person and as a transvestite comes to question “the stable binarism of patriarchal thought” (Grist 2003: 4), a binary system well-rooted in Irish collective identity that has been defined as an “invisible jail” whose bars are made out of the rewards and punishments depending on our accomplishment of the gender mandates we are assigned from the very same moment we are born (Bacete González 2017: 56; Christian McMahon and Raewyn Connell 2015: 68-9). As a matter of fact, the binary classification of human beings according to their sex as well as the construction of a national project are two of the most important master narratives of modernity (Mosse 2000: 224; Ryan 2002: 15), a modernity which, as some specialists have pointed out, is closely related to the marginalisation of wide sectors of society exploited and/or silenced and whose invisibility was desired for centuries wanted invisible for centuries (Dussel 2010: 119-20; Gilroy 2004: 9; Grosfoguel 2011: 11; Hall and Gieben 1992: 89). If the “dominant masculinity model within most Western societies is ‘expected’ to be strong, powerful, heterosexual, wealthy, capable, self-dependent, self-confident, physically able-bodied, sufficient, respected and honored” (Senel 2017: 21), Kitten is the opposite of that model. However, in order to avoid the perpetuation of a binary classification by substituting the modern dichotomy (male vs. female) with another

⁸ As the aim of this article is not so much to determine whether *Breakfast* does or does not fit into the category of queer narration but to examine how Jordan uses different strategies in order to challenge fixed notions of Irish national identity, those interested in an approach to the film from the perspective of queer theories may refer to the work of Maureen Fadem (2016), Jeannine Woods (2014) or Anne Mullhall (2013).

(heterosexual vs. homosexual) and privileging one of the elements involved in the pair, Kitten is at a far remove from the narrator sanctioned by convention: her authority will be challenged constantly, not only for her destabilising clothes and manners, but also for her delusions of grandeur and her keenness on drama, fiction and creativity in general.

In this sense, Kitten comes to stand for the unstable, incoherent subject Judith Butler describes as the keystone for radical political change, a proposition which has provoked harsh criticisms in some feminist quarters for challenging the idea that “feminism must articulate a ‘stable’ subject in order to ground a feminist politics” (Webster 2000: 7). For Butler, gender categories are fundamentally “performative”, that is, a set of repeated acts which are assigned by social convention, constituting their meaning through repetition. To put it another way, the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1990: 151) ends up naturalising the relationship between those reiterative actions and sexed bodies: “Gender is [...] a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 1990: 33). Meaningfully, far from traditional understandings of subject empowerment, according to Webster’s reading of Butler, agency comes from the instability of the subject, understood as “the site of endless transformation and resignification and insofar as its constituted character is never fixed but always in process [...] that resistance is always possible” (Webster 2000: 8). In many ways, Neil Jordan’s film seems a treatise on Butler’s theories for the way in which *performative acts* in the construction of identity are underscored in the film and also for the profusion of sequences in which some kind of acting is carried out, from the games Kitten plays with her friends when they are children, to the repetition of script lines while she watches tv or the fantastic stories she invents and Jordan puts into images.

In addition, Kitten’s jobs are all related in one way or another to “showbiz”: in chapter 12, “My Showbiz Career”, we see her joining a glam-rock band (0:31:05); later, she gets a job working as a *womble* to keep children entertained (0:50:30); and she also works as a magician’s assistant (1:01:15).⁹ We also see her in less reputable jobs, as a prostitute in the streets or in a peep-show run by a cooperative of women where she ends up following a police officer’s advice,¹⁰ but in all cases, some sort of *acting* is implied. Nevertheless, Butler draws a line between performing a role in theatrical terms and acting offstage: “the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence” (1988: 527). As a transgender person, Kitten’s identity falls in between labels of the binary kind (Pohlmann 2008: 5) and not only in terms of gender ascription, but also in relation to her national identity: in Julia Kristeva’s words, she will embody the abject for the inhabitants of the/any nation in her own right and “from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (1982: 2).

Very early in the film (0:04:00), we witness Kitten’s inclination towards crossdressing and subversive behaviour even when s/he was a child living with his/her foster family. As numerous specialists have pointed out, the (heteropatriarchal) family is often considered the core of a national identity (Collins 1998: 62-3; Sikora 2004: 67), in the same way that the mother is identified at a symbolic level with the nation (Ryan 2002: 10): meaningfully, Kitten has no family, and her main obsession is to find her absent mother. Jordan’s planning of this sequence plays with our expectations, as it opens with a close-up of somebody’s legs putting on woman shoes and stockings, inviting the public to assume it is a woman that we are watching as she gets dressed, an image that has been repeated throughout film history. She stands up and

⁹ For a deeper analysis of a performance inside another performance as a metaphor of female subjectivity and its “rigorous subordination [...] to the male gaze”, see Kaja Silverman’s *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988), in particular pp. 56, 64 and 177.

¹⁰ In this sense, Kitten is “presented as the ultimate marginal and transgressive character because his sexuality (homosexuality), his gender identity (female), and even his trade (prostitute) are regarded as subversive within heteronormativity” (Subero 2008: 162-3).

puts a dress over her head, and only when she finishes, do we realise it is Patrick/Kitten as a young boy. He starts putting on some lipstick in front of the mirror, one of several mirror sequences in the film which opens the door to a *lacanian* analysis.¹¹ Furthermore, according to Grist, the mirror “refers identity to the cultural” (2003: 109), an idea reinforced in this sequence when we see Patrick repeating the dialogues of a soap opera which is on TV with Mitzi Gaynor as protagonist.¹² She is Patrick/Kitten’s fetish, as she has been told her mother resembled the actress. The soap opera, banal and simplistic as they usually are, gains a subversive twist here as it is a young boy who, by the very act of crossdressing and repeating the dialogues, questions the traditional roles and the conservative ideology behind it: “the act of crossdressing not only permits the transgression of heterosexual normativity but also allows for the intersection of other social and cultural discourses such as those of race, class, and politics” (Subero 2008: 159). The *performative* moment is complete (the mirror, the make-up, the mimicry, the repetition of the dialogues) and, again, as Butler reminds us “agency is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition [...]. It is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (1990: 145).

That Kitten embodies such a “subversive variation” seems obvious by the way in which the sequence ends: when the boy’s foster mother gets home and sees Kitten/Patrick dressed in her clothes, she punishes the boy and threatens him with the shame of public exposure in a woman’s outfit: “I’ll march you up the street in disgrace in front of the whole town!”, she tells him/her as the ultimate humiliation (0:05:09). However, Patrick’s answer (“Promise?” he asks with a big smile on his face) subverts once again the apparently adverse situation.¹³ If, traditionally speaking, a body seems to be recognised as “human” right at the moment in which that body is gendered (that is, when we answer the question “is it a boy or a girl?”), Kitten assumes her condition as “inhuman” at a very early stage in her life, when s/he realises s/he belongs to “those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender, fall outside the human [and], indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted” (Butler, 1990: 111). And it is against “those bodily figures”, I would say, that the very same concept of nation finds one of its most basic Others (Mosse 2000: 158-180). That is, Kitten’s (trans)gender and her relation to Catholicism and the Troubles, two of the most important tropes in Irish national identity, come to challenge the very “essence” of the nation.

Living on the Border of Irish National Identity

Neil Jordan plays constantly with the idea of displacing frames and borders at all levels, not just because the main character is a transgender person¹⁴ who was born on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but also in the way the filmmaker deals with the Troubles and IRA violence.

Violence is a haunting presence which, in one way or another, has loomed over Kitten’s life since she was a child. In addition to the mistreatment she suffers because of her transgendered identity, Kitten will have to deal with the sectarian violence between (Irish) Nationalists and (British) Unionists that has pervaded the lives of Irish people for decades, with “more than 3,000 [...] killed, and thousands more injured” (Muldoon 2004: 459), and periods of high intensity, very especially in the first years of the 70s (when the action of *Breakfast* takes

¹¹ See, for example, Gustavo Subero (2008: 175) and Peter Mahon (2007: 445).

¹² The actress Mitzi Gaynor is the star of the show, some sort of Doris Day, but far less known: once again, it is Jordan playing with and displacing margins and centres.

¹³ See Butler *et al.* (2016) for an in-depth analysis and challenge of “vulnerability” as traditionally opposed to the concepts of “agency and resistance”.

¹⁴ Until as late as 1993, homosexuality was illegal in Ireland and only recently, in June 2015, marriage between people of the same sex is permitted.

place). Because Kitten is subjected to violence from “both sides”, the narratives of fixed national identities are blurred – she “belongs” to neither (and also both), and it is in no small part her gender identity that forces this recognition of the instability of national identities. Thus, Kitten will be the target of, on the one hand, homophobic attacks by IRA militants and sympathisers alike and, on the other, of the British police brutality when, after a terrorist attack in London, her Irish transgendered body is found under the rubble of the deflagration, the perfect suspect.

The first reference to political violence in the film is when we see Patrick/Kitten playing with her friends when they are still children. Meaningfully, all of Patrick/Kitten’s friends would be clear candidates to inhabit the periphery of traditional nationalities: Lawrence, a child with Down Syndrome; Irwin, a weak and feeble boy whose ambition is to join the IRA to fight the English invaders; and Charlie, a black girl whose racialised body opens a vast array of issues in the film.¹⁵ In this sequence (0:06:45) the children are performing an execution, carrying out rituals which have been omnipresent in the public culture of Ireland since, at least, the beginnings of the 20th century, with Patrick in the role of the national hero, being tied up and his/her eyes covered, with an Irish flag waving on a pole. However, even as a child, Patrick/Kitten veers away from patriotism when s/he asks, “Die for Ireland?! Sorry, but it appeared someone’s taken leave of their senses”. To complete the parody, Lawrence, who was playing R2D2 in a previous sequence, mixes games and says, “Die for Ireland, earthling”, while Patrick/Kitten begs him, “Come on Englishman, a bullet please”, anticipating a very similar situation she will have to deal with later, when two IRA gunmen are about to shoot her. This brief sequence, irrelevant as it may seem, comes to underscore the performativity in constructing a particular national identity, but also the pervasiveness of violence in the everyday lives of the Irish. Moreover, the sequence contextualises Kitten’s childhood in a time (the mid-late 1960s) when the Troubles were considered a “major threat” to the rise of the middle classes and the stability of Ireland and for that reason the Border needed a “reinforcement” (Barra Ó Séaghdha 2002: 147).

Kitten’s indifference, even disdain, for the IRA’s cause almost gets her killed after Lawrence’s murder (0:43:00). Chapter 14 (0:37:00) is titled “Very, very serious”, with an evident ironic tone: the chapter starts with a demonstration against political internment in which her friend Irwin is participating, dressed in military-like uniform and sunglasses. When Kitten asks him whether she could wear pink glasses if she volunteers, Irwin asks her “Can’t you take anything serious”? Later, after flinging IRA weapons into the lake, she remarks it is “time for some serious spring-cleaning” (0:39:45). Finally, in Chapter 16, “In which I get out of my league” (0:42:15), she will have to face the IRA gunmen: “this is serious” one of them says. When she tells them about the weapons, she adds she has nothing to live for “in this stupid serious world”, but when the gunmen say she “is not worth a bullet, the mental nancy boy”, Kitten gets offended because if they kill “everyone else” she wants to get killed as anyone. The IRA men look outraged and tell her something everybody knows by now: “you’re way out of your league, sunshine” and leave her.

Once again, given the space constraints of this essay, I am obliged to include just one more reference to violent acts in which Kitten is involved. After her friend Lawrence is murdered in a terrorist action (whose responsibility is not clear), she decides to follow her mother’s steps to London, a route which, to a certain extent, comes naturally for her: not in vain, a good number of queer theorists agree in pointing out how the only true nation for the LGTB community is diaspora, as it is impossible for this collective to find a place in the heterosexist space of the nation and, in particular, in Ireland: “until very recently (that is, before decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993), homosexuality was so insistently displaced

¹⁵ See, for instance, Charlotte McIvor (2009: 32).

abroad in Irish literature and culture that queer sexuality *was* a diasporic project” (Madden 2012: 175). Once in London, British police officers arrest her as the main suspect of a terrorist attack in a pub in London for the mere fact of being an Irish transvestite (1:19:50), following the well-known trope that links homosexuality and cross-dressing with espionage and undercover actions since, at least, the 16th Century up to the present (Sikora 2004: 70; 73-4). Later, she is tortured at the police station, convinced as they are that she works for the IRA (1:20:00), while Jordan comments parodically on that trope relating homosexuality with espionage when, to the officers’ dismay, we watch how Kitten’s “confession” turns out to be another fantastic episode in which she is an undercover agent all dressed up in rubber, killing her enemies with doses of perfume (1:22:00).

Jordan’s approach to the trope of violence might seem too close to that well-trodden discourse which comes to assert that both sides in the conflict are equally responsible for sectarian violence, a position of equidistance between two factions which was forcefully answered by Seamus Heaney in his famous poem “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing”: according to Mahon, the poem was written at a time when, “merely six years after the start of the Troubles, the rhetoric of sameness had already become a sort of cliched lip-service, where simply repeating ‘One side’s as bad as the other, never worse’ was simply a way of saying nothing” (2007: 442). For Mahon, the proof that rhetoric is totally meaningless is the fact that, at the elections and despite the general idea that “they are all the same”, people “continue to vote along community lines” (2007: 442).

However, Jordan breaks open the discourse of equidistance, if only because there is no meaner violence than the one coming from the only institution in possession of the monopoly of violence, that is, the (in this case, British) state: while the IRA has been considered a terrorist group by the international community (meaning “first world” states), the brutal beating of Kitten at the hands of two officers at the police station has no possible alibi. Furthermore, the film challenges the rhetoric of sameness and the (allegedly) neutral political position as the solution to keep apart from (and ultimately do away with) violence because it suggests that there is nowhere to hide. Aware as he is of the complexity of the situation, Jordan demands our active participation in making sense of the film by the way in which he approaches the omnipresence of violence in the film, using formal and narrative devices such as the comic dialogues/situations with the IRA gunmen as the one already commented,¹⁶ the slow motion in the sequence of the bomb at the pub, or the brutality by the police officers who, finally, come to understand Kitten and, probably out of remorse, try to help her. Thus, despite Kitten’s disdain for the conflict, she cannot avoid the turmoil of political violence and suffers the consequences in her own body.

Conclusion

Despite the apparent happy ending with Kitten’s alternative family, the film shows a pessimistic edge in relation to the oppressive presence of Catholicism and sectarian violence in Ireland. When Kitten gets back from London to her hometown after accepting her father’s invitation to go back and live with him together with Charlie and her baby (the one Kitten strolls around with in the opening sequence), they suffer the violence of the intolerant small community of Cavan which is not ready for such an alter/Native family model or for a society based on and respectful of diversity.

¹⁶ Despite the comic twists, IRA violence is devoid of any kind of romanticism and is always portrayed crudely. That is the case of the sequence in which Irwin is murdered for betraying the organisation: just when we might think we are watching another humorous situation (for being so absurd: two killers arguing about who should pull the trigger), the sound of a shotgun leaves us dumbfounded in our seats (1:43:45).

Apart from the looks and gossiping of the neighbours (1:48:05), Kitten's particular family will have to escape after their house is set on fire out of sheer intolerance (1:50:00). It is at this point when the problematic happy ending occurs: we are back to the opening sequence and see Kitten once again walking the baby and joining the rest of her family, including Charlie, Father Bernard and, most importantly, Kitten's mother with her children, inviting us to think (although there is no clear evidence of this) that Kitten and her family have decided to go and live in London, the big city that keeps on swallowing Irish diaspora and all those Irish citizens who, for one reason or another, do not fit in Irish national space. Some critics have seen in this happy ending a conservative twist, not so much for the happy ending itself, but for the fact Kitten and her alter/Native family must leave Ireland in order to find a more tolerant society. However, it is my contention that Jordan is making a final comment with one of the fundamental features of that popular genre which is the fairy tale: the parodic happy ending comes to suggest not so much the existence of a national space (London, UK) where Kitten could finally find some happiness, but some sort of wishful thinking which, in part, became true when the law regulating gay marriage was passed.

As a(n attempt of) conclusion, it is my belief that if genre hybridity is a sign of the transmodern¹⁷ times we are living, it serves as an effective narrative strategy to challenge two of the modern categories par excellence, gender and nation. The Enlightenment pushed forward scientific thought and reason as the way to approach both the physical and spiritual world, and one of the fundamental tools for this approach was binarist thinking and classifications, invariably favouring one of the terms as the norm against which every Other is measured and contrasted: after almost three centuries, those classifications are taken for granted as natural and given even nowadays. Jordan challenges the fixity of national and gender categories by mixing different media and film genres and, most importantly, by placing the transgender character who was born on the Irish border at the centre of the narrative. It will be for that radical liminality that she will suffer the violence from both sides of the sectarian conflict that haunted (Northern) Ireland for decades. *Breakfast* does not offer a romanticised and Manichean vision of either Kitten or the Troubles: on the one hand, she is introduced as an unreliable and fantasising narrator, demanding our active participation in the understanding of the film and challenging the imposition of a single authoritative/arian discourse forcing upon the public/population the corset of uniformity; on the other, Jordan avoids an equidistant position between the two communities involved in the conflict, although it is true that he vindicates the right to difference which seems to find the same amount of intolerance in both British and Irish national space. For that reason, in my opinion, the setting for that (problematic) happy ending is not London, but a U-topos, a "no-place", which Jordan seems to have envisioned in his film before any other could: in June 2015, the Irish Parliament passed the law permitting the marriage between people of the same sex.

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¹⁷ Although there is plenty of literature about the transmodern as opposed to the postmodern, one of the first specialists theorising about the concept was Enrique Dussel; see also Ramón Grosfoguel (2008), Walter Mignolo *et al.* (2014) or María Lugones (2008).

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