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**Chapter: The Country, the City, the Sea, and Girls with Green Eyes: The Films of Desmond Davis and Edna O'Brien**

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### **Introduction**

Film director Desmond Davis and Irish novelist Edna O'Brien collaborated on three feature films together: *Girl with Green Eyes* (1964), *I Was Happy Here* (1966), and *The Country Girls* (1984). These films frame their stories of burgeoning female sexuality and eventual disillusionment in a series of contrasting environments that help to construct regional and national identity. The films (and O'Brien's novels that the films are based on) not only explore gendered spatialities, but also examine notions of belonging and displacement – the pressure of the “Mother Ireland” fantasy immobilizing the female protagonists (Obert 2012, 292).

In *Girl with Green Eyes* Kate (Rita Tushingham) is excited by Dublin. To her, the city “represents the possibility of escape from the oppressiveness of her childhood and of satisfying her romantic impulse to feel swept up into something larger than herself” (Weston 2010, 93). A sense of place is drawn more acutely in *I Was Happy Here*. In this film, Cass (Sarah Miles) has taken residence in a tiny flat in central London. As I discuss later, the city is a stifling place, and the film's narrative is punctuated by flashbacks to Cass's idyllic youth on the Irish coast. Ruth Barton's argument is pertinent here. She stresses that:

In the Irish context, the extraordinarily picturesque and photographic quality of the landscape has combined with an immigrant culture predicated on nostalgia and a history of tourism to endow the romantic vision of the landscape and its people with an enduring potency. (Barton 2004, 7)

Cass's experience as an exile intensifies her feelings of homesickness and draws her back to Ireland. *The Country Girls* focuses on Kate's early experiences in the country, the convent, and her subsequent move to Dublin where she finds the freedom to pursue her clandestine relationship with an older man. The films are relatively faithful adaptations of O'Brien's work. *Girl with Green Eyes* and *I Was Happy Here* were produced in the context of the British new wave, which Davis was a part of, and contemporaneous with O'Brien's novels. The Channel 4 TV movie *The Country Girls*, however, was released twenty-four years after the novel was first published, and tends to present its characters and its landscapes through the prism of nostalgia. This arguably diminishes some of the political authority that the original novel had in 1960, as I discuss later.

Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins argue that the rural West of Ireland is traditionally gendered as feminine and that "the Irish peasant female, seen as passive, pure and nurturing" has been "co-opted as a personification of that authentic landscape" (Adams and Robins 2000, 9). O'Brien herself argues that "Ireland has always been a woman," but her heroines provide an antidote to the passive females mentioned by Adams and Robins (O'Brien 1978, 11). They can be aligned with the "wild Irish girl figure", played "with varying emphasis on her rebelliousness, seductiveness, tragic potential, [and] moral ambiguity", who genders the landscape as "feminine" (Meaney 1998, 238 – 240). The female protagonists of O'Brien's novels attempt to liberate themselves from the family and the Catholic

Church and this is largely conducted through variations in narrative space as they move from one distinct place to another. Kate and Cass look for independence by moving away from the country to the city, or by moving away from Ireland to England. As Obert reveals, O'Brien's memoir diagnoses "the palpable 'psychological choke' experienced by women who find themselves trapped in Ireland's political vice, and suggest[s] 'escape' (in her own case to England) as a re-enfranchising alternative" (Obert 2012, 292). The pattern of migration in her novels and in their film adaptations, however, seldom offers a resolution from the strictures of Church and family. Ellen McWilliams argues for instance that it is "important to avoid plotting [Kate's] escape to Dublin in *The Country Girls* novel as a simple transcendence of the limits of rural Ireland for the freedom of the city" (McWilliams 2011, 53). Her move to Dublin provides "a space that initially seems liberating but quickly becomes cloyingly claustrophobic", and therefore presents a new set of problems for a protagonist who has such a quixotic outlook on life (Obert 2012, 286). This preliminary feeling of freedom transforming into eventual containment becomes a familiar pattern represented throughout O'Brien's novels and in the three films directed by Davis.

According to Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, "all notions of landscape are produced by human interpretation which, simply due to human physiology or due to political or cultural bias, is selective" (Harper and Rayner 2010, 16). They continue by arguing that,

A definition of landscape... needs to acknowledge different kinds of environments, from the rural to the urban, from the macro-environment of

expansive ecology to the micro-environment of human habitation. (Harper and Rayner 2010, 16)

The narrative landscapes that I discuss in this chapter include rural and urban spaces, as well as the micro-environments of the home. These landscapes are repeatedly constructed in the O'Brien/Davis films through representations of gender or nationality, and, importantly, a combination of the two. I will also consider the films' industrial, historical and social contexts in order to discover what these films reveal about place and the changing identities of Irish women from the 1960s onwards.

Eileen Morgan argues for instance that O'Brien's novels posed a threat to "the weakening conservative establishment in the Republic of the '60s" and that "simply by representing women from rural Ireland as desiring subjects with sexual fantasies and habits" the author "challenged the nationalist image of Irish women as chaste, ethereal beings" (Morgan 2010, 450). Significantly, O'Brien's and Davis's films of the 1960s succeed in communicating narratives from the point of view of the female leads, rather than from the point of view of the "middle-class male protagonists" that Carrie Tarr argues is the case in the contemporaneous *Darling* (John Schlesinger 1965) for example (Tarr 1985, 65). However, it is important to point out that in O'Brien's novels, migration does not offer complete emancipation for her heroines. As Obert suggests, "even in London, they cannot escape the demands of submissive Irish femininity" (Obert 2012, 284). In these texts women endeavor to gain more control of their lives and bodies through migration from country to city, and from Ireland to London, yet these voyages of self-discovery ultimately end in disillusionment. Themes of place, movement, emancipation and containment are

common throughout O'Brien's and Davis's films, and provide the contexts for the narratives of place explored in this chapter.

### **Dublin and *Girl with Green Eyes***

Desmond Davis was one of the key figures to emerge from the new wave of British filmmaking in the 1960s. Davis worked as a camera operator on *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962). *Girl with Green Eyes* was his first film as a director. Each of the above were made by Woodfall Films, a company originally formed by Tony Richardson, John Osborne and Harry Saltzman to produce the film version of Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959) (Murphy 1992, 16). *A Taste of Honey* made a refreshing change from the Woodfall films associated with the "angry young man" movement. Its female writer, Shelagh Delaney, ensured a move away from the "male-centred and potentially misogynist expressions" of much of the new wave films (Hutchings 2009, 305). *Girl with Green Eyes* follows a similar formula, and, like *A Taste of Honey*, stars Rita Tushingham (as Kate Brady) whose "unconventional and quirky" qualities described by Christine Geraghty emphasize the heroine's "outsider" status (Geraghty 2009, 315). Woodfall were notorious for producing films based on controversial novels and plays so choosing one of O'Brien's works for adaptation was fitting, because:

O'Brien's first novels met with a divided response in the liberalizing Ireland of the '60s. Her frank portrayal of sexuality incensed conservatives, including the state censors, who banned her first five novels. (Morgan 2010, 451)

The narrative of *Girl with Green Eyes* centers on the relationship between Kate and an older man, Eugene Gaillard (Peter Finch). Kate has moved to Dublin with her best

friend Baba Brennan (Lynn Redgrave) to escape from the domineering clutches of her alcoholic father. The opening scene of the film establishes the city as a vibrant and bustling place. As we see Kate walking briskly through a busy street back to her lodging house in an almost *cinema-verité* style her voiceover divulges her love of Dublin, and her escape from the country:

“I love the city. I feel inside the life of it because there is always some face, some noise to interest me. It must be because I grew up in the country, a farm we had, and the house was in the middle of a field. Trees and wind and dogs barking was [*sic*] the noises I heard most.”

Although we do not see any significant Dublin landmarks at the beginning of the film, the city is defined by the volume of its people as Kate passes shops and traffic. As O’Brien suggests the “enormous vitality of people hurrying to somewhere” is a far cry from the windswept, desolate farmhouse that Kate grew up in (O’Brien 2007c, 169).

The scene continues with an up-beat montage of Kate and Baba in their lodging house getting ready to go out for a night on the town. This parody of cosmetic commercials celebrates femininity knowingly and humorously. It does not critique consumerist culture as a negative feminine trait in the way referred to by John Hill (1986, 154). As Geraghty asserts, “feminine discourses of beauty and fashion are not the property of the establishment but a way of claiming a feminine identity which can be used as a mode of self-expression” (Geraghty 2009, 317). Baba blows soapsuds, fingernails are polished, and the girls fortify themselves with a gin and tonic before being collected for their date to the cinema. Although far from luxurious, the shared lodging room has at least been made to feel contemporary by the two young women – particularly by Baba who has pin-ups of men around her

bed. This seems worlds apart from the “damp, dilapidated house” in which Kate was brought up, and which her aunt says has had a curse put upon it (O’Brien, 2007c: 97). If Baba is constructed in this film as self-assertive and confident, Kate is more contemplative and romantic. The young men who take Kate to the cinema and who approach her in the Dublin dance halls do not interest her. Instead, Kate prefers to read romantic fiction and “loses herself in daydreams about a man who will lift her out of her rural and tradition-bound Irish origins” (Weston 2010, 90). Morgan highlights how Kate desires “non-Irish men, precisely because she assumes that they will take care of her better than her own countrymen would” (Morgan 2010, 463). Eugene represents a life far removed from that which Kate has been used to. He is middle-class, part-Hungarian, and works in the film industry. After a couple of chance encounters, Kate takes the initiative to invite Eugene to join her in a Dublin teashop. This place, like the lodging house bedroom, appears to be a space where women may assert power. Kate feels confident enough to invite the older man without Baba as chaperone. In the early stages of their relationship she displays confidence and takes agency by ordering the tea, toast and cakes, reminding Eugene that it was *she* who invited *him*. O’Brien’s heroines are able to break cultural norms in the spaces in which they feel comfortable. However, when Kate moves into Eugene’s house her assertiveness is diminished. A recurring theme of these films therefore is the representation of the heroines’ sense of agency turning to inadequacy in places where men claim ideological control.

### **Eugene’s House**

If the city in *Girl with Green Eyes* offers Kate and Eugene a neutral space with which to acquaint themselves with each other, Eugene's imposing Georgian house in the hills beyond Dublin is a space where Kate is less self-assured. O'Brien's intertextual references to Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) abound here. Eugene's housekeeper, Josie – "a rural Irish Mrs. Danvers" – regales Kate with tales about the sophisticated parties that his wife Laura had there before they separated, and Kate finds a box under the bed with items belonging to Eugene's daughter whom he omitted to tell her about (Greenwood 2003, 27). Kate's aunt's comments regarding the curse on the Brady farmhouse seem to have extended to Eugene's country residence. Kate feels as though she has taken the place of an older and more cultured woman, and this gradually erodes her confidence. Once the impartial space of the city is left behind, the grand house emphasizes class distinctions between Kate and Eugene. The house also becomes a site of masculine conflict when Kate's father and fellow countrymen burst in one evening to take her away from this "heathen" outsider. To them, Eugene is from a different class and nationality and his grand house represents something that the Brady family has lost. Greenwood points out that Kate's impoverished family have been unable to live in their ancestral "big house" since it was burned by the "Protestant Black and Tans" and that instead, they live in a smaller farmhouse on the land that their ancestral home once stood on (Greenwood 2003, 32). The forced entry by Kate's male relatives is not only an attempt to maintain patriarchal control, but also to wrest her from the "other" male that Eugene represents. Unlike the city, which at least offers Kate the possibility of living in the present, rural Ireland is irrevocably a historic space, bound by its past, and as revealed here, often a troubled and traumatic one.



The narrative spaces of *Girl with Green Eyes* are clearly delineated. Kate's country roots are ideologically ingrained, despite her taste for romantic literature and her desire to find excitement in Dublin. The old house fails to be a safe haven for Kate, and the specter of Eugene's ex-wife Laura drives her away. Unable to deter her feelings of inadequacy, Kate deserts Eugene in a Dublin hotel, and makes the life-changing decision to travel with Baba to London. The repeated experience of the move between places and the unfulfilled promises that this brings to O'Brien's heroines is palpably felt by the representations of space and character in this film. This is explored further in O'Brien and Davis' next collaboration, *I Was Happy Here*, where the heroine's status as an exile is brought to the fore.

### **The Western Seaboard and *I Was Happy Here***

*I Was Happy Here* tells the story of young Irish woman Cass who moves to London hoping that her fisherman boyfriend Colin (Sean Caffrey) will join her there. The narrative framework presents a contrast between the west coastal landscape in County Clare where Cass grew up, and the grey, impersonal space of central London where she meets her future husband Dr. Matthew Langdon (Julian Glover). Trapped in an unhappy suburban marriage she flees back to her hometown where she reminisces about her youth and talks to her confidant, Hogan (Cyril Cusack), the owner of the inn where she used to work. The movement of Cass and the resultant sense of displacement is part of the thread that is common across all three films discussed here. As Murray suggests, "the process of migration... plays an important structural role in O'Brien's work by framing and contextualizing the often dramatic shifts in perspective and identity that take place in her characters' lives between

Ireland and elsewhere” (Murray 2013, 86). The narrative takes place in Cass’s fishing village after she flees from a dismal Christmas day meal with her abusive husband Matthew. Much of the story is presented in flashback, showing Cass’s past and includes several distinct spaces which help to construct the emotional timbre of her story. The distinctions between the fishing village and London are foregrounded in the film. Cass’s unhappy experiences in London tend to make her look upon County Clare with nostalgia, which in turn emphasizes the cultural gulf between her and Matthew. Hamid Naficy points out that “[e]xile is inexorably tied to homeland and the possibility of return. However, the frustrating elusiveness of return makes it magically potent” (Naficy 1999, 3). As I discuss here, it is Cass’s isolation in London and the feeling of entrapment that her marriage brings that makes her nostalgic remembrance of Ireland ever more forceful.

Having an affinity with the sea is a motif that signals the compatibility or incompatibility of the partners in the film. Colin is nomadic by nature. His livelihood comes from the sea, and his eyes represent the romance and mystery of the ocean. Cass remarks that he has “sea eyes – they’re changeable”. After Colin and Cass have separated, he tells her about his job on an oil tanker saying that he likes working at sea because he gets lost in it, enabling him to forget the past. This conversation is conducted with a fishing net hanging between the two former lovers, signifying their separation, but also, perhaps their connection with the sea. Unlike Colin, Matthew is a city person. As Cass says:

“I don’t think he likes the country. We went to the sea once – he sat in the car, I walked up and down for hours, couldn’t get enough air. He thought I was mad...”

The seaside scenes (filmed at Lahinch beach) are idyllic and represent the heroine's freedom from restraint. In one of the film's most visually striking moments, Cass is shown cycling with carefree abandon along the sands. The seaside setting constructs a feeling of youthful vitality – the liminal space at the edge of the tide, between the permanence of the land and the ever-changing sea indicating Cass's freedom prior to marriage. Later in London, Cass tries to recapture some of this vivacity when she finds a bicycle in a narrow lane beneath the silhouette of the Post Office Tower. Freedom is expressed here via movement. The pull of her rural Irish roots is too intense for Cass to ignore, and as she circles around on the bike she is ideologically transported back to County Clare, momentarily becoming the girl on the beach once more.



*Figure 1: Cass in her London bedsit.*



Figure 2: Cass riding her bike on Lahinch Beach.

### **Alone and Stranded in London**

Cass's move to London shares similarities with Kate Brady's move to the same city at the coda of *Girl with Green Eyes*, and like Kate's life in the novel *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, Cass's hopes for adventure soon begin to unravel. As Murray argues, the "degree of personal transformation achieved by escaping to London in these novels is undeniably limited. Rather than offering a means of liberation for O'Brien's protagonists, the city threatens to be the site of their emotional exile or nemesis" (Murray 2012, 66). As Weston suggests, "the psychological battles of the individual are inseparable from the cultural context in which they are fought... engagements with a wounded past problematize the future, calling into question the possibility of moving forward" (Weston 2010, 88). Cass's Irish roots and the "restrictive roles for women" that are inherent in this make it impossible for her to assimilate fully to London life (Weston 2010, 88). Matthew and Cass's incompatibility

is marked out from the start. On their second meeting in a noisy pub, Matthew asks Cass to join him with his rugger-loving friends. Although Cass is at home in the pubs of her village – she worked in a seaside inn with Hogan, after all – the London pub is evidently a masculine space. She looks lost in the crowd of men as they gather around her in the cramped space of the bar singing a bawdy, raucous song. This is contrasted with another musical scene when Cass returns to Ireland and skips joyfully down the middle of the village high street as she imagines hearing the sea shanty "Shoals of Herring" coming from one of the local pubs.

The pivotal scene in which Cass and her husband have Christmas dinner takes place in the impersonal space of a hotel dining room. This might be considered as the type of “non-place” or “temporary abode” that Marc Augé refers to. In this instance, the hotel is a “transit point” somewhere between Matthew’s idea of home in the suburbs of London, and Cass’s remembrance of home in the fishing village. The hotel provides Cass with a transitional space and escape route from her marriage (Augé 2008, 63). When Matthew wonders why there are so few diners in the hotel Cass explains to him that they are all “at home next to fires, warm” – a veiled complaint about their far-from-cozy circumstances. When Cass takes issue with the way that Matthew speaks to the waiter her husband asks her how it feels to “identify with the downtrodden”. He then delivers a misogynistic diatribe that is directed at both Cass and her country. To him, Cass and Mother Ireland are one and the same:

“I was not brought up in an Irish bog. Why don’t you go back to those country cousins of yours? Mother Earth!”

This exchange directs Cass back home. The film concludes with the heroine staring out to sea. The ever-changing tides emphasize the pervasive theme of movement and migration that runs throughout O'Brien's work. Greenwood argues that in the context of post-war Ireland and Britain, O'Brien was "remarkable" for "anticipating the zeitgeist" and "disillusionment" that came with the "permissive society" of the 1960s (Greenwood 2003, 22 – 23). This sentiment is clearly foregrounded in *I Was Happy Here*. As Danny Powell suggests, sixties films such as *The Knack* (Richard Lester, 1965) and *Darling* "dispel the myth of a sexual revolution" that treats men and women equally (Powell 2009, 178). Similarly, Murphy states that "*Georgie Girl* (Silvio Narizzano, 1966), *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) and *Smashing Time* (Desmond Davis, 1967) all look for thrills in the big city but end up endorsing homely virtues like sincerity, loyalty, friendship" (Murphy 1992, 146). What makes O'Brien's and Davis's work in *I Was Happy Here* unique, however, is that the subjective view of London is experienced through the eyes of an Irish female exile who realizes how much she misses home. As Naficy argues, "[m]ost of us take for granted our place in the world and come face-to-face with it only when we are threatened with displacement" (Naficy 2001, 152). It is this sense of displacement that makes Cass feel so lonely and isolated in the big city.

### ***The Country Girls***

Almost twenty years after their previous collaboration, Desmond Davis and Edna O'Brien returned to the author's first novel for a production of the Channel 4 TV movie *The Country Girls*. After a notoriously unstable decade of British film production in the 1970s, Channel 4 helped to revitalize the industry in the 1980s

with a series of low budget made-for-television films, some of which were successful enough to warrant a cinema release. Neil Jordan's first feature, *Angel* (1982), for instance, was financed by both the Irish Film Board and Channel 4, and was the first of Channel 4's films to receive theatrical exhibition (Rockett 2005, 209). Although *The Country Girls* was produced by London Films and was therefore arguably a British production, it was the first of the O'Brien/Davis collaborations that had assistance from Bord Scannán na hÉireann, the Irish Film Board. This would lead one to expect a more authentic representation of Ireland on screen, but, at times, *The Country Girls* tends to present "Irish land as scenery" that sometimes deviates from the construction of place in O'Brien's novel, as I will explain later (Meaney 1998, 238).

The narrative explores Kate's (Maeve Germaine) life in the period in which she and her friend Baba (Jill Doyle) lived in the country before moving to Dublin. Kate is infatuated with an older man in her village, Mr. Gentleman (Sam Neill), but is estranged from him during her and Baba's time in the convent. The girls hatch a plot to escape from there by being expelled, and eventually move to Dublin, bringing us to the point in which the audience was introduced to Kate and Baba in *Girl with Green Eyes*.

The opening of the film establishes the rural setting and the two main characters, as they skip down a country lane framed by green hills. In the following scene they act out a confession. Kate informs Baba (as the priest) that she has thought about boys touching her "under me frock". To which the worldlier Baba exclaims "don't tell him about boys ever, he's fanatical, he'll have you whipped!" The confession takes place outdoors in a sun-dappled coppice with smoke from a

smoldering bonfire drifting across the scene. The romantic setting is disrupted by the scandalous conversation of the two girls. Meaney's observation about gendered Irish landscapes is appropriate to these two opening scenes:

[L]andscape is simultaneously gendered (as feminine) *and* politicized in films set in Ireland. Panoramic introductions to Ireland as scenic location are often concluded by a scene of political confrontation or a first view of a heroine, sometimes both at once. (Meaney 1998, 238)

The confrontation here is addressed ideologically against the Church and previous works of Irish fiction. As Ciara Barrett suggests, “[o]ver the history of Irish visual and literary culture... the Irish woman has been denied a basic, earthly embodiment, tending instead to be figured as a de-sexualized religious or political symbol” (Barrett 2015, 61). Although these themes are alluded to in the 1960s films, the 1980s production allows its heroines to talk more frankly about sex within the green Irish countryside, making for a politically symbolic text. Baba sees through the hypocrisy of society and the Church. She “recognizes that the Catholic ideal of womanhood, the Virgin Mary, is unrealistic” (Byron 2002, 457). At the convent she undermines the authority of the Mother Superior in the most transgressive way possible by passing a note around the classroom which she knows will be intercepted. The contents referring to Father Tom having sex with Sister Mary result in the girls' expulsion, giving them the opportunity to move to Dublin. Here they gain an independence that was lacking in the village, and Kate also obtains the opportunity to meet Mr. Gentleman away from prying eyes.

### **Kate and Mr. Gentleman, and the Romance of the Landscape**



One of the spaces in which Kate and Mr. Gentleman meet is noteworthy because of the way that it deviates from the same key scene in O'Brien's novel. Late one night, Mr. Gentleman drives Kate to a remote boathouse by a lake where he tells her about his plan to take her away for a weekend in the traditionally romantic city of Vienna. In the novel, this scene takes place in the front room of the Dublin lodging house where Kate and Baba live, and Mr. Gentleman asks Kate to undress for him so that he can see her naked body. The scene as written is filled with awkwardness; Kate does not want Mr. Gentleman to look as she unclasps her suspenders and brassiere, and she stands in mild embarrassment, not knowing what to do with her hands once she has no clothes on. When Mr. Gentleman returns the favor and undresses for her, Kate imagines the "horror" if Joanna (the landlady) "should burst in in her nightdress and find us like two naked fools on the green velveteen couch" (O'Brien 2007a, 211).

The film version tends to favor a more cinematic treatment of the scene by framing the two characters in silhouette against a moonlit lake. This romantic construction of place – due to the media's reinterpretation of the scene – ultimately diminishes Kate's disappointment of the unrealized trip to Vienna and provides her with a romantic memory that the awkward scene in the front parlor would not have done. The breathy voiceover from Kate that accompanies much of the film reinforces her romantic outlook on life, but again, the political intentions of O'Brien in subverting romantic fiction may be lost by the cinematic representation. Kate's voiceover is told in the past tense because she is recalling events that happened before she left for London, but this past tense also gives the film a nostalgic quality, which is reinforced by the period *mise-en-scene*. Even as Kate boards a boat for her

new life in England at the film's conclusion her internal monologue is a reminiscence of events in Ireland. Naficy argues that the process of displacement causes the exile to live out their experiences through a sense of loss. He says it is as though "the experiences of here and now are not sufficient or real enough by themselves unless they are somehow projected as loss or are mediated by memory and nostalgia" (Naficy 2001, 153). Kate's desire to make a new start in London is prompted by the disappointment of her failed relationship with Mr. Gentleman, yet the romantic setting of their last encounter and the nostalgic remembrance of her homeland arguably tempers the crushing level of disappointment that is represented in the novel.

## **Conclusion**

Representations of place in the O'Brien/Davis films make a key contribution to the audience's understanding of the characters. National boundaries and gendered spaces alike help to construct the identities of Kate, Cass, Eugene, Colin and Matthew. Murray argues that "rather than being unambiguous and cohesive entities, identities are constructed from contested and sometimes contradictory discourses of nation, gender and generation" (Murray 2013, 90). It is important, therefore, to consider that the identities in the three films discussed here are not fixed – like Colin's eyes, "they're changeable". As I have revealed by analyzing the representation of Kate in a series of narrative spaces such as the Dublin tearoom and Eugene's house, or the Cass of County Clare and London, these women alter with the landscape as well as with the people they share time with.

Exile and displacement play an important part in these films, either as an integral part of the narrative, or as a key feature of a film's conclusion. The move from one space to another is represented not only by a change in location, but also by shifts in the characters' identities. In the case of Cass, this is illustrated in her personal transformation caused by the movement between the western seaboard of Ireland and London. Although jaded and distressed by her experience as an exile, she ultimately seems somewhat stronger, firmly telling husband Matthew that reconciliation is out of the question. In the conclusion of *The Country Girls* Kate recalls her memories of life in Ireland nostalgically in a voiceover presented in the past tense. Her ties with Mother Ireland ensure that a move to London will not entirely sever her from her rural roots. The significance of the landscape is integral to analyses of the films discussed here. As Conn Holohan argues:

[I]t is through a shared understanding of belonging that a space becomes one in which we may collectively belong. However, as an examination of Irish cultural discourses over the past decades reveals, that understanding necessarily shifts over time in response to wider social, economic and cultural changes. (Holohan 2015, 15)

As revealed here, the films of Desmond Davis and Edna O'Brien offer an illuminating insight into the representation of place and the changing identities of Irish women in the mid to late twentieth century.

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