

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Aesthetic Arguments And Civil Society



The Public and its Problems, John Dewey (1927/1954) wrestles with the difficulty of a public forming an adequate opinion about its members' shared interests. American journalist Walter Lippmann (1922/1949) had argued that the complexity of the modern age, coupled with the average citizens' disinterest in reading and learning the results of accurate investigation, condemned them to a vulnerable state of disarray. Dewey allows that Lippmann's point is well taken, save its oversight of the potency of art. "Presentation is fundamentally important," he writes, "and presentation is a question of art... Artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation" (p. 183).

Dewey recognized art's relationship to the publicity principle, which lies at the heart of informed citizen participation in the political process of the modern state. The conditions of modernity - the invention of mass and instant means of communication, the rise of mass transportation and increased mobility, universal dependence on mass manufacturing, and concentration of population in urban centers - led to the eclipse of the public, he argued (pp. 110-42). The era of politics conducted under the Aristotelian assumption of prerequisite leisure had passed. Democracy's new realities were connected to the conditions of civil society: the network of associations existing outside the state and regulative of it through the force of publicly formed and communicated opinion on duly elected and appointed representatives. The need to participate in civil society, along with the conditions that fragment and isolate citizens, led Dewey to raise a different point than the connection of art to life. He regarded artists as the purveyors of news because art maximizes the publicity principle. It brings issues to those whose interests are at stake, raises their awareness, and shapes their political thoughts. His point is not about culture but about communication and specifically deliberation that lies at the center of civil society's political function.

At the conclusion of his analysis of why "the public" is in eclipse, as he considers the consequences of rapidly changing conditions of economy, work, travel, and

information transfer on human association, he notes that desires and purposes created by the machine age are disconnected from the ideals of tradition. He concludes, "Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible" (p. 142). More important than the information content of a literary work is the artist's power to bond strangers in shared experience through portraits constructed with signs and symbols that evoke deeper reflection.

The freeing of the artist in literary presentation, in other words, is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry. Men's conscious life of opinion and judgment often proceeds on a superficial and trivial plane. But their lives reach a deeper level. The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness. Common things, a flower, a gleam of moonlight, the song of a bird, not things rare and remote, are means with which the deeper levels of life are touched so that they spring up as desire and thought (pp. 183-84).

Art's evocative power leads Dewey to the claim that artists are the purveyors of news, not in providing information "but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation." Art engenders the shared state of desire necessary for civil society to sort through its members' differences and find the necessary bonds of association to sustain relations of mutual dependency.

The call for civil society is important for the study of rhetoric because it marks a peculiarly modern understanding of political relations. Dewey's observations are suggestive for integrating a rhetorical approach to public art with this post-Enlightenment understanding by pointing to the role of aesthetic forms in shaping society. Viewed from this perspective, the *public arts* are always part of civil society. They are creations of imagination intended to be *performed*. Their performance brings members of society together as an *audience*. Their performance presents the artist's claims about human feelings, relations, and actions. Their audiences are not just spectators whose function is to witness, they also are engaged by events "of which," as Oliver Goldsmith (1772/1958) put it, "we all are judges, because all have sat for the picture" (p. 99). Their point is not so much evocation for evocation's sake as for inducing *contemplation*. But more than that, since public arts are experienced communally, one who witnesses also might share the process of contemplating publicly. This is another way of saying they invite *deliberation*. Sometimes, when artistic portrayal is co-extensive with

actual events, these deliberations may organize public memory in other than official terms, thereby shaping society's understanding of its own historicity and the model of its own self-organization. This is to say that public art itself is part of the network of associations constituting civil society. Its contents cannot avoid engaging in the public dialogue contributing to society's self-regulating process of forming *public opinion* that might challenge the state's primacy in setting social purpose.

Specifically how public art might contribute to this dialogue is suggested by the responses it elicits. I wish to explore this relationship between public art and civil society's deliberative process by examining a specific case, the acclaimed film "In the Name of the Father" (Sheridan, 1993), in which an artistic production not only was contested for the portrait viewers were asked to judge, but was itself a participant in the larger frame of political deliberation it portrayed. Although my analysis will be restricted to this specific case, recent controversy surrounding the 1996 film release of *Some Mother's Son*, dealing with Bobby Sands' 1981 hunger strike in Maze Prison, and the 1999 "Sensations" exhibit at the Brooklyn Art Museum suggest this film is not an isolated case of art functioning as an argument form.

1. The Guildford Four: Art Intersects History

In 1974, the Troubles in Northern Ireland made their way to England where the IRA began a campaign of terrorist bombing[i]. The attacks continued into the fall, and unsuccessful police efforts to apprehend the perpetrators contributed to mounting public fear, as the IRA seemed able to strike at will. On October 5, 1974, they bombed two public houses in Guildford, Surrey, killing 5 and wounding 70. Shortly thereafter, the police arrested four suspects who were charged with the bombing - Gerard Conlon, Paul Hill, Paddy Armstrong and Carole Richardson - who became known as the Guildford Four. The police also arrested another seven accused of supplying the bombs. The alleged ringleader of this group was Conlon's aunt, Anne Maguire, after whom the group was named the Maguire Seven. In addition to members of her immediate family, the Maguire Seven included Guiseppe Conlon, father of Gerard. Although they professed their innocence and despite subsequent confessions by two members of the IRA, who claimed sole responsibility for the Guildford bombing, both groups were convicted. The presiding judge at the Guildford Four trial openly expressed regret they had not been tried for treason since it carried the death penalty. All served prison terms without remission. Guiseppe Conlon died in prison professing his

innocence.

During their incarcerations the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven made continued pleas for judicial review, which the court refused to grant. Public opinion, on the other hand, increasingly held that their incarceration was a miscarriage of justice. This opinion strengthened when private pressure by influential institutional voices went public, as Lords Scarman and Devlin and then Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Runcie argued that the Guildford Four had been denied justice. In 1989 the Department of Public Prosecution agreed to look into the matter. By October the DPP had uncovered evidence that called the convictions into question. This newly disclosed evidence, which had been known to the police but not shared with the defense, gave Conlon and Hill secure alibis for the night of the bombing, Carole Richardson had been administered pethedrine while under interrogation, which could have induced a false confession, and the police apparently had manufactured records of what transpired during their interrogation of the Guildford Four and then lied on the witness stand. Roy Amlot QC for the Crown informed the court that the DPP no longer regarded the convictions as safe and on October 19, 1989 Chief Justice Lord Lane quashed the verdicts on the Guildford Four. A year later the convictions of the Maguire Seven also were set aside.

The Court's action initiated a national discussion of these convictions as a gross miscarriage of justice and possibly the most significant failing of the British legal system in modern history. The police, the courts, and the review panels had acted in ways that ignored or suppressed the evidence, denied the defense material facts that would have proven the innocence of the accused, and responded to public emotion from the wave of terrorism by making scapegoats of four youths whose only apparent crimes were to be Irish and without means.

No one disputed that a gross miscarriage of justice had occurred; the debated questions were how to interpret the quashing of the verdicts and how that would color public memory of the Guildford Four. In the immediate aftermath of the trial, public officials, participants, and common citizens joined the contest for shaping public memory.

In England, the Court's quashing of the verdict was taken as a sign that the system worked; that errors, when found, were corrected; and that justice ultimately prevailed. British Deputy Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Howe told the House of Commons, "A serious miscarriage of justice, which has led people to be

wrongly imprisoned for many years, has been set right" (Forbes, 1989, Oct. 19). The Boston Globe reported that the British government was "portraying the decision as proof that British justice, even if extraordinarily delayed, works and that British officials [were] big enough to admit their mistakes" (Cullen, 1989, Oct. 20, p. 2).

In Ireland, the Court's action was greeted with greater misgiving. Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey, while acknowledging that the verdict showed "the system has the capacity to correct its own mistakes," added that other mistakes had been made in cases involving Irish citizens now serving time in British jails for bombings they claimed not to have committed (Forbes, 1989, Oct. 19). Less politic expressions of distrust came from Irish voices not connected with the government. *The New York Times* quoted Paddy McManus, Sinn Féin's legal spokesman, who thought the decision, "far from being a vindication of the integrity of British justice, is a damning indictment of it" (Rule, 1989, Oct. 18, p. A7). Conlon himself was quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* as expressing a view shared by many of his countrymen: "If you're Irish and you're arrested for a terrorist offense, you don't stand a chance" (McLeod, 1989, Oct. 23, p. 6). In Belfast and Dublin the release of the Four reinforced the foregone conclusion that the British judiciary was unjust. *The Boston Globe* reported that in Belfast the Court's decision was a cause for cynicism more than celebration. "It won't be justice," said one of Gerry Conlon's childhood friends, "until the policemen who put them in those cells take their place" (Cullen, 1989, Oct. 20, p. 2). The real issue was whether that would ever occur.

Following their release, the Guildford Four's moments of publicity soon became sporadic. They reassumed center stage four years later with release of the film, "In the Name of the Father," based on Gerard Conlon's autobiography, *Proved Innocent*. The debate that surrounded this film is revealing of the argumentative power that a rhetoricized aesthetic may exercise, as artwork merged with the historical events it portrayed to become a participant in their continuing development.

Before the film's release, there was roar of protest over its contents. The Maguire family was incensed at how Anne Maguire was depicted and it used the press to continue a family feud. Those familiar with the case were incredulous that Alasdair Logan, chief solicitor for the Four and the person who most doggedly pursued the legal basis for the reversal, was not portrayed in the film but was

reduced to fleeting mention in its credits. Logan expressed acceptance of the enlarged role given to Gareth Peirce in gaining the Four's release and casting Emma Thompson in her role since he understood the dramatic need for a strong female character to balance Daniel Day-Lewis's portrayal of Gerry. However, he challenged the film's depiction of British court proceedings as "a charade" and the false impression it created of the role of British police and the DPP, who actually discovered the falsified and suppressed evidence and who advocated that the verdicts be quashed. Others were concerned about the numerous factual errors in a film that was dealing with telling the truth. Finally, MPs expressed concern that the film painted a sympathetic picture of the IRA.

The MPs were particularly concerned that American audiences, whom they regarded as uninformed about the IRA, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and the Guildford Four would be misled. Tory John Wittengdale, MP for Colchester South and Maldon warned the film would spread prejudices about Ulster. "It's a very good piece of cinematic fiction. As a drama it is well acted and directed. What it is not is a true story. It purports to tell a true story of the Guildford Four. It doesn't. This compounds my fears about the film. It means more people will see it and it will have more influence. It will lead to greater misunderstanding of the situation in Northern Ireland and the situation regarding the Guildford Four. It will reinforce prejudice." Lord Fitt, former leader of the SDLP and ex-MP for Belfast West stated: "As a film it was something to be seen. But for someone such as me who knew the whole facts behind the Guildford Four and the Annie Maguire cases, the film was a gross distortion... The film will undoubtedly go down very well in America, which is 3,000 miles away from all the realities of the Guildford Four." Tory Peter Bottomley, MP for Eltham who also was joint chairman of Ulster's cross party peace group New Consensus, thought Gerry Adam's visit to the US may have a connection to the film and said: "The film should be judged on its artistic merits. The IRA themselves should be judged on their abuse of human rights - they still have to turn away from turning women into widows, children into orphans and causing the event that has seen some people being wrongfully convicted." Labour's Harry Barnes, MP for Derbyshire North East, agreed with the spirit of these sentiments, though he recognized they rested on a problematic dividing line: "If drama and art could be divorced from life then the film is brilliant. But the problem is it rather cavalierly alters the way things occurred. Its high standing as art and drama and its emotional impact may be used on gullible people to argue a political case against the British state, which is then too

sympathetic to Sinn Féin's position." He concluded the film was unfaithful to the experiences of the Guildford Four and the Maguires "who themselves turned out to be victims, not just of the abuses by the forces of law and order in this country, but of the IRA" (Devlin & Clare, 1994, Feb. 9).

The MPs' concerns converged on their fears that the film would be taken as a truthful portrayal of what occurred, and that it would constitute a powerful narrative that so fused art with life as to shape public memory for the less informed of what occurred. If the film were to constitute public memory, its news, in Dewey's sense, could only legitimate Irish Republican aspirations in their ongoing war with Great Britain.

Jim Sheridan, who directed the film, responded that these were narrow-minded or misinformed reactions. This was not a documentary, but "faction." Changes in certain factual materials were necessary to condense 15 years into two hours, but such changes did not distort reality since the film was true to the essential facts. Sheridan maintained that his work had to be judged as an aesthetic endeavor entitled to exercise artistic license, and he attributed the onslaught of criticism to a British establishment that, in his view, never believed the Guildford Four were innocent and wanted to retry them in the press (Freeland, 1994, Jan. 19, p. C1). On the contrary, he espoused that his film was about filial bonds and injustice, and he described it as "a great victory against injustice" (Devlin & Clare, 1994, Feb. 9). He insisted that the film was not political, and not anti-British. When asked about his views on the Irish Republican dream of a united Ireland, his words were "to hell with all that" (Freeland, 1994, Jan. 19, p. C1). As for *In the Name of the Father* being sympathetic to the IRA, he dismissed the charge by claiming the film was not about the politics of the Troubles but about the developing relationship between a father and son and a miscarriage of justice. Sheridan's responses sought to confine discussion of the film to an aesthetic accomplishment that interpreted an historical event. Emma Thompson was more succinct in dismissing criticism that the movie was less art than politics and was bound to renew American sympathy for the IRA. "I don't give a fuck, quite frankly," she told *Vanity Fair* (Boynton, 1994, Jan. p. 112).

Certainly one might consider the film solely on aesthetic terms. Its emotional core of the father-son relationship between Gerry and Guiseppe invites us to contemplate the role of filial bonds in a young man's struggle to become independent. Yet "In the Name of the Father" is more than a film about the British legal system and the coming to independence of a son. Its distortion of

details in a portrayal of actual events assumed identity as a partisan political argument about the Troubles and as specifically aligned with the IRA and Sinn Féin in its anti-British sentiment, if not by endorsement of their political goals. I wish to consider how that argument develops.

2. The Argument for Conditions of War

Although Gerry is the emotional center of the film, its first two-thirds lead us through his experience against the backdrop of the Troubles and the IRA's role in resisting British domination. The film begins with the Horse and Groom bombing, then immediately cuts to Gareth Peirce driving the London night listening to a tape of the still imprisoned Gerry's version of his ordeal. The taped account returns throughout the film to frame events with Gerry's interpretation, thereby strengthening the impression that the film's flashback technique is dramatically recreating actual events. His narrative begins with his petty thievery recklessly and irresponsibly jeopardizing an IRA hideout in Belfast and its cache of weapons. The British army, mistaking him for a sniper, pursue with tanks and armed troops, while women, children and youths stage a street riot to forestall the army's advance. They hurl stones, bottles and Molotov cocktails to provide IRA rebels with cover while they move weapons hidden along the path of Gerry's flight. The opening scene of the bombing, juxtaposed with the street riot, interprets the IRA as a military combatant outdistanced in personnel and technology by the British army it opposes in the streets of its own neighborhoods, and as having significant support from Belfast's Catholics.

Gerry goes to London to avoid the consequences of being kneecapped by the IRA for his recklessness and in pursuit of the early 70s hedonistic ideals of sex and drugs. Meanwhile, the IRA presence is felt through its campaign of bombings on British soil. IRA operatives are portrayed as selecting targets for their military nature. Against the British account of Guildford as a terrorist bombing that murdered 5 and seriously injured 70, the film counters by depicting the IRA as acting on its own intelligence that the pub was a soldiers' hangout. The terrorism of the bombing is made ambiguous by portraying it as a continuation of the ongoing conflict depicted in the opening riot scene.

The police are pointed in Hill's direction. They arrest him and Gerry in Belfast and fly them to London for interrogation. The police are depicted as determined to extract a confession, irrespective of their actual guilt, in response to public pressure on the government to do something to stop the bombings and because

they are “Irish scum”. Gerry is subjected to nonstop interrogation and psychological torture and finally confesses in the face of threats to his father. The Four are convicted and sentenced to life in prison, while the Seven receive 12-year sentences.

Gerry and Guiseppe are imprisoned together where Gerry seems to accept confinement with disturbing resignation and absence of anger. His outcast status as Irish leads him into the company of the equally outcast black inmates, and joins them in consuming drugs. Soon this changes when Joe McAndrew, the IRA commando guilty of the pub bombing, enters the prison. He tells the Conlons he has confessed to the police, suggesting that the IRA has honor, as the British judicial system that ignores his confession does not: “I told them. They know. They know the truth. They can’t afford to face it. It’s a war. You’re one of those innocent victims. I’m sorry for your trouble.” When Guiseppe indicates his sympathy should be for the innocent victims of his attack, Joe defends his actions: “It was a military target, a soldiers’ pub.”

Joe becomes a pivotal character in the culture Gerry must endure, where English prisoners pose a continuing threat of physical and verbal abuse. He stands up to physical intimidation by English prisoners, precipitating a mess hall brawl. When Irish and black inmates join him in a fistfight with their white English counterparts, McAndrew signifies the possibility of leadership for the Irish and blacks to confront bullies who, by extension, are the duped pawns of British oppression.

Joe becomes Gerry’s mentor. On the tape Gerry narrates how Joe led him to see himself as a victim of British economic exploitation who would always be a victim until he fought back, to see the British as never voluntarily relinquishing their presence in an occupied country but having to be beaten out, and the prison as an extension of their colonial system that pits those with shared class interests against one another in order to maintain control. Without embracing the IRA’s alternative of military resistance, Gerry’s narrative of his political awakening inserts Sinn Féin’s interpretation of the injustice that lies at the film’s center as an indictment of the British judicial system’s incorrigibility.

Meanwhile, the film’s action depicts Joe using his status as an IRA soldier who can back his words to restore peace among the inmates. He is dignified before the prison officials, speaks to the English prisoners with a self-confidence that suggests he can back his words with action and that they honor. Joe commands respect that leads to improved conditions for the Irish and black inmates. The

bullying stops, prisoners start acting collaboratively, and relations within the prison appear as a model of what Sinn Féin is advocating and the IRA fighting for on the outside.

True to the Irish Republican interpretation of British authority, the chief prison officer, Bulgar, responds to the prisoners' newfound discipline as a threat to his authority. When Bulgar tires to reassert his authority, Joe leads a riot that gets national TV coverage. Bulgar orders in the riot squad and Joe and Gerry are placed in solitary confinement as ringleaders. As Joe is being taken away, he snarls at Bulgar, "You just signed your own death warrant." Through Joe, Gerry and we see the British screws as an extension of imperialist power, and prison as a site for continuing the war being fought on the outside. In this war zone Joe occupies the romanticized emotional space of a warrior who protects his own from a hostile environment. He is brave, skilled at what he does, and honorable within the code of war he is waging.

The last IRA scene depicts McAndrew gaining his revenge. As the prisoners watch a film, Bulgar is caught off guard by McAndrew, who sets him ablaze with a homemade torch. Gerry splits with Joe at this point, professing "In all my god forsaken life I've never known what it was like to want to kill somebody... You're a brave man, Joe, a brave man." Gerry asks to be returned to his cell. Joe tells the others to stand their ground, but the prisoners follow Gerry. While his parting may be seen as a rejection of the IRA and we may shudder at the IRA's limited and ruthless means, the film invites ambivalence in its viewers' response by making this IRA commando the only character capable of heroic action. Meanwhile, the facts remain that the British continue to subjugate the Irish, the Troubles continue and still touch Gerry, and there has been no cease-fire in the war.

Gerry joins Guiseppe's campaign to clear their names, but it quickly becomes apparent that, even in the judicial system, winning the Anglo-Irish conflict preempts pursuit of justice. When Mrs. Peirce visits Inspector Dixon to ask for Guiseppe's release, she pleads that he didn't do it, that the real bombers have confessed. Dixon is unmoved. Finally she says, "But he's dying; Guiseppe's dying," to which Dixon responds unsympathetically, "Lot's of people are dying; it's a dirty war."

The dirty war has more than one front, we learn, as the combat shifts from the street to the court. Peirce discovers how deeply this war has insinuated itself into

the legal system, with knowing suppression of evidence, false testimony, and a conscious choice not to disclose material facts to the defense. The dramatic final scene, in which Inspector Dixon takes the witness stand and perjures himself on his prior knowledge of Gerry's innocence, only to be confronted by Peirce with the damning evidence that he has lied and knowingly sent innocent youths to prison, shows the enemy to be a recalcitrant British judicial system. As its concluding proof of this point, the film reminds us that this is a story about real people whose history is still occurring. Before the credits roll we read about what has happened to each of its main characters since their release. We also learn that three policemen were tried but acquitted of charges to pervert the course of justice. "No policeman has been convicted of any crime in this case."

3. Debating History through Art

As far as we know, works of art have always prompted public discussion. The interesting feature of "In the Name of the Father" is how it became a participant in the discussion in a way that asserted ownership of the issues. From the perspective of the historical record discussed in the first part of the paper, the DPP was actively engaged in the process by which the verdicts were finally reversed. The British government, assuming the inevitability of judicial mistakes, posed the question as whether the system of self-correction works. In this case, where grounds to question the verdict led to further investigation, determination the verdict was not safe, and it's being quashed, the salient question was answered in the affirmative. By contesting for issue ownership, the film posed an alternative set of issues and evidence to answer them.

Michael Mansfield QC (1994, p. 7), writing in *Sound and Sense*, notes that the film asks these three questions:

1. Who took part in preventing the defense from discovering the existence of a statement by an alibi witness for Gerry Conlon?
2. Who decided that the Balcombe Street siege defendants who confessed to the explosions in the Guildford case would not be prosecuted?
3. Who authorized the amendment of forensic science schedules so that connections between these incidents would be excluded?

Public art has less commitment to answering such questions with fidelity to historical details than to developing answers that provide insight into human motivations and consequences without undoing what took place. It seeks answers that provoke contemplating their meaning.

This point seemed entirely lost on those who took issue with the film's political stance on the Anglo-Irish conflict and posed the issue as one of facts v. artistic license. Casting the issue in this way revealed an inability to distinguish between arguments made from the historic record and those made from an artistic rendition of that record. More fundamentally, it ignores that artistic renditions are unabashedly biased because their commitment are to a compelling presentation of a particular story with its own meanings.

Fusing the historical record and artistic renditions *as if* they shared the same commitments and argumentative obligations produced arguments about the Guildford Four made *through* the film's lens. This resulted, for example, in the concern of a British journalist (Elliott, 1994, Feb. 13, p. 4) for the film's marginalized treatment of the Four's solicitor Alasdair Logan, taking the form of he and Logan speaking through the film's portrayal to defend British courts and lawyers. The argument they jointly develop was not to vindicate the British judiciary that, in fact, reversed the verdicts. Instead, they mounted a refutation of the film's indictment of the judiciary as if it were an historical statement. They complain of its factual inaccuracies and offer testimony of Logan's dogged persistence to gain judicial review, completely missing its irrelevance to answering the film's basic questions with a compelling presentation.

Similarly, British MPs responded to the film as if it were an indictment of the British judiciary uttered by an Irish Republican parliamentarian on the floor of Commons. They also discussed the Guilford Four through the film when they express fear that uninformed American audiences will conclude the meaning of the Four was their exposure of the British judicial system's invidious corruption and bias rather than the system's self-correcting process. The issue of the Four's *symbolic* significance, however, is conspicuously absent from the MPs' discourse. In the 38 news articles I examined, none reported what that meaning was. If its absence signifies a prevailing assumption that the case proved the judicial system worked, one can only wonder at the efficacy of such an assumption when the same institutional voices remained silent on the same judiciary's failure to convict a single police officer of the crimes millions of international viewers had now witnessed.

The point of public art is to create public meaning. Its arguments, accordingly, are about meanings, not facts. Moreover, the meanings it argues for are not necessarily caught by the facts. It adapts the basic facts to its narrative structure

to make a forceful presentation. Unlike history, therefore, film attracts us to its narrative through its characters and the conflicts they must face and resolve. To require that "In the Name of the Father" resolve its issues by accurately reporting the historical details, would change it from a dramatic presentation to a documentary, and moreover strip it, and public art generally, of making arguments that lead us to contemplate more basic commitments at stake in the ebb and flow of historical events.

Returning to the three questions Mansfield believes the film raises, its answers are fairly direct: The DPP prevented the defense from discovering that Conlon had an alibi witness; the DPP decided the real perpetrators of the Guildford bombings would not be prosecuted, and the DPP authorized keeping these two cases from intersecting. More significantly than these literal answers is the poetic license it takes in constructing them. The injustice of the Guildford Four is a fact. More important is the story - fabulous in many respects though it be - that searches for meaning as the fact of injustice intersects with the lives of Gerry, Guiseppe, and the families it disrupted beyond repair. We are asked to search for meaning in the acts of officials who responded to public pressure, to ethnic bias, and without regard for justice. We are asked to contemplate the meaning of a gross miscarriage of justice in terms of the Anglo-Irish conflict that produced fear, commando responses, and public hysteria.

The film uses artistic license to present its answers through Gerry's emotional and conceptual development. His emotional space becomes ours; it places us in relationship to his father, the British judicial system, the IRA, and the concrete manifestation of British/Irish relations. Since the argument of the film fuses his imprisonment with his national identity and class, our empathy for his victimization cannot be separated from his identity as a poor Belfast Catholic nor from the series of events that link his own transformation to the political experience of being Irish under British domination. Gerry's weaknesses as a young man are symptomatic of alienation not only from his father but also from the community of Ireland. He was powerless against poverty and military force. He could not escape the isolation of his private indulgences to participate in civil society because his sense of political identity derived largely from rejecting personal responsibility for his circumstances and conduct. His relationships with Joe as his mentor, and then with his father, mark his journey from isolation to contact. They rest on his own developing empathy, which diminishes his hostility

and encourages his willingness to listen.

His developing empathy, in turn, has political value because it binds him first, through Joe, to the community of an Ireland in opposition to its British masters, and then, through Guiseppe, to the community of those engaged in the campaign to clear his name. Gerry escapes his victimage through the politics of his anti-British sentiments. Moreover, his petitioning support for judicial review of his case defines him as a responsible agent. It asserts his challenge for power over his own life by enjoining the associative network of civil society to act on his behalf. Finally, our knowledge of his innocence encourages empathy with Gerry and the community of opposition to British injustice. This is not an argument from fact but for the meaning of being politically and morally responsible.

I began this discussion with Dewey's observation that artists contribute to public dialogue by breaking through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness on which superficial opinion rests to awaken deeper commitments from which desire and thought might spring. They are the purveyors of news. Dewey's advocacy urges us to interrogate an art work's capacity to engage sentiments and commitments borne of experience. If our judgments about the circumstances of our lives are colored by our commitments, unless and until we know what they are, we remain susceptible to the tyranny of tradition or the charm of performances designed to serve vested interests. The partisanship of this film's portrayal of the Guildford Four and the prejudice of British justice is its vehicle for arguing that the accused have a right to a fair trial, that they have a right to access all the evidence, that police investigations based on preformed conclusions are problematic, that authorities who knowingly distort the record should be held accountable, and that there is greater virtue in defending one's name against false accusation than accepting such an injustice with resignation.

Whether the film is a distortion, of course, is a matter of interpretation. Its argumentative and evocative power draws on the dominant narratives in British and Irish or other national civil societies by either reinforcing or refuting them. Regardless, by engaging these narratives in ways that have the potential to shape cultural memory of what occurred and what it means, blurring the line between art and life becomes more than a stimulus for public discussion. If an adequate opinion on the Troubles requires a rhetoric that asks us to read history through the deeper human aspiration to lead a life worth living, then this and similar works of public art are a necessary part of civil society's deliberative process by

which we form the idea of peace.

NOTES

[i] Unless otherwise note, my account of the historical event is based on the books by Conlon (1990), Hill (1990), and Maguire (1994), and on newspaper accounts in the London and Dublin dailies of October 18-20, 1989 and May 23 through July 28, 1990 reporting the quashing of the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven verdicts respectively.

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