

Stewart Donovan

**Learning to Look
Film, Culture, Education and Entertainment**

Nineteen seventy-five saw the birth, or rather spawning, of the world's first blockbuster movie: Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. At home in our once traditional fishing village of Ingonish, my childhood companion Michael Dunphy asked his uncle Bart, who had fished since he was a boy, what he had thought of the film? The uncle replied that he had never seen a shark use reverse before, but up until that point he had been enjoying the movie. And *movie* it was.



Steven Spielberg was making entertainment and he is on record as saying that he had no desire to make a film—he wanted to make a movie. An action picture, in fact, that combined thriller, horror and adventure and where middle-aged fishermen were not a target audience: fifteen year old urban boys would not care about surface realism or verisimilitude—they were there for the thrills and they were willing to pay, or their parents were¹. The film cost an estimated \$8 million to make, and by the first week-end of its release, June 22, 1975 it had grossed \$7,061,513 and a little over a month later on July 27, it had taken in \$69,725,376. A new cinema had arrived and its supporters would be permanent members of a youth group; if money talked—and in this case it screamed—there would never be any reason ever again to make a movie that stepped outside the cinema age². For

Hollywood, if not for America and the world, the slightly extended and distended Age of Aquarius had become the age of permanent adolescence³.

Two years after the appearance of the great white mechanical fish, George Lucas launched his sci-fi fantasy *Star Wars* (1977) and none of us have been the same since. Whether we tripped over the broken imperial walkers in our sister's basement, a new necrosis of clutter (benedictions to Jonathan Franzen) "are you ever going to throw those out?" or we listen to characters in a Kevin Smith film debating the justice of blowing up the Death Star because of all those innocent workers, (probably non-union from Wisconsin) or we watch the YouTube comic parody, Vader Sessions, which sends up the fact that all that Space could not contain one person of colour, only the voice of a disembodied James Earl Jones. Then the references to Joseph Campbell, that great cataloguer of myth, now forever an extra with the cast and crew on IMDB and, finally, that irrepressible survivor, Carrie Fisher, commenting critically and comically on how the image of her young body was commodified and taken from her for the rest of her life. No doubt in 50 years time her image, like that of Minnie Mouse, will be re-copyrighted until the end of the cosmos. And then we had Lucas himself in his late middle age messing with our memories and those of our children by re-releasing the originals with CGI scenes not in the original. "Who wants to see that fat slob Jabba-the-Hut move anyway? Didn't he have people to do that for him?" And so it goes.

Some have argued that watching the Americans in space in a fantasy future (even with an homage to Leni Riefenstahl) was still better than watching them constantly reenact the Second World War or, worse, the many real proxy wars that have preoccupied them ever since. This, of course, didn't prevent Spielberg from making *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or *Band of Brothers* (2001). I watched the former with my D-Day veteran father on a small screen some years after its release, he was impressed by the realism of the D-Day scenes and commented without being questioned on how Chester Dunphy (that would be Bart's older brother) had continually swum from beach to blown-up landing craft rescuing a half a dozen men or more from drowning.

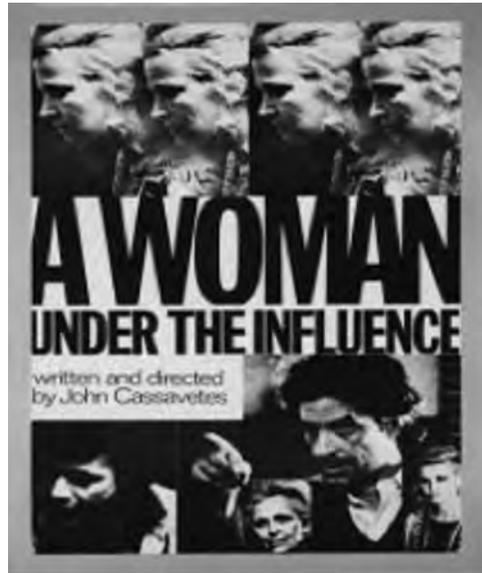
Chester was that rare thing, a fisherman's son who actually knew how to swim. The story goes that he then got into a tank and was blown up, survived the explosion, and, without pausing to get a drink or have a smoke, got into another tank and kept going. Yes, he survived the war. After the Omaha Beach landing scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* my father lost interest: "Another war film about Americans," was all he said⁴.

There has been a lot of ink spilled and blogs filled about the consequences of Hollywood moving forever into the blockbuster mode and the more or less permanent cinema age of its juvenile audience. Many of the parents still following films, understandably enough, were driven back or home to television, but there would be some respite for those who craved a more mature cinema, or at least one that went beyond the cinema age. Of course not all independent voices were silenced and the subversive movie tradition of the 60's and 70's would never disappear completely, though its impact would be lessened almost to the point of folklore. Directors such as Woody Allen, Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese and many others, continued to make films that appealed to a wide and sophisticated audience, but the real and reel hunger of true cinephiles would be met by an advance in technology known as the videocassette recorder.

For the first time in film culture, people who loved the cinema, the way readers loved books, could begin collecting films and, more importantly perhaps, they could begin watching them; a sophisticated world cinema that, until very recently, had been limited to larger urban centers where art house and repertoire theatres showcased the work of international auteurs and avant-garde movements. Of course by the time the VCR came within easy reach of the middle class in the 1980's many of the great auteurs had passed on or were quietly working away on their oeuvres in an obscurity only poets can relate to.

While many of the good folks in our village were quietly enjoying Peter Falk in the TV series *Colombo* (the first series was directed by a young Steven Spielberg), Falk himself was busy helping his friends John Cassevettes and Gina Rowlands make what would become a seminal American independent cinema (quiet kudos to Roger Corman to keep some readers from

being cranky). Cassevettes was known to the wider world for his character acting in *The Dirty Dozen* and *Rosemary's Baby* while his wife Gina Rowlands began her long and distinguished career on TV back in the mid 1950s, acting in everything from Kraft Television Theatre to *Bonanza* to *Dr. Kildare* to *Peyton Place*. And Peter Falk wasn't simply acting in *A Women Under the Influence* (1974) he put a half a



million dollars of his own money into the production. Although the classic film is regarded, among other things, as a profound feminist tract⁵ and among Cassevettes' and Rowlands' finest work, a large part of its groundbreaking legacy had to do with the fact that it was the first time in the history of motion pictures that an independent film was distributed without relying on the traditional Hollywood system of sub-distributors. Of course this merely showed that it could be done if you were willing to mortgage your house. The independent and semi-independent directors from David Lynch, John Sayles, Jim Jarmusch, Paul Thomas Anderson, Todd Solondz, Mike Leigh, Sally Potter (who also mortgaged her house) and Ken Loach to pick a few at random, have always known that living and working in the English-speaking feature film world is to always battle the studio system, especially when you are not taking its money, especially when you are taking its money. David Lynch, cinephiles will recall, refused George Lucas's offer to make the second *Star Wars* film, Lynch despised the studio system and though Lucas greatly admired *Eraserhead* 1976, Lynch was disappointed with friends Lucas and Spielberg for perpetuating a studio system they had all had contempt for when young and one which all auteurs worthy of the label continued to despise. For Lynch, Lucasfilm Ltd, Industrial

Light and Magic and DreamWorks were just later incarnations of the old studios: MGM, Warner Brothers and Disney—the unholy alliance of artist and businessman was keeping pace.

While Hollywood embraced the blockbuster some universities began to take a long overdue interest in Film and Media Studies and, more broadly, Cultural Studies, an offshoot, among other things, of literary, political and cultural theory⁶. Videocassette libraries and words such as cineliteracy and filmography entered the language of the academy and, eventually, of everyday life. Art house cinema, once the strict purview of urban elites was now available to anyone who owned a VCR, had access to a video store, or a mail order catalogue. But as would-be film professors, aficionados and cinephiles soon discovered, bestowing legitimacy and rigor on film and media studies would be an uphill battle and would succeed best—especially in the more rural and conservative world—when escorted and complimented by some ancient disciplines sporting the relatively new clothes of cultural studies. Many traditional academic disciplines were suffering not from rigor but rather rigor mortis: rumor had it that students had not only stopped reading but that they had stopped pretending to read. The fat and ubiquitous *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (Volumes I and II), a nightmare text for Edward Said⁷ if ever there was one, could still be seen to cause sciatic strain while being backpacked across campuses, but this was now done mostly for show. Beowulf⁸ and Chaucer never mind Virginia Woolf, knew their days in the classroom were numbered, at least as text. The homemade⁹ world, a critic like the Canadian Hugh Kenner had so loved and taught in, was coming to an end, and in our own time too. Decades later, Salman Rushdie, now far from his salad days, would lament not simply the disappearance of the book but of the mighty and lowly book reviewer as well. Although this “death”, or at least this change, in reading habits would later be seen as connected to the demise of the Liberal Arts and an attack on the deeper text of democracy itself, film would eventually become to be seen not as a fifth columnist in this war but rather as a somewhat unstable ally.

But we are getting ahead of our selves. The low level nuclear threat of the internet and Amazon, with its other attendant

acolytes and handmaidens are decades away and bookstores, in their tender, elitist and sometime snobbish way, did not seem to mind the new kid on the block. After all, they are only movies. Soon, however, bookstore clerks, as if Kevin Smith had been sent back Spock-like from the future, began to be seen having earnest, engaged and argumentative discussions in the corner video stores, and not just with their parents, girlfriends and boyfriends. One of these stores would, in time, nurture that hardcore cool auteur of *Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino.

George Steiner has written lovingly and longingly about the café culture (the coffee houses) of Europe and how they had nurtured and harboured an intellectual and artistic life for decades, if not centuries, in the streets and alleys of the great cities, allowing a Bohemian life, bound up in books, ideas and talk, to flourish in the thoroughfares of the shopkeepers, labourers and everyday citizens of the town and city. There is not much that is Bohemian about Tim Horton's or Starbucks, but for a brief moment culture—outside of sport and popular music, both of which approach religious observance or fanaticism (depending on the family member)—was talked about in public. The brief life of the video store, especially the independent ones (in this they resembled bookstores) came and went without much fanfare. It could, and sometimes did serve as the poor or rural person's art house or repertoire cinema. But you would never find Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan making a movie about the loss of an independent video store or lamenting its takeover by, for example, Blockbuster. No, celluloid would not be missed because it really never went away: it transmogrified or metamorphosed not just into digital but over to Netflix, Apple TV, Amazon, HBO, movie channels, Pirate Bay and the hacking skills of unseen teenagers and undergraduates from Beijing to London to Buenos Aires. And as we all know now “life” went “on line”.

In his *Biographical Dictionary of Film* there are several, or more than several, occasions when David Thomson becomes autobiographical and though it can safely be argued that much of his text has an elegiac tone, for the movies in particular and for film in general, in one entry he writes a pure elegy that is also part eulogy. It is in remembrance of his friend and early collaborator

in film appreciation, Kieran Hickey, an Irishman from Dublin who died relatively young at the age of 57. I note this here for selfish, autobiographical and narrative reasons of my own: Fenton Burke was a colleague and mentor of mine who came from New Waterford, Cape Breton Island, the son of an Irish Canadian coal miner¹⁰ and a professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton who also, as it happens, died relatively young at the age of 58. Although literature was his chosen field, a specialist in the novel, his great love and obsession in middle age was film and it was inevitably from Fenton that I came to learn about that moveable feast of European and World cinema. Like Thomson's friend Hickey, Fenton was not a writer but he did believe in Hickey's axiom as explained by Thomson: "It was Kieran who taught me that not to talk about something was to risk losing it, or letting it escape."

This was the time when videos could be ordered from far away, which usually meant New York, and access to the art and auteur cinema of the great urban centers was now possible. Fenton, who smoked over two packs a day until it killed him, would sit beside his fireplace on Kitchen street blowing smoke up the chimney while binging, in what is now known as Netflix TV style, on the great and-not-so-great-auteurs of the recent past. I was a yeoman in these foreign fields, so I insisted on Bergman, Buñuel and Herzog, and while he tolerated my obvious bullying

preferences, his own heart lay more with the Italians, Fellini, Rossellini and Pasolini, the quirky Cronenberg and the exotic, Almodovar. My own first encounter with Italian cinema was at the Montreal Film Festival in 1977 courtesy of my sister Lila who was working with the CBC/Radio Canada and was in the know about such things. We saw, among other films, the Taviani brothers' Paolo and Vittorio's now classic *Padre Padrone*, (1977), based on the life of Gavino Ledda, the son of an often brutal Sar-



dinian shepherd. It would be many years however before Italian cinema, especially the period of neo-realism under Rossellini and figures like his self-taught protégé, Gillo Pontecorvo, got to enter our classrooms.

In October of 1977, not long after my sister had introduced me to Italian cinema in Montreal, I landed in Ireland to pursue a PhD, not in film studies (which didn't exist in any case) but in Anglo-Irish literature and drama at University College Dublin. For a student in love with high literacy and drama the Dublin of the late seventies and early eighties was about as close to a Bohemian heaven as you could possibly find or wish for. The newly built Belfield campus of UCD resembled something out of *Logan's Run* (1976) Michael Anderson's dystopic film with Michael York running for his young blond life. Still, the surrounding concrete walls harboured the likes of Seamus Heaney, John McGahern, Seamus Deane and Tom Kilroy to mention a few. We even got to participate in Abbey Theatre workshops and dress rehearsals with the cast and crew¹¹. There were other theatres to go to of course including the Abbey's second stage, the Peacock, where we eventually got to see the San Quentin Prison players perform "Krapp's Last Tape" directed via Paris by Beckett himself. And the Gate theatre where the great Orson Welles lied his way onto the stage at sixteen and into parts, performances, fame and life-long friendships with Hilton Edwards and Micheál Mac Liammóir, later directing the latter as Iago in his version of *Othello* (1952). It was at the Gate too that we saw the beautiful and powerful Fionnula Flanagan in her prime looking



like Maureen O’Hara and totally miscast as a fragile Blanche Dubois.

Her Stanley was also miscast and we ended up feeling sorry for him because she towered over him so and he looked like he might need help when the crunch came. Flanagan, of course, had devoted a part of her career to putting Joyce onstage and film, beginning with her performance as Gerty McDowel in Joseph Strick’s adaptation of *Ulysses* (1967) which made it past the Irish film censors in 2000. Which sounds about right as these things go. The year we saw her at the Gate she was performing and perfecting her one woman show James Joyce’s *Women committed to film* in 1988. The great Siobhan McKenna missed out



on the freedom of a Fionnula Flanagan, spending most of her days on the Irish stage and often being caught in American expectations of purity, religion and what the Irish west (that’s Galway and Connemara) should sound like. This Synge-song that Brian O’Nolan (a.k.a. Flann O’Brien, a.k.a. Myles na

Gopaleen) love to parody in his Cruskeen Lawn column which he wrote for *The Irish Times* from 1940-1966 had a homegrown stage-Irish quality about it because of numerous performances of Synge’s plays, especially “The Playboy of the Western World”. Luckily, we got to see McKenna in one her last great performances at the Abbey: a Canadian friend of mine David Conrad who



was studying for his PhD in Greece came by for a visit in 1982 and we went to see her perform her one woman show “Here Are Ladies”. Her rendition of Molly’s monologue at the end of *Ulysses* would have no rival for almost two decades until the commanding Angeline Ball’s performance in *Bloom* (2003).

All great movements in art and culture need a critical mass of talent, some social and political timing and, for want of a better phrase, a partial alignment of the stars. The Ireland of the early 1980s despite (some might say because of) the war in the North and the desperate economic conditions of the Republic, was on the verge, whether consciously or not, of breaking into the exclusive club of world and Hollywood cinema. The Irish were preparing to enter this ring for the first time and then to punch so far above their weight that it looked as if they had created a cinema of their own, one equivalent to Australia's recent first wave or at least a Czech New Wave. Film and cultural historians will record the exact moments or telling details, but many of the players, for whatever reasons, seem to have come together at Ardmore Studios in Bray when John Boorman decided to shoot his version of the Arthurian Legends, *Excalibur* (1981)¹². The cast is a who's who of British stars and soon-to-be stars from Helen Mirren to Nicole Williamson to Patrick Stewart, but for Irish eyes it was Liam Neeson, Gabriel Byrne and Ciaran Hinds who stood out. Finally, there was the young Neil Jordan who was credited as a screenwriter and who Boorman¹³ would help the following year by being the executive producer on his first breakthrough film, *Angel* (1982). *Angel* (also known as *Danny Boy*) was set in Ireland and received good critical reviews especially for a debut film, but it was his 1986 film *Mona Lisa* produced by Stephen Wooley and shot in London that gained him his first international recognition. Though filmed in England with a British cast, including Bob Hoskins, Michael Cain, Robbie Coltrane and Cathy Tyson, the film has some strong Irish, and Catholic themes in particular, that say something about the origins of their director and his writer's vision. The strong performances of Hoskins, Tyson and Caine got most of the critical and popular attention, but Jordan was nominated for the Palme d'Or in Cannes.





In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray.
Canto I, Lines 1, 2.

There is a Dante-like feel to the whole film which gives its noir canvas a very Catholic and infernal tinge: from a Gustave Dore atmosphere when they are cruising the streets in search of the “lost” Cathy, to the crucifix hanging in the Irish teenage sex worker’s ear. Then, of course, there is the scene in the Catholic St. Peter’s Italian Church in Clerkenwell, London where Cathy mistakes Hoskins character for a priest and calls him Father George. Themes of innocence and loss and symbols of white rabbits, draft horses, playgrounds and an-old-woman-who-lived-in-the-shoe-house, are present throughout the film, contrasting and amplifying the sinister underworld of teenage sexual exploitation. At one point George exclaims in shock to Simone that he has a daughter that age after passing a teenage sex worker. The film takes pains not to judge the adult world of the sex workers (working in cooperation, in fact, with a legal London sex workers cooperative) but it is explicit about the exploitation and suffering of the innocent girls who get swept up and so often



swept away on streets of London or any city for that matter. Jordan is more than implying that the young Irish girls fate has a long and desperate pedigree. The central character, George, so convincingly rendered by Bob Hoskins, eventually survives this underworld, Dantesquen journey, and ends up back with his daughter. He has gone from the opening Purgatory of prison back to the inferno of the streets and the underworld of crime; he finally emerges, in the end, not in paradise or a dark wood, but back on pavement with a sense of hope and, most importantly, the love and company of his daughter.

Endnotes

¹ *Jaws* was also, as Roger Ebert suggested, “one hell of a good story, brilliantly told.” The story of course is an updated version of *Moby Dick* with Robert Shaw as a latter day Captain Ahab and, yes, it is silly to blame Spielberg or Peter Benchley for the fact that Asians love shark fin soup (either for the taste or as an aphrodisiac) and this is one of the more prominent reasons for their imminent extinction. But Ebert, like Shaw’s character Quint, blames the sharks for killing most of the crew of the *USS Indianapolis* that went into the water after being torpedoed on that fateful day of July 30, 1945. But most of the seamen died from what we would expect them to die from: hyperthermia and dehydration. Yes, there were shark attacks, but mostly the sharks fed upon the already dead sailors. It is true that the *Indianapolis* had delivered enriched uranium for the atomic bomb, *Little Boy*, to be dropped on Hiroshima, but that is not the reason, as the character Quint suggests, as to why they were not found to be missing until three and a half days later. There was no blackout, but their was incompetence on the part of the navy and a tragic story of the scapegoating of the ship’s Captain, Charles McVay, the only serving Captain in the U.S. Navy ever court-martialed for the sinking of a ship.

² In the very funny and insightful *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (2012), directed by Sophie Fiennes, Slavoj Žižek makes a Freudian/ Lacanian case for the shark, if not for the film: “In Steven Spielberg’s “Jaws” a shark starts to attack people on the beach. What does this attack mean? What does the shark stand for? There were different, even mutually exclusive answers to this question. On the one hand some critics claimed that obviously the shark stands for the foreign threat to ordinary Americans. The shark is a metaphor for either natural disaster, storms or immigrants threatening the United States citizens and so on. On the other hand it’s interesting to know that Fidel Castro, who loves the film, once said that for him it was obvious that “Jaws” is kind of a leftist, Marxist film and that the shark is a metaphor for brutal, big capital exploiting ordinary Americans. So, which is the right answer? I claim none of them and at the same time all of them.”

³ In 2013 Spielberg’s spoke at the opening of a media centre at the University of Southern California. He predicted an “implosion” in the industry. “That’s the big danger ... there’s eventually going to be an implosion – or a big meltdown. There’s going to be an implosion where three or four or maybe even a half-dozen mega budget movies are going to go crashing into the ground, and that’s going to change the paradigm.” Spielberg also suggested that this could lead to audiences being asked to pay \$25 a ticket for films such as *Iron Man 3*. Spielberg later qualified his remarks suggesting that there was room for all kinds of films because the nature of viewing had changed. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/oct/05/bridge-of-spies-stein-spielberg-denies-predicting-hollywood-implosion>

⁴ There were always other wars that Hollywood could make movies about but nothing could match the feel good impact of a Second World War film. There is a scene on a *Saturday Night Live* episode where Jerry Seinfeld is hosting: he is a substitute school teacher trying to teach about the Second World War but the students don’t know who the Nazis are. One kid speaks up and asks,

“Do you mean those guys in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?” Seinfeld says yes, but “that’s a movie, I mean...” the student persists and asks if he should bring in his copy of the movie? At the end of the skit, Seinfeld-the-teacher surrenders and says, “Yes, bring it in.” Hollywood myth as history of course is the point. Both Seinfeld and Larry David did a similar thing with *Shindler’s List* (1993) when Jerry is caught making out with a date in the cinema while the movie is on. His family and New York Jewish relatives hear about it and berate him from New York to Florida, but we get the joke and the point: how do you represent The Shoah in cinema or any art form for that matter? Can such suffering be aestheticized?

Unlike the generation who went before him, Spielberg seems unwilling to critique the contemporary military industrial complex of America. When he returns to the second war, to the “greatest generation” as they are called, he rarely does so with an eye on the present, on what American historian Howard Zinn would call, *A People’s History of the United States*. For Spielberg, the ideology is always ignored or accepted. Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglorious Bastards* for all its CGI violence attempts to end forever, in one combustible celluloid moment, the Hollywood fetish of the Second World War from John Wayne to the next Band of Brothers. Finally, does using the Holocaust as Subject demean the lives lived and taken? Must the Jews (and by extension the Israelis) in the words of Frederick Seidel forever learn “How to Keep Killing Hitler”? Can we and should we embrace Roberto Benigni’s comedy *Life is Beautiful* (1997) or are there limits to representation and Subject? The iconic Primo Levi thought so. None of these questions diminish Spielberg’s achievement, but the film, like Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* and other such films, go beyond cinema and become events. Can we critique Spielberg for putting the girl with the red dress in the film or making the bodies of the women in the showers scenes sexual instead of famished? These are legitimate criticism and they remain even in the face of the films astute political, existential and tragic scenes.

⁵In his biography of John Cassavetes, *Accidental Genius: How John Cassavetes Invented the Independent Film* (2006) Marshall Fine records the independent auteur as saying: “I only knew one thing about *Women* [Under the Influence] when we started: that it was a difficult time for today’s woman to be left alone while somebody goes out and lives. I know when I was not working and Gena was working for me—because I was really in trouble in this business—I stayed home and took care of the baby and I was a pretty good housewife and all that. But I didn’t have really the same reactions as a woman would have, mainly because I didn’t have to think into the future of when I’d get older or when my attractiveness would fade or when the kids would grow up or when the baby would cease to cling to you. All those things are more interesting than what they’re making movies out of.” No one seemed to agree with him when he approached Hollywood moneymen with the idea. He was told, “No one wants to see a crazy, middle-aged dame.” See also *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* (2001) by Ray Carney.

⁶In *After Theory* (2003) Terry Eagleton, who had been a student of Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies, notes that: “There had long been recognition in radical circles that political change had to be

‘cultural’ to be effective. Any political change which does not embed itself in people’s feelings and perceptions—which does not secure their consent, engage their desires and weave its way into their sense of identity—is unlikely to endure very long. This, roughly speaking, is what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci meant by ‘hegemony.’ Eagleton goes on to emphasize “There was a great deal more at stake than so-called identity politics. There were movements like feminism, for which culture in the broad sense of the word is not an optional extra. On the contrary, it is central to the feminism’s political demands, the grammar in which they are framed. Value, speech, image, experience and identity are here the very language of political struggle, as they are in all ethnic or sexual politics. Ways of feeling and forms of representation are in the long run quite as crucial as childcare provision or equal pay. They are a vital part of the project of political emancipation”. pp. 46-47.

⁷ Among Said’s great books is *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993.

⁸ Not even the late Seamus Heaney’s glorious translation of the Beowulf bard could keep the text on campus.

⁹ Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World*, Knopf, 1975

¹⁰ Fenton eventually replaced Sheldon Currie another coal miner’s son and author of *The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum* a collection of stories which became the film *Margaret’s Museum* with Helena Bonham Carter.

¹¹ I remember our seminar class attending Tom Kilroy’s “Talbot’s Box” with Roger McHugh, the first holder of the chair of Anglo–Irish Literature and the man who stood up and protested Abbey productions with Valentin Irenmonger, the poet and diplomat, in the 1950s. McHugh was also referred to as an “auld Fenian” probably because he was one of the people responsible for bringing back the bones of Sir Roger Casement, an Irish patriot the British had hanged during the Easter Rising of 1916.

¹² John Boorman shot four of his 19 feature film projects at Ardmore, beginning in 1974 with the sci-fi drama *Zardoz*, starring Sean Connery as the futuristic barbarian Zed. Boorman lived in County Wicklow for over forty years, his grandmother Fitzgerald (on his father’s side) was Irish.

¹³ John Boorman received the Irish Film and Television Life Time Achievement Award in 2010.