

“Anywhere but Scotland?” Transnationalism and New Scottish Cinema¹

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Fifteen years on from the moment that Danny Boyle’s *Trainspotting* (1996) fulfilled the promise of his earlier *Shallow Grave* (1994) and helped to launch what has become known as New Scottish Cinema, the critical debates which have accompanied its development find themselves at a crossroads. Prompted in part by the New Scottish Cinema symposium, which took place in Ireland in 2005 and looked back over 20 years of Scottish film, key writers have begun to critically assess the arguments which have circulated and to refashion the debate for the future. Initial models focussing upon the influences of first American and then European cinema have proved themselves to be inflexible in locating New Scottish Cinema within a global cinema marketplace, and furthermore have privileged a certain type of film, influenced by European art cinema traditions, as being representative of Scottish cinema to the exclusion of other more commercial projects. Not only is this ironic considering the inherently commercial nature of both *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave*, but also it had led to a vision of Scottish film which is more European than Scottish; more international than national.

Recent scholars have begun to address New Scottish Cinema through the concept of transnationalism and it is the aim of this article to consider transnationalism as a way forward for critical debates about New Scottish Cinema through a case study of two films, both shot in the same location, one of which has been widely discussed and fits the more traditional critical model, Ken Loach’s *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), and the other of which has been largely ignored and is much more mainstream in its ambitions and economic context, *Dear Frankie* (2005). Beginning by discussing the debates which emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s, and how those debates have become problematised, this piece will then examine how transnationalism seemingly prevents New Scottish Cinema dealing with Scottish issues, before arguing, through a comparative analysis of the two selected films, that

transnationalism firstly offers a broader, more inclusive approach to New Scottish Cinema and second that it encompasses, rather than eclipses, the national.

The concept of New Scottish Cinema was first outlined by Duncan Petrie in 2000 in his article of the same name (2000a: 153-169) and his book *Screening Scotland* (2000b: 172-190). In broad terms it began in the mid 1990s with the success of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*, which not only achieved critical acclaim and box office success, but which also helped to cement ongoing developments in the funding of Scottish films. As Petrie notes *Shallow Grave* was the first film to be supported by the newly established Glasgow Film Fund (GFF), and its success encouraged the GFF to grow (Petrie 2001: 55). Writing in 2001, Petrie declared that 1999 was a landmark year, seeing as it did the release of two key debut features, Peter Mullan's *Orphans* and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*, both of which he saw as defining texts, in part because of their "art-house" connotations (2001: 57). These films, he argued, represented a form of "devolved" British cinema; a Scottish cinema that, like the devolved Scottish parliament, took for itself a measure of control away from the centralised power of London based "British" cinema and funding, and established its own regional identity.

The initial enthusiasm with which New Scottish Cinema was met waned as the new millennium continued. Writing in 2006, Petrie offered the more measured suggestion that the undoubted and demonstrable explosion in Scottish feature and short film production since *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* had "come to suggest that Scottish Cinema has a certain tangibility" (2006: 134) which is a far cry from the notion of the devolved Scottish cinema championed five years earlier. Indeed in 2005 he told journalist Noel King "I was very positive, upbeat and optimistic...I think that would be slightly tempered now" (quoted in Murray, 2007: 89). Murray suggests that the decade since 1996 has seen a "raising but also disappointing [of] local expectations" (Murray, 2009: vii) and proposes elsewhere that this may be due to "the paradoxical lack of fit between the unprecedented level of local achievement in film cultural and industrial terms...and the feeling, on the part of the very people responsible for that achievement, that, ultimately, it was less significant than was hoped" (2007: 89).

In academic discussions this sense of disappointment on an industrial level has manifested as an attempt to reconsider and review the image of New Scottish Cinema which emerged after Petrie's groundbreaking work. As part of the revisionist approach, what is now emerging in critical discourses is a sense that the explosion of academic analysis of Scottish Cinema since 2000 has become rather narrow, revolving around relatively few key films and film-makers. Particularly feted for example have been the works of Peter Mullan (*Orphans*, 1999; *The Magdalene Sisters*, 2002), Lynne Ramsay (*Ratcatcher*, 1999; *Morvern Callar*, 2002) and David McKenzie (*Young Adam*, 2003) (see for example Petrie, 2001, 2006; Murray 2007; Street, 2009). Petrie in particular frequently returns to the works of Mullan and Ramsay, in part because they both graduated to features via successful short films, and Petrie highlights the significance of short film making to the cultural impact and industrial development of Scottish film (2006). The result of this narrowing of focus is that by 2006/07 critical discussion of New Scottish Cinema settled on a formula which suggested that from the mid to late 1990s Scottish Cinema was initially influenced by American independent cinema thanks to the success of *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave*. The subsequent release of *Orphans* and *Ratcatcher* marked 1999 as a transitional year which saw New Scottish Cinema increasingly tied to Europe, drawing more heavily upon European funding and European funding models, relying increasingly upon the film festival circuit for its international profile, and also moving aesthetically towards a high-quality auteur-based art cinema (see Petrie, 2006, Murray, 2007). Indeed Murray goes so far as to say that Andrea Arnold's thriller *Red Road* (2006) is proof positive of this and means that the relationship between European and Scottish cinema "can now-perhaps for the first time – be accepted as objective observation rather than as a prescriptive and only partially applicable aspiration" (2007: 86).

Leading the emerging new discourse is Sarah Neely, who offers a compelling argument for the reductive qualities of this formula. She suggests that this defined trajectory based around a small number of key films has reduced New Scottish Cinema to a series of identifiable strands in a similar way to Colin McArthur's groundbreaking edited collection on Scottish Cinema, *Scotch Reels* (1982), a volume against which debates around New Scottish Cinema strongly reacted. Neely suggests that, "although it is appealing to define a 'New Scottish Cinema', what the project of *Scotch Reels* showed us is the limitations and dangers

in this type of analysis" (2008: 162). While Mullan, Ramsay and Mackenzie's films, like Arnold's, are undoubtedly influenced by European art cinema, they are by no means representative of the entire output of Scottish cinema, and Neely suggests that "the films produced are too complex and contradictory to allow for a clear definition of Scottish cinema to be carved out" (2008: 162).

Neely ends her article with a call for a broader acceptance of the variety of Scottish cinema. She suggests that, "a vibrant cinema is marked by a diversity of influences, the collaboration with and borrowing from, other film cultures, and the embrace of a variety of film-making practices" (2008: 162-3). In this call Neely seeks to bridge the gap between the model of New Scottish Cinema outlined by Murray and Petrie among others and the diversity of voices and styles which she champions, thus acknowledging that New Scottish Cinema is influenced from elsewhere, but not seeking to reduce these influences to the broad categories of first American independent and then European art cinema. Indeed Murray himself, whilst simultaneously championing the influence of European art cinema in *Red Road*, notes that, "Scottish cinemas Rentonesque rush to be 'just like' other larger, longer-established and more internationally successful national cinemas proved ultimately to be a process of institutionally enforced capitulation" (2007: 79).

Recent discussions have indeed begun to move away from seeing Scottish cinema as trying to be like other international cinemas, and have tried instead to place Scottish cinema more broadly as part of an international cinema community. While this is a tentative step towards fulfilling Neely's objective, the international community in question is still very much that of European art cinema. Petrie, for example, argues that one of the essences of European art cinema is that it is simultaneously national and international. He notes that, "while (art) cinema is often predicated on a strong sense of national identity or specificity, art films also tend to be produced as much for international distribution and exhibition as they are for local consumption" (2006: 136). Emerging from the international film festival circuit, art cinemas as new movements in national cinemas (here represented by New Scottish Cinema but it could just as easily be New German Cinema of the 1970s, Fifth Generation Chinese Cinema of the 1980s, or New Korean Cinema of the 1990s) are born out of national issues, and feed back into those issues, but are equally international in scope.

More recently Sarah Street has extended this argument by focussing upon Scottish cinema as post-national or transnational. Again using examples of films which can be identified as influenced by European art cinema, in this case *Morvern Callar* and *Young Adam*, Street argues that:

trans-national cinema is marked by diversity in terms of its production base; funding sources; origin of production personnel and actors; variety of locations and patterns of cross-cultural reception...we are not talking about globalisation or internationalism, but something more localised, maintaining specific features and themes but at the same time reaching out to many different audiences (2009: 142)

The significant issue, as Street suggests, is that New Scottish Cinema is simultaneously local, national and transnational. A film like *Young Adam* for example, while maintaining a certain level of national relevance, be it through the heritage of the project (based upon a novel by Scottish writer Alexander Trocchi), the stars (both Peter Mullan and Ewan McGregor are identifiable figureheads of New Scottish Cinema), or by funding (part funded by Scottish Screen and Glasgow-based Sigma films), is nevertheless an international tale. While it takes place on the Union canal, as Street points out, "one canal stretch is much like any other" (2009: 151) and the themes of the film, around love and betrayal, are universal.²

Street's focus is once again on art film, but this trend towards universality via transnationalism is potentially very useful for broadening the discussion away from the primacy of European art cinema influences, because universality is by no means a new tradition in New Scottish Cinema. As Petrie points out, even though *Shallow Grave* is set in Edinburgh, its story is equally universal, unequivocally stated in the opening voice over of the film itself which tells the audience "this could have been any city-they're all the same" (2000b: 192). Similarly Martin McLoone describes the American-Independent influenced *Trainspotting*, as being set "anywhere-but-Edinburgh" and *Late Night Shopping* (2001) as being set "anywhere-but-Scotland" (2009: 351, 352), while John Hill has argued that in Ken Loach's Scottish-set dramatic trilogy of *My Name is Joe* (1998), *Sweet Sixteen* and *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004), Glasgow operates as a kind of "Liverpool-in-disguise", partly due to the difficulties of raising production finance in the England. He suggests that it is to represent the typicality of the working-class in Britain, rather than to offer a specifically Scottish case

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study, that led Loach to cross the border (2009: 90). This is even the case for a much more mainstream film like *On a Clear Day* (2005). In the film Peter Mullan is laid off from the Clyde shipyard in which he has worked all his life and eventually finds self respect by swimming the English Channel. *On a Clear Day* is very obviously influenced by *The Full Monty* (1997), drawing as it does upon the idea of disempowered masculinity finding new self-esteem by taking on a symbolic challenge. Nevertheless the film seems to relate to national issues through its link to the Scottish tradition of Clydesideism, the notion of the 'hard man' whose masculinity is threatened by unemployment who finds self-fulfilment in positive physical action (see Neely, 2008: 152). Yet the film was originally set in Newcastle and the location was moved to Glasgow purely to ensure Mullan would play the lead role (Martin Jones, 2009: 188-9), so as originally conceived the film draws more upon the image of post-industrial Britain seen in the representation of Sheffield in *The Full Monty*, than any particularly Scottish tradition of representation.

While transnationalism offers the potential for a more inclusive definition of New Scottish Cinema which encompasses not just art cinema in the style of *Young Adam* or *Morvern Callar*, but more mainstream fare such as *On a Clear Day*, the seeming ubiquity of this idea of universality, represented by this phrase "anywhere-but-Scotland" raises the issue that transnationalism reduces Scotland to a mere location for a universal story. This move, dictated by economic pressures around distribution and financing effectively negates any useful form of engagement with local or national issues in favour of a focus on universal concerns, with Scotland itself literally receding into the background. But this is not the case, as can be seen by a comparison of two films, Ken Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* and Shona Auerbach's *Dear Frankie*. These films are ostensibly very different. Loach's film draws upon British Social Realist traditions and is linked to art cinema, Auerbach's is much more commercial. Yet both films were shot in the same location and both are representative of transnational cinema as outlined by Street. Significantly, while both films ostensibly use Scotland merely as a background for a more international story – in the case of *Sweet Sixteen* as a substitute for England and in the case of *Dear Frankie* as a location for a universal story – the following analysis of the two films demonstrates that they offer a method for reconciling the national and the international.

The mainstream qualities of *Dear Frankie* appear to have effectively excluded it from critical debate. While Neely (2008) discusses the film as a political metaphor, David Martin-Jones, whose book *Scotland: Global Cinemas* was in part inspired by the fact that writing on Scottish cinema ignored so many films, mentions it only in passing in a list of other titles (2009: 196), as does Murray (2007: 85). The other most recent work on Scottish cinema, aptly titled *Scottish Cinema Now*, contains not one mention of the film in fourteen chapters (2009). The film tells the story of a young deaf boy, Frankie (Jack McElhone), who moves to a new town with his mother, Lizzie (Emily Mortimer), and grandmother. Frankie's father is absent, ostensibly working on a ship, and Frankie regularly writes letters to him. It emerges that his letters are intercepted by his mother, who writes back to Frankie pretending to be his father in order to protect him from the truth that his father was abusive and violent and ultimately the cause of Frankie's deafness. When the imaginary ship that his father is on not only turns out to be real, but is also docking in the town, Lizzie pays a stranger (Gerard Butler) to pretend to be Frankie's estranged father for the day. While the film is set in Scotland, the theme of healing a broken family has universal relevance. *Sweet Sixteen* tells the story of Liam, a fifteen year old boy whose mother is in prison. At the start of the film Liam is thrown out of the house shared by his grandfather and his mother's boyfriend, Stan, after refusing to help them use his mother to smuggle drugs to the prison inmates. With his friend Pinball, Liam steals Stan's drugs and starts dealing in order to raise enough money to buy a caravan for himself and his mother to share when she is released. This draws him to the attention of a local drug kingpin, Tony, who takes Liam under his wing but asks him to kill Pinball, who is a liability.

There are elements in both films that clearly link them to Street's concept of transnationalism. For example, Street highlights the idea of escape and transience as being a fundamental aspect of her conceptualisation of *Morvern Callar* and *Young Adam* as transnational. For her "Scotland as a narrative setting is less important than its function as a place to be left" (2009: 143). In the case of *Morvern* it is a literal escape to Spain, while Joe in *Young Adam* is categorised as being less about escape in a national context, but in various other guises; escape from the past, escape from commitment, escape from the present via

sex and new experiences. Set, like *Morvern Callar* and *Young Adam* in a non-urban Scotland of “pastoral, port and waterside locations that in themselves indicate points of possible departure” (Street, 2009: 148) Lizzie and Frankie’s life in *Dear Frankie* is equally transient; escaping from Frankie’s father they move from place to place, while both Lizzie and Frankie escape the reality of their situation through the fantasy father figure, first on paper, and then in the physical figure of The Stranger. In Frankie’s ‘fantasy’ voiceover (he is deaf and does not speak, and also the voice is that of a different actor) he speaks to his father about his success at geography, and on his wall is a map of the world dotted with flags which mark the locations of his father’s ship. While Frankie’s transient real life is land-locked within Scottish borders, Frankie’s equally transient but much more satisfying fantasy world of his imagination, is linked to his fictional father and his life outside and away. Similarly Liam in *Sweet Sixteen*, thrown out of the family home, occupies transient spaces throughout the film and seeks actively to escape from his surroundings.

Ken Loach is a committed socialist filmmaker whose work is “inextricably linked” to “the continuing history of British realism” (Brown, 2010, 35) and therefore stems from the tradition of European Art Cinema championed by writers on New Scottish Cinema. In this respect *Sweet Sixteen* can clearly be situated alongside *Morvern Callar* and *Young Adam* within a tradition of European Art Cinema (Street 2009: 150), albeit a particularly British form. *Dear Frankie* wears no such label. In an interview discussing the Cannes premiere in 2004, Emily Mortimer said, “I understand why *Young Adam* was well-received [at Cannes] because it was a film-lovers film, but *Dear Frankie* was not esoteric at all, it was more of an audience film” (Mortimer in Goodridge, 2005: 13). As a film for audiences *Dear Frankie* does not seek or encourage art-film comparisons but instead straddles an art-cinema/commercial cinema divide. The film’s links to European art cinema are clear in its origins. Screenwriter Andrea Gibb acknowledges that she was heavily influenced by Peter Mullan, Lynne Ramsay and Bill Douglas when preparing the script (2011). Director Shona Auerbach studied in Poland and was influenced by Eastern-European cinema while producer Caroline Wood was initially inspired to make a film about a young child after having seen the Academy Award winning Czech film *Kolya* (1997). Like Ramsay and Mullan, Auerbach came from a successful short film background, her student short film *Seven* (1996) having won awards at

international festivals, while Gibb originally wrote the script as a short, submitted to the Scottish Tartan Shorts competition where it lost out to Lynne Ramsay's script for *Gas Man* (1997), one of the shorts championed by Petrie in his argument for a devolved Scottish cinema (2001: 55). Like *Young Adam*, it was also an international production. Producer Caroline Wood was based in London, while funding came from Scottish Screen and also from European money, in this case funds from the National Lottery distributed via the Pathé franchise.

There, however, the links to art cinema come to an end. Immediately after the Cannes premiere it was picked up for distribution by the mainstream American distributor Miramax, who acquired the rights for North and South America, Spain, Italy and Australia (Minns, 2003: 12). *Young Adam* was also picked up for American distribution by a mainstream distributor, Sony Pictures Classic, but received a much smaller release. At its peak *Dear Frankie* ran on 96 screens in the US, building from only five screens, while *Young Adam* opened on nine screens and reached a maximum of 41. *Sweet Sixteen* was distributed in the USA by the mainstream distributor Lionsgate Films, but played in a maximum of 21 screens over nine weeks and grossed \$316, 319 at the US Box Office (Box Office Mojo). While both Mortimer and McElhone have art cinema credentials through their appearance in *Young Adam*, they are paired with Gerard Butler who in 2005 was on the brink of mainstream international stardom, *Dear Frankie* coming between *Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003) and *Timeline* (2003), and the lead role as *The Phantom of the Opera* (2005). Indeed although *Dear Frankie* was finished in 2003 it opened in the UK in January 2005 and in the USA in March, after *The Phantom of the Opera* in both countries.³ While *Young Adam* also features a Hollywood star, Ewan McGregor, alongside Peter Mullan and Tilda Swinton, McGregor is one of the very few actors who is comfortable in both art and mainstream films and has equally strong credentials in both.

Dear Frankie straddles an art-cinema/commercial divide not only industrially, but also thematically and tonally, represented by both universality and positivity. This universal quality is articulated in specific terms. In interviews on the DVD Butler describes the film as a "fairy-tale couched in the reality of everyday life", (Pathe Distribution Ltd 2005) Mortimer and director Shona Auerbach both describe it as a "fable", (Pathe Distribution Ltd 2005)

while Butler notes the positive aspect by describing the film as “a nice mix of what is typical of a British film, but it doesn’t drag you down”, (Pathe Distribution Ltd 2005) something echoed by Adam Minns who notes that the film “was always conceived as a warmer...slice of realism” (2003:12). Thus while *Dear Frankie* has undeniable aesthetic links to traditions of realism in British cinema, itself a movement within the European art cinema model, notably for example by shooting on location, by using regional accents and by setting the film in a predominantly working class milieu, this emphasis upon the fable or fairy tale sets it apart from the realist traditions embodied by *Sweet Sixteen*.

This is particularly visible in the representation of Greenock, where *Dear Frankie* was shot. Greenock is where screenwriter Andrea Gibb grew up and also supplies the location for *Sweet Sixteen*. While there are some similarities, overall the presentation of the town is markedly different in the two films as befits their very different approaches. As a social realist filmmaker with particular concerns with the effects of long-term unemployment in a post-industrial Britain, Loach emphasises the decaying urban landscape of Greenock. This emerges in particular once Liam and Pinball become involved in the drugs trade, where their drug deals take place in back alleyways and rundown housing estates. Likewise as the crisis between the two friends deepens and Liam is ordered to kill Pinball, he finds him in a typically filthy abandoned flat/drug flophouse on a bleak estate. Yet while *Sweet Sixteen* is set predominantly in the streets of this urban landscape, Liam and Pinball spend a great deal of time high up and looking down; they look down at Liam’s grandfather’s house from Pinball’s flat, the caravan which Liam buys for his mother is on a hill overlooking the Clyde and the town, Pinball looks down from a vacant flat on Liam as he gets beaten up while selling on the streets, and after finding Pinball in order to kill him, Liam sits on a bench overlooking the town. Consistent with Street’s analysis of *Morvern Callar* and *Young Adam*, these vantage points offer the boys a sense of escape from the urban streets, tenements and alleyways, and by extension the world of broken homes, unemployment, drugs and petty crime that make up their lives. In reality, however, escape is never possible and barely conceived of. Except for the caravan, which Liam buys precisely so his mother and he can escape the streets, these other vantage points represent Liam and Pinball not looking up away from their environment, but looking back down into it, less an attempt to escape than

to step back and try to assert some kind of control. Thus Liam and Pinball watch from their vantage point as the police, called by Liam, arrive at his grandfather's house, and from the bench he calls Tony to say that Pinball is dead, even though he has spared his life.

Dear Frankie also makes use of vantage points, but in a very different way. Frankie's window in his apartment looks down not upon urban decay but upon a wide street lined with beautiful old stone buildings leading to the docks, the Clyde and the distant mountains. Frankie's favourite spot is on a hill overlooking the Clyde while Lizzie, when she reaches her lowest point in *Dear Frankie* having gone to a bar to find a man to pretend to be Frankie's father, and having been accused of being a prostitute, sits on a bench all night staring at the Clyde wondering what to do. In *Dear Frankie* these vantage points do not offer escape nor separate the characters from the urban environment but are instead part of their everyday lives, because they and the film never enter the urban environment of Greenock. Instead the location is presented as a town nestling between the hills and the water. The football pitch for example, where The Stranger takes Frankie for football trials and Frankie collects his winnings from Ricky Monroe having made a bet that his father would appear, is filmed as a picturesque green space with the town nestled in the mountains on one side and the Clyde on the other.

Loach says of Greenock in the production notes for *Sweet Sixteen* that "the scenery is spectacular, which is more that can be said for the job opportunities since the shipyards closed" (Anon, 2002). Echoing Loach, Andrea Gibb says that, "the striking thing about Greenock is the juxtaposition of the beauty of the hills and the urban decay of the town itself" (2011). In *Dear Frankie* this urban decay is highlighted when, whilst walking to the aforementioned local pub Lizzie passes a derelict warehouse symbolic of the area's industrial decline. Also the Clyde, while represented as beautiful from a distance, is not always so. On their first day out together, Frankie and The Stranger hang out next to a grim slipway across from the docks, and the beach which they joyfully run across in a key iconic image is not a picture-postcard sandy seaside beach but a horrid, drab, boggy mess.⁴ While both films therefore share some similar imagery, in Loach's film, true to his commitment to socialism and realism as a human being and a filmmaker, the emphasis of the mise en scene is on the closed shipyards, joblessness and urban decay. In contrast *Dear Frankie's* merging

of realism with a softer, fable-like quality shifts the focus much more towards the beauty of the location, and represents Greenock more as a seaside town, to the extent that, as Andrea Gibb notes, “I remember watching the rushes and thinking that people would be thinking, ‘Let’s go there for our holidays’. That made me hoot” (2011). Towards the end of *Dear Frankie*, as Lizzie and The Stranger finally make a connection and Lizzie finally opens up to a man again, suggesting some form of healing on her part, they walk along the promenade, as if taking a romantic stroll just like any holidaymakers might after a pleasant evening out. The entrance to Lizzie’s apartment is equally couched in seaside terms. Next to her front door is the Café, the barbers and the welcoming bright lights of Marie’s chip shop, looking for all the world like a row of local seafront shops facing the promenade.

While *Dear Frankie* does not therefore hide the reality of the post-industrial landscape of Greenock, it makes no attempt to foreground it. In part this is because the decayed post-industrial urban landscape is not part of the point which the filmmakers want to make because it is not related to the problems which Lizzie and Frankie face. In *Sweet Sixteen* Liam’s conflict is prescribed by his circumstances and his environment, and thus is an internal conflict caused by external factors. Liam’s life of crime is motivated by the desire for himself and his mother to escape to the caravan and get, as he calls it, “a fresh start”. While Liam seems proactive in his desire to escape, he is reacting to the pressures which his circumstances assert upon him. Conversely, in *Dear Frankie* the conflict for this family is more of their own making and therefore more internal. There are external pressures to which they must react, notably that they move constantly to avoid being found by Frankie’s real father, plus the crisis in the family is precipitated by the arrival of the *Accra*, a ship which Lizzie didn’t even know existed and made up in Frankie’s letters from his father. Aside from these elements, the environment which surrounds Lizzie and Frankie in Greenock puts little pressure upon them and is in fact highly supportive and comforting. The only threatening space is the pub where Lizzie sits by herself, and this location is very clearly separated from the seaside world by Lizzie’s walk past the derelict warehouse, marking a change of the environment from seafront to urban. As Gibb notes, “the community strength...is important to the story. That’s what I grew up with and that’s what I drew on”. (2011) Compared to the cramped flats of *Sweet Sixteen*, which are dingy, cluttered and

mostly coloured with dull greens, even the apartment which Frankie shares with his mother and Nan is warm and comfortable. The colour scheme within is predominantly brown. In the opening sequence when they move in, they are surrounded by brown boxes, a large wooden kitchen table, brown doors and brown wallpaper. The corner of the room which belongs to Nan consists of a big sofa with a brown rattan framework and dark green cushions. This emphasis on brown suggests a certain drabness born of poverty, but much more than that it suggests the apartment is an earthy, warm and comforting place, augmented by the warm lights coming through the big picture window in the kitchen.

In this comforting environment conflicts from the outside are dealt with cursorily. The absent father, when he returns, is bedridden and so while Lizzie sees his violence once again, he poses no threat to Frankie either physically or emotionally. Ricky Monroe is obnoxious but his attempts to “bully” Frankie are pathetic and cause Frankie little trouble. When he writes “Def Boy” on Frankie’s desk, Frankie politely smiles and corrects his spelling. The only time Ricky gets to Frankie is by making the bet that his father will not turn up to football trials, and when defeated Ricky capitulates without rancour. While the social situation of the character in Loach’s films is the driving force of the narrative, the drama of *Dear Frankie* does not need a socially deprived environment in order to take place. While the film does not pretend that the family have money - it is clear that they don’t and nor do the other characters - the absence of money is of minimal importance. Thus Greenock becomes a location, a community wherein the narrative takes place, rather than an active participant in the lives of the characters. As Gibb notes, “the film is set in Greenock simply because that’s where I grew up. We never name it. It’s not about Greenock as such”. (2011) This downplaying of the significance of place adds to the impression of timelessness that the film attempts to convey, which was a deliberate choice by Auerbach in order to highlight and maintain the fairy-tale/fable like quality of the film. While the film is set in the contemporary world, as the occasionally glimpsed cars make clear, there are no cell phones and no computers, and even Nan’s TV set is a small portable with a stand-alone aerial which could be from any period from the 1970s onwards.

Ostensibly this timelessness distinguishes *Dear Frankie* from the contemporary post-Thatcherite, post-industrial world of *Sweet Sixteen*. But the fact that Loach’s film uses

Scotland as “a Liverpool substitute” means that while one film is timeless and the other rooted in the present, neither film is actually using the location as anything more than a suitable place in which to site the action. It is not Greenock that is of particular importance to Loach, merely the environment which it represents. Despite the fact that its depiction of the town is more aligned to the tradition of British social realism, *Sweet Sixteen* uses Greenock and Scotland as a background to a drama that is not inherently Scottish in the same way that *Dear Frankie* does. Yet crucially this does not mean that the Scottish background is of no relevance to Scotland. Even though Scotland may stand in for Liverpool in terms of the universality of its depiction of working class life, *Sweet Sixteen* is nevertheless irrefutably Scottish. Screenwriter Paul Laverty interviewed local young people when preparing the script and members of the local community appear in the film (Anon, 2002). While Greenock may be the background for a story which is not inherently Scottish, equally it is also the real community which grounds the melodrama of the action. Post-industrial decline, poverty and drugs are just as relevant in Scotland as in England, or indeed Wales or many other European countries. Equally while *Dear Frankie* may be a fable telling a universal tale of childhood, faith and hope, this does not deny it relevance to its Scottish setting. The Stranger for example, by his very name, represents an archetype, but while Gibb freely acknowledges he is “a Western archetype. Like Shane”, he is also by her own admission equally a “West of Scotland archetype”, simultaneously drawing upon and projecting both national and international models (2011).

Thus these two films, from very different traditions – one from an art cinema tradition, the other more commercial – suggest that a transnational cinema of Scotland-as-background does not deny Scottish cinema a relevance to its own nation and prompt a reading of the films as “anywhere but Scotland.” Instead it can, as Street suggests, help to avoid “narrow particularism” (2009: 151) and identify a cinema which can be celebrated both for its crossing of industrial, national and generic boundaries but also for its relevance to the place in which it is set. The point about universal themes is that they are universal, and while applicable outside of the milieu of Greenock or Scotland, such themes nevertheless both draw from and relate to that milieu. Therefore the transnational cinema of *Dear Frankie* and *Sweet Sixteen* represents a cinema which we must define not as “anywhere but Scotland”,

but far more significantly as “anywhere *and* Scotland”. The advantage of this approach for the debates around New Scottish Cinema are that this model is both more inclusive – allowing for discussion of more mainstream films - and more national, drawing themes of international interest from a specifically Scottish setting.

At the end of *Dear Frankie*, it is clear that Frankie has known all along that The Stranger is not his father. Andrea Gibb suggests that, “Frankie is really the parent at the end...He consents to Lizzie's maternal fantasy in some ways. Allows her to be his mother. Gives credibility to her role. Just as he does with the adopted father figure.” (2011). The concept of transnationalism allows us to redefine New Scottish Cinema less as a young industry under the parental influence of American independent or European art cinema, but rather as a mature and thoughtful industry which is active rather than passive in selecting its influences and applying them towards critical and commercial success in a global marketplace.

Endnotes.

¹ I am indebted to Andrea Gibb, screenwriter for *Dear Frankie*, for taking the time to discuss the film with me and answer my questions. I would also like to thank fellow screenwriter Line Langebek for initially contacting Andrea on my behalf.

² Indeed while Trocchi was Scottish, he emigrated to France in the 1950s before ending up in America, and the novel itself is influenced by French intellectual pornographic writing of the 1950s.

³ It should be mentioned here that in 2004-5 Miramax was undergoing considerable problems with parent company Disney, which resulted in the Weinstein Brothers leaving in 2005. This may have had an impact on when *Dear Frankie* was released in the USA, although waiting for the high-profile *Phantom of the Opera* to make Gerard Butler a superstar is equally plausible.

⁴ This was ‘cleaned up’ for the poster image which has noticeably brighter colours and more of a joyous sense of running through the sea than running across wet sand at low tide.

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