



The Non-Traditional (M)Other: The Representation of Young Motherhood and Ambivalent Motherhood in Contemporary German and Irish Films

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A major thesis presented as full requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in
German Studies and Media Studies

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures,
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August 2020

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional motherhood. I investigate how the films represent young mothers and ambivalent mothers; I analyse the characters' roles within society and examine how the mothers' family situations influence their maternal experiences. I do so to fill a gap in current research on non-traditional maternal representations in contemporary European film. Using a comparative case study, my textual analysis shows that the films share a representation of the non-traditional mother as the *Other*, while also presenting differences that can be related to the national context.

These differences regarding young motherhood, for example, include a focus on reproductive rights in Irish film and a strong expectation of failure in the German context. I demonstrate that the films represent the young mothers as socially isolated and that their bodily autonomy is restricted. In particular, I show how the films represent that society expects them to fail as mothers. Furthermore, my investigation of the depiction of ambivalent mothers reveals that they are frequently represented in opposition to both "natural" and "sacrosanct motherhood," so that their representation challenges an ideal image of maternity. My analysis shows that most of the films do not represent non-traditional motherhood in combination with both work and sex, and when they do so, they frame them as incompatible. Additionally, I show that non-traditional mothers are dissatisfied with their family situation. In particular, the role of the father influences the mothers' perception of their own ability to mother.

This study builds on the framework of maternal discourses that E. Ann Kaplan identifies in American media of the 1980s and 1990s and develops it to include two further categories. It adds a European focus by investigating how contemporary German and Irish films represent both young and ambivalent mothers.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the Irish Research Council for their financial support of this research. Without their funding, I would not have been able to conduct this project.

I am indebted to both of my supervisors, Dr. Valerie Heffernan and Dr. Denis Condon, for their continuous support throughout this research project, for their expertise, patience and motivation. Thank you.

Both the Media and the German Department at Maynooth University offered a particularly friendly and positive environment to work in. I am grateful that I was able to benefit from the expertise of my colleagues in both departments. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Kylie Jarrett, Dr. Anne O'Brien, Dr. Sarah Arnold, Dr. Aaron Hunter, Dr. Gavan Titley, Dr. Janeen Naji, Anne Byrne, Tracey O'Flaherty, Dr. Cordula Böcking and Fiona Cummins for their advice and support.

I am also grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Institute at Maynooth University for providing a research space for the postgraduate students. This space allowed a lively exchange in a supportive environment. Therefore, I want to thank the Dean of Graduate Studies, Prof. Maria Pramaggiore, and the whole team for their practical support throughout my research project; in particular, Conor Wilkinson, Éilís Murray, Hazel Keane Lavelle and Dr. Andrea Valova.

My gratitude goes to my fellow postgraduate students with whom I was able to have engaging conversations, who gave me invaluable feedback and who made my days a little bit brighter. In particular, I would like to thank Matthew Fogarty, Monireh Astani, Chris Beusang, Thomas Connolly, Conor Dowling, Meredith Dabek, Sarah O'Brien, Brenda O'Connell, Páraic Kerrigan, Cait Harrigan, Daniel Watson, Gregory Jackson, and Jack Kavanagh.

Furthermore, my thanks goes to my family and friends, who supported me throughout this journey. I am thanking my parents, grand-parents, step-parents, parents-in-law, Clara Lehmann as well as Ulrike and Riccardo Gent for their support and patience. I am very grateful to Marwin Uhrig for sharing his expertise. I also want to thank Ewelina Palej O'Grady for sharing her wine with me in difficult times, Kelly Sparks for introducing me to Yoga and Remy for forcing me to go for walks and taking breaks. My greatest gratitude, however, goes to my beloved husband, Ailbe Collins, who made me believe in myself and supported me in every way possible. Thank you all so much!

Finally, I want to acknowledge that preliminary versions of some parts of this thesis were previously published. An early version of my analysis on the German film *Madonnen* were previously in the postgraduate journal *NPPSH Reflections 1* (2017) pp. 78-82, and an early version of a comparative analysis of the German films *Lucy* and *Am Himmel der Tag* was published in *NPPSH Reflections 2* (2018), pp. 33-41. Furthermore, an excerpt from my analysis of *Snap* is forthcoming in the *Athens Journal of Humanities and Arts* as well as an excerpt from my analysis of *Lucy*, *Jelly Baby* and *Heartbreak* is forthcoming as a book chapter.

1. Introduction

The structure of the family and thus the role of the mother are dynamic and vary from culture to culture and time to time. Motherhood in contemporary Western societies, such as Germany and Ireland, does not just include the traditional role of the mother that encompasses managing the household and caring for the children, but rather combines work, family life and relationships. This thesis focuses on the mediated lives of mothers within the public and domestic sphere and explores how contemporary German and Irish cinema represents non-traditional motherhood in the 21st century. In contemporary European society, we are still able to observe gender boundaries and stigmatisation within public life, and within the home. This applies for many women and especially for mothers. This research adds to our understanding of how society depicts non-traditional motherhood in Ireland and Germany by examining and comparing the countries' contemporary film scenes in the light of recent motherhood discourses.

In this thesis, the term “non-traditional motherhood” defines mothers who do not follow a traditional middle-class ideal of married, stay-at-home motherhood in Western society, as further described below. The non-traditional mothers in this thesis often mother outside of a nuclear family ideal and/or refuse to mother their children and/or the films represent them as being too young to mother. While the socially acceptable age to mother is between the age of 20 and 35 (Campbell), additional “[d]emographic characteristics that are associated with being a good mother include being educated, married, financially secure, and of a culturally appropriate age to have children” (Rudzik 52). Therefore, in this thesis, I define young mothers as women and girls who have not yet finished their schooling and still financially depend on their parents. This includes pregnant women and mothers “under, or close to the age of majority and generally unmarried, but not necessarily a teenager by exact definition” (Rock 21). Due to the

young age of some of the maternal characters, the term “work” includes both the representation of paid labour and of education. Additionally, the term “sex” encompasses an analysis of the representation of the mothers’ sexual intercourse with their partners and an evaluation of their romantic relationships. Finally, I understand ambivalent mothers as those women who struggle with their maternal role, openly admitting to hating and loving their children at the same time. Here, this definition does also include feelings of maternal regret, due to the reasons given below.

With this thesis, I introduce a European focus to filmic non-traditional maternal representations of young and ambivalent motherhood. I further develop E. Ann Kaplan’s overview of maternal discourses in the 1980s and 1990s American film, which did not give adequate consideration to either young motherhood or maternal ambivalence. I show which filmic formats represent non-traditional motherhood, what kind of non-traditional representations are predominant and compare the German and Irish films’ representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in order to find European commonalities and highlight national differences. I show that while German contemporary films represent young and ambivalent mothers in documentary and feature films, Irish contemporary films represent them in feature and short films. Neither German nor Irish films represent young and ambivalent motherhood as desirable, and both link it to challenges, such as the impossibility of combining motherhood with both sex and work, the impossibility of escaping societal judgment, and the impossibility of succeeding as mother outside of an idealistic family model.

I started this research by defining the most prevalent non-traditional maternal characters in German and Irish films. During the definition of my film corpus, three major non-traditional maternal representations emerged: young mothers, ambivalent mothers and lesbian mothers. Due to the limited representation of lesbian motherhood in Irish films, I decided to solely focus on young and ambivalent mothers in this thesis. I analyse

whether the films attribute a maternal point of view to these non-traditional mothers and whether they represent non-traditional motherhood as desirable or as deviant. In particular, I explore the degree to which contemporary German and Irish films represent young and ambivalent mothers in relation to both work and sex, the degree to which maternal characters are subject to societal pressures, and the degree to which the mothers' positioning within the family influences their maternal experiences.

To analyse the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood, I focus on three aspects. Firstly, I analyse the mothers' representation in relation to both work and sex. Historically, domesticity and chastity were attributes associated with the ideal mother. Even though women are now able to choose whether they want to work and are able to have a fulfilled sex life without the same stigma that previous generations experienced, mothers are still judged for prioritising their individual needs over their child's need for care. This thesis analyses the extent to which young and ambivalent mothers receive the same judgment or whether they are able to break away from a traditional maternal idealisation. Secondly, I examine societal pressures that the mothers experience, such as the stigmatisation of young mothers and the maternal idealisation that is challenged by ambivalent mothers. These chapters analyse the societal construction of ideal motherhood and show how the non-traditional mothers are punished for their inability to fit within these norms. Finally, I evaluate the mothers' position within the family and whether their relationship to their male partners influences their maternal experience. As described below, the patriarchal institution of the family is an influential factor that historically attributes caring tasks to the mother, while the father is traditionally the breadwinner of the household. I examine whether this is the case for non-traditional mothers, who often live outside of the nuclear family ideal, and I show that they are still judged against a patriarchal ideal of womanhood in contemporary German and Irish films.

1.1. Literature Review

To supplement my textual analysis and further develop Kaplan's description of maternal discourses from the 1980s/90s, I also incorporate the influential scholarship of matricentric researchers, such as Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Shari L. Thurer and Rozsika Parker, in order to analyse non-traditional maternal representations in contemporary German and Irish film. The study of motherhood covers a wide range of topics, such as relationships, maternal love and hate, issues of maternal well-being and employment. While research by Chodorow and Parker enables a deeper understanding of the maternal character's psyche, the sociological and historical accounts by Rich and Thurer enables an understanding of the institutional and societal pressures on mothers in Western society.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, academic research increasingly focused on motherhood. This interest was paralleled by a societal shift which saw more married women working and the debate about whether or not this behaviour effects their children. The critique of the "good," homebound mother applies particularly to the work of second-wave feminism, as in Betty Friedan's prominent book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Through interviews, Friedan, a psychologist and feminist, discovered that many housewives are unhappy and feel guilty for not being able to appreciate their supposedly comfortable suburban lives. This "problem that has no name," as Friedan calls it, goes against the societal myth that women find fulfilment through motherhood and housework (5). In particular, women's magazines and other media sources promoted this idea of the happy housewife, which lead to the mothers' feelings of guilt. Friedan argues that education and work outside the home is essential for women to develop their own identity.

Like Friedan, most of theorists of the period did not take adequate account of class and ethnicity. The work that I cite mainly describes North American and European women who are white, middle-class and married to men who are financially stable. While the

mothers in the German and Irish films are from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds and are mostly white (only one mother has a mixed-race background), they are all judged against this middle-class, white ideal of motherhood that culture constructs as the normative condition.

1.1.1. Traditional and Non-Traditional Motherhood

1.1.1.1. Motherhood versus Mothering

The poet and feminist Adrienne Rich offers a particularly incisive critique of the institutionalisation of motherhood in her 1976 book *Of Woman Born*. In general, she distinguishes between motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution. While mothering can be rewarding, motherhood as an institution is problematic. Rich underlines the patriarchal construction of motherhood as institution, which reduces women to their maternal capacities, while men are traditionally responsible for earning the money as head of the family. This patriarchal institution encourages a heterosexual development of the female, which again is supposed to lead to a nuclear family, as seen for so many decades across the world.¹ According to Rich, “[t]he woman’s body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected” (*Woman* 55). While Western society understands femininity as maternal, heterosexual, passive and dependent, and often glorifies pregnant women as calm Madonnas, these women actually frequently experience internal confusion and

¹ Even though family structures have been redefined in the last three decades and women have the ability to choose whether to mother or not, the nuclear family is still the most common form of family. Further, the pressure on women to decide between career and motherhood is still prevalent. Mothers often struggle with the threefold burden of work, motherhood and taking care of the household, as many of them still take on most of the caring work. Additionally, society puts a lot of pressure on women. On the one hand, mothers are blamed if they go back to work too soon after the child is born, connecting any harm that the child could encounter with its mother. On the other, mothers are also criticised if they do not go back to work soon enough, giving up their own identity for motherhood (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 180ff.).

chaos about their maternal experience. The social pressure of idealisation and impossible expectations produces mothers with ambivalent feelings towards their children as a result of their fear of failure. My research demonstrates that women whose experiences of motherhood do not fit this mould in contemporary German and Irish films, even those from working-class backgrounds, are still judged against a white, middle-class idealisation of womanhood. As Kaplan argues, since the 1980s the mother starts to be viewed as a subject and this “coming into *subjectivity* causes [...] problems, that cultural productions [...] now address” (*Motherhood* 26). Rich’s critique offers a valuable account to understand this subjectivity of the mother in relation to patriarchal structures and the family.

1.1.1.2. Sacrosanct Motherhood

Writing in 1994, the historian and psychologist Shari L. Thurer highlights the myths that developed around motherhood in Western society from the Stone Age to the 20th century. While she presents the Stone Age as a positive time for women, during which complex female deities existed, Thurer connects the emergence of patriarchy thereafter with a continuous decline in the mother’s status in society. She illustrates the societal pressures that many women experience and, in turn, put on themselves in order to meet patriarchal expectations. Thurer especially criticises the patriarchal assumption that only mothers are able to meet the children’s demands adequately and emphasises that it is merely important for the child to have one main nurturer, regardless of gender. This idea of woman as main carer complicates mothers’ ability to combine motherhood and work, as “[f]or many women, perhaps most, motherhood versus personal ambition represents the heart of the feminine dilemma” (Thurer 287). Religious images such as that of the Madonna and Child especially influence the idealisation of the mother as pious, chaste and devoted to the needs of her child. The idealisation of the Virgin Mary separated sexuality from

motherhood. Women who did not fulfil the chaste image of the Madonna were, in contrast, often represented as whores. While Thurer offers little evidence for her account of early history, she succeeds in defining a cultural understanding of “good” mothering that still influences contemporary Western society and is highly influenced by Church teachings. I use Thurer’s arguments to highlight the struggles young and ambivalent mothers encounter when they deviate from this definition of the “good,” pious mother and challenging the myths of motherhood.

In 1984, Julia Kristeva and Arthur Goldhammer give a valuable description of how the ideal of the Virgin Mary entered the consciousness of contemporary society. Translating the Bible into Greek, the Semitic word that described Mary as an unmarried woman was exchanged with the Greek word for virginity: *parthenos*. This translation led to various interpretations of the importance of chastity for both sexes. In the 4th century, the concept of sexuality and death were strongly interlinked. The Church Fathers believed that in order to escape death, they had to abstain from sex. Sexuality remains highly problematic in the eyes of the Catholic Church and, even now, is seen as only ordained by God for heterosexually married couples. In particular, the imagery of the *mater dolorosa* combines maternal love, death and tears, while excluding her interest in any other man but her son. In the 13th century, the Virgin Mary moved into focus as the perfect combination of “the desired woman and the holy mother,” an idealisation continuing to be impossible to reach for women and safe to desire for men (Kristeva and Goldhammer 141). Kristeva and Goldhammer’s argument informs my analysis on how the representation of non-traditional mothers deviate from the idealisation of the Virgin Mary and how these mothers challenge the myths of sacrosanct motherhood that was developed particularly by the Catholic Church.

1.1.1.3. Intensive Mothering and New Momism

In her influential 1996 book *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood*, the sociologist Sharon Hays points out that, historically, the child was not always the focus of attention in Western families. It was only in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and in the late 18th century and early 19th centuries in America that childhood started to be perceived as precious. During this time, child-rearing and the management of the home became a woman's task and provided the basis for the ideology of what Hays calls "intensive mothering" (25ff.). This ideology holds mothers responsible for the upbringing of their children, is both labour- and cost-intensive and emotionally absorbing. Despite the fact that intensive mothering is expensive and, therefore, almost exclusively achievable for the middle and upper classes, Hays argues that working-class mothers equally understand the cornerstones of this ideology as the definition of "good" mothering. In contrast to middle-class mothers, however, their financial restrictions hinder their abilities to fulfil this ideal (95ff.). According to Hays, society accepts only two versions of a good mother in line with this discourse, the "traditional mother" and the "supermom" (131f.). The traditional mother stays at home to take care of her children, her husband and the house. The supermom, in contrast, works outside of the home, while managing the house and the children in addition to her paid labour with ease. This struggle underlines the contradictions for contemporary women, who, according to Hays, are able to pursue their individual needs within the labour market on one hand, yet are still expected to follow an intensive mothering discourse on the other. In contrast to this middle-class ideal of the traditional mother, who is financially able to follow an ideology of intensive mothering, the non-traditional mothers in this thesis struggle to fulfil society's definition of "good" mothers.

In 2004, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels coined the term "new momism" in their book *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has*

*Undermined Women.*² Douglas and Michaels argue that new momism builds on the ideology of intensive mothering and fosters the idea that a woman is only fulfilled once she becomes a mother. New momism developed during the 1980s and was publicised in particular by American mass media. Similar to the discourse of intensive mothering, new momism understands good motherhood as an altruistic task, expects unrealistic standards, and demands that a mother's full attention be devoted to her child's wellbeing. While feminism promotes the idea that it is a woman's choice whether to join the workforce or to be a mother, new momism contradicts this effort by labelling only the choice to become a mother as the correct option. According to Douglas and Michaels, new momism further heightens the contradiction between the idea of fulfilling one's individual needs in the public sphere and the ideal of full-time mothering within the private sphere of the home that was introduced by Hays.

Andrea O'Reilly outlined how contemporary society understands good motherhood as a mirror of the patriarchal demand for maternal perfection promoted by both intensive mothering and new momism. Her "rules for good motherhood" specify that

- (1) children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother;
- (2) this mothering must be provided 24/7;
- (3) the mother must always put children's needs before her own;
- (4) mothers must turn to the experts for instruction;
- (5) the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood;
- (6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children;
- (7) the mother has full responsibility, but no power from which to mother;
- (8) motherwork, and childrearing more specifically, are regarded as personal, private undertakings with no political import. (O'Reilly 10)

² The term "momism" was originally coined in 1942 by Philip Wylie in his bestseller *Generation of Vipers*.

Mothers who do not comply with this definition – if they are, for example, too young, too poor or not fulfilled by motherhood as represented in the contemporary German and Irish films in this thesis – are considered “bad” mothers. By contrast, O’Reilly defines feminist mothering as an alternative that enables mothers to find fulfilment outside of the home. This concept of feminist mothering rejects patriarchal ideals, such as the nuclear family, and promotes the acceptance of a myriad of options for mothers, inside and outside the home. I use O’Reilly’s argument of good motherhood to demonstrate that the non-traditional mothers in both contemporary German and Irish films are still judged against a traditional ideal and struggle to escape the representation of the “bad” mother.

1.1.1.4. Conclusion

To summarise, Western society associates the trades of the traditional mother with the ability of being a “good” mother. The traditional mother is heterosexual, married, middle-class, white, passive and financially depends on her husband. Furthermore, she is the main carer of her child(ren) and takes care of the household. This task allocation supports a patriarchal understanding of the mother as being the only one who is able to fulfil her child(ren)’s demands adequately and, at the same time, removes the father’s responsibility to provide emotional care to his child(ren). In particular the discourses of “intensive mothering” and “new momism” argue that traditional motherhood equals “good” motherhood and promote the patriarchal ideal of maternal perfection.

In contrast, non-traditional mothers are women who are either not willing or not able to fulfil this patriarchal ideal of motherhood. They sometimes challenge the myths of maternal fulfilment, seek individualism outside of motherhood and openly discuss their ambivalent feelings towards maternity. In particular, mothers from a working-class background are unable to fulfil the ideal of traditional motherhood due to financial restrictions. Yet, they still often judge their own maternal abilities against the traditional

ideal of “good” motherhood. Therefore, women who are either too poor, too young or seek fulfilment outside of motherhood, amongst others, are not able to fit the mould of the “good” mother. This thesis will show that the representation of the non-traditional mothers in both German and Irish films often falls back into this narrative of the non-traditional mother as potentially “bad” mother.

1.1.2. Maternal Ambivalence

1.1.2.1. Maternal Ambivalence (Psychoanalysis)

Since I am analysing the representation of ambivalent motherhood, I will sketch a short theoretical background of the discourse in both psychoanalysis and sociology, the two disciplines that are essential to an understanding of the idea of maternal ambivalence. In psychoanalytic theory, the focus of analysis mostly lies on the child and not on the mother. This is, in particular, the case for the founder of the discipline, Sigmund Freud, and early psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan and Helene Deutsch. Even though my analysis applies a feminist lens and, therefore, focuses on the work of feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow and Rozsika Parker, I will give a short overview of Freud’s influential psychoanalytical theory, which is situated in a patriarchal context, in order to understand the historical development of Chodorow and Parker’s arguments. I specifically refer to Chodorow and Parker’s theories, since both of them focus their analysis on the mother instead of the child. According to them, it is not just the child who feels both love and hate towards his or her mother, it is also the mother who has ambivalent feelings towards her child.

According to both Freud and Lacan, the mother strongly influences the child’s development and can, therefore, be held accountable for any negative behaviour in the child’s later life. Freud argues that the mother plays an important part within the oedipal

conflict, in particular of the male child. He suggests that initially, the child is ungendered, autoerotic and seeks pleasure. The mother provides the fulfilment of his or her pleasures. In the pre-oedipal stage, the male child develops a desire for his mother and perceives his father as his rival. The female child develops a similar attachment to her mother but does not perceive her father as a rival. With the oedipal crisis, the male child realises that the mother lacks a penis and perceives this as a symbolic threat of castration. Therefore, he breaks the maternal bond by accepting the father as an idol instead of a rival. During this process, he represses his desire for his mother and detaches from her. According to Freud, the female child on the other hand experiences a less intense oedipal conflict. While the male child is driven by his castration anxiety, the female child experiences penis envy. When the female child realises that she does not have a penis, she blames her mother for this lack. While connecting to the father, the connection to the mother will not be completely disabled for the female child. Psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch, a pupil of Freud's, further developed the argument that the female child will later identify with her mother, which will make motherhood within a heterosexual relationship her goal of development. This means that the daughter will be raised to become a heterosexual woman, who wants to be a mother.

Freud and Lacan's concept of female identity is controversial. According to them, it is not possible to be a woman and a mother at the same time, therefore the woman has to give up her individual identity to gain a maternal identity. This will lead to a decision between individuality and motherhood. Feminists on the other hand argue that it is possible and important for a mother to form her own identity as an individual *prior* to her identity as mother, and they support, therefore, the idea of a complex female identity. This identity embraces the woman's identity as well as the identity as mother (Suleiman 272ff.). Deutsch's argument underlines Simone de Beauvoir's claim that women are made, not born. In *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir consults psychoanalysis, amongst

others, to analyse the female position in society. According to her, female subordination originates in men's mystification of women into symbols of either life or death, excluding the existence of female individuality. While man occupies the role of the subject, woman becomes the mysterious *Other*, the object. She argues that society shapes the female child into being passive and dependent, and that women are not born with these characteristics.

According to Freud, it is important that the identification of the female child with her mother is limited to the desire for motherhood, as women should actually attach themselves to men – their future husbands – to achieve this goal. A close relationship between mother and daughter or shared womanhood later in life is perceived negatively as threatening to patriarchal society. In Freud's theory, the mother is a passive object of the child's desire and functions to fulfil her child's needs. Lacan, in contrast, argues that the mother is not just a passive object, but actively promotes the Law of the Father, namely his will (Lacan 35). In both cases, the mother does not voice her own needs and is relegated to the background.

While Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis originated in a patriarchal context in the late 19th and early 20th century, mainly focusing on the male child and his relationship to his mother, in the 1970s Chodorow developed a feminist psychoanalytic focus on the object relation between daughter and mother. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow challenges the phallogocentric theories of Freud and suggests that the reproduction of mothering, namely the fact that it is always woman who is the main carer, is not necessarily fixed for future generations. Chodorow underlines the role of the father as important influence on the maternal experience. According to her, childbearing and childcare are two very different aspects of parenthood. Whereas pregnancy has to be carried out by the woman, childcare does not need be executed solely by women. Chodorow argues that technologies such as breast pumps make it easy for both parents to fulfil the role as the main carer. Due to this important and ground-breaking matricentric

emphasis, Chodorow's psychoanalytical account on the psyche of the maternal character supports the film analysis of this thesis. I analyse the relationship between father and mother, as well as the influence that the father's role has on the mother, in German and Irish films. Kaplan argues that Chodorow's "a-historic, a-specific theories [...] about the adolescent girl's struggle to separate from her mother illuminates some mother-child representations in 'resisting' maternal women's films", such as in *Stella Dallas* (Vidor, 1937), between 1930 and 1960 (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 34). I further argue that these theories still illuminate maternal representations of non-traditional mothers in contemporary German and Irish films.

In his influential 1994 paper *Hate in the Counter-Transference*, Donald W. Winnicott argues that the mother's ambivalence is essential for the development of her child. By accepting her own ambivalent feelings, the mother enables the child to deal with disappointment and hate in his or her future relationships. According to him, the "good enough" mother tends to her child's needs in order to develop a situation in which the child can progress. However, in his analysis, Winnicott focuses on the child's development and not on the mother.

Rozsika Parker, a feminist psychoanalyst who explores maternal ambivalence, on the other hand, reverses his argument and focuses on the mother's experience of ambivalence. Writing in 1995, Parker underlines the positive aspects of maternal ambivalence for the mother. According to her, feeling both love and hate towards one's own child is beneficial to a mother's parenting skills and should be accepted by society, as well as by oneself, as a healthy part of the maternal experience. Instead, society often ostracises mothers who acknowledge negative feelings towards their children and blames them when their child behaves outside of the norm. By focusing on the mother instead of the child, Parker also further develops Melanie Klein's argument, which differentiates between two developmental positions; the schizoid-paranoid, in which the child splits the mother as

object into good and bad, and the depressive position, in which the child can accept that the mother internalises both aspects of good and bad and recognises him-/herself as separated to the outside (Klein, "Mourning"; Klein, "Notes"). According to Parker, the schizoid-paranoid position of the child is mirrored by the mother, who in turn splits the child into good and bad and also experiences her mothering as a split of good and bad work. Because of this focus on the mother, Parker's and not Winnicott's arguments inform my textual analysis of contemporary German and Irish films in this thesis. I use Parker's arguments to explore the influence of family dynamics on the maternal experience, to highlight the problematic representation of the ambivalent mothers' sexuality and to underline the importance to accept negative feelings towards one's child.

1.1.2.2. Maternal Ambivalence and Regretting Motherhood (Sociology)

While psychoanalysts highlight the benefits of maternal ambivalence for mother and child as a constant negotiation of their relationship, Israeli sociologist Orna Donath discovers that many women feel regret towards motherhood and wish that they were able to reverse their decision to become a parent. This discovery was met with disbelief and hostility in many countries, including Germany (see: SRF Kultur). Since the acknowledgment of maternal regret breaks with the ideal of the "good" mother, in particular the German discourse redefined regretting motherhood as maternal ambivalence. This blurring the distinction between maternal ambivalence and regret in German society mirrors the representation of maternal ambivalence in contemporary German and Irish films (even though Donath's article did not gain a lot of attention in Ireland) and raises the question of how artistic representations can differentiate between the two concepts without the need for one character to verbally state that they would not decide to have children if they could go back in time. Due to the reinterpretation of maternal regret as ambivalence and

the fact that none of the mothers in the films verbally state that they regret motherhood, but merely imply it, I include both concepts in my analysis of maternal ambivalence.

In an article published in 2015, Donath drew attention to the phenomenon of maternal regret, which resulted in a widespread public debate, especially in Germany. Regretful mothers are specifically those mothers who admit that they regret that they had their children in the first place and who would not decide to have children again if they could go back in time. Donath distinguishes “between women who experience feelings of ambivalence or temporary regret” and “women for whom the burden of motherhood ultimately outweighs the benefits” (Heffernan and Stone, n.p.). In particular, the German debate focused heavily on the first account and women repeatedly affirmed that even though they feel regret, they still love their children. Christina Mundlos’ account of German women who regret motherhood especially highlights this need to emphasize the love mothers have towards their children at the same time as describing their feelings of regret. While the second section of this thesis indeed includes mothers who feel regret, they are understood as ambivalent mothers, due to their constant negotiation of their relationship to their children. None of the maternal characters completely regrets their motherhood, and they are repeatedly inclined to reconnect with their children. Therefore, I analyse the non-traditional mothers in the second section of this thesis as ambivalent mothers who occasionally feel regret towards their maternal role. Due to the complex interplay between feelings of maternal regret and love, Donath’s account still serves as a useful theoretical model that offers valuable insight into the characters’ maternal struggles.

1.1.3. Women and Motherhood in Germany

As the role of the mother, and also that of the father, is subject to social construction, it is, furthermore, important to understand motherhood within its historical context in both Germany and Ireland. As maternal discourses weave through religion, philosophy, academia and state policy, I briefly outline how religious practices and philosophical ideas influence state policies and the everyday lives of mothers in Germany up to the present. This overview is based on Barbara Vinken's account of German motherhood in her book *Die deutsche Mutter: Der lange Schatten eines Mythos*. I briefly outline how Lutheranism as well as philosophers propagated a conservative role for the mother, even before the 20th century. This stance that understood woman as mother was then brought to an extreme by Hitler's nationalist ideology, which celebrated women who bore four or more children and raised them in a way deemed appropriate by a nationalistic ideology. This conservative understanding of woman as mother and the ideal of the stay-at-home mother in contemporary Germany bears the marks of this historical confluence of philosophy, religion and state ideologies.

The German family model is strongly influenced by a long history of Lutheranism. According to Martin Luther, the individual found God by serving his or her family. In this model, the father became the head of the family, being the mediator between them and God, while the mother was bound to the house, looking after children and husband. While the Catholic Church believes in a physical and a spiritual form of motherhood, Lutherans gave the spiritual responsibility solely to the husband. In this society, a woman's task was to become a mother and to bear as many children as possible. Fruitful heterosexual marriages were especially seen as ordained by God. Lutheranism influenced the ideal of the family in Germany and postulated that women should become mothers in order to serve God (Vinken 109ff., 119, 121; Vinken et al. 11ff.).

This religious idea of the woman as subordinate to men also influenced philosophical theories. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose philosophy was influential in Germany and across Europe, denied women any intellectual faculty. He perceived a patriarchal republic which controls women by subordinating them to the will of their children as ideal situation. Breastfeeding played a very important part within this subordination, as mothers became completely dependent on their child's rhythm. To become good mothers, young women had to be trained from early on to adapt to the constraints of motherhood. He was not the only 18th century intellectual who promoted this view of women. In fact, Rousseau's ideas were congruent with those of Immanuel Kant, who considered a woman's intellect as her accessory, and Friedrich Schiller, who wanted women to be subordinate to men and located within the private sphere (Vinken 93ff., 146ff.; Rousseau).

Even though the influential Protestant thinker Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi believed in a maternal instinct within the upper classes, he also pursued Rousseau's idea that women had to be taught how to mother correctly. The educator had a vital role within his model, as he could and should help the woman to become a good mother. Elsewhere, Vinken et al. argue that Pestalozzi's concept of education created a maternal patriarchy, namely a patriarchy in which everybody either became a mother or was nurtured by one (14). The concept of motherhood was thereby the apotheosis of womanhood. The mother always represented the best kind of woman and the maternal spirit was able to heal the world, according to Pestalozzi. The mother had to become an *imitatio mariae*, a virtual mother of God who displayed humility and was married, in contrast to the Catholic celebration of Mary's virginity. Despite this difference of idealisation, Pestalozzi still used the Catholic image of *mater dolorosa et lacrimosa* to advertise his ideal of an altruistic and nursing mother (Vinken 163, 168ff., 174f.; Pestalozzi).

Feminist movements at the beginning of the 20th century fought for equality in America, Europe and Australia. In Germany, however, emancipation was not easily accepted by society. According to Vinken, the reason for the German antifeminist stance was the influence of the army, as well as the fact that the upper middle class did not have a strong liberal tradition and valued the Protestant norms of loyalty and obedience. Both conservative and progressive movements defined women as mothers and agreed that women, when part of the labour market, should not compete with men but rather have jobs that were deemed appropriate for women. This mainly included jobs in the educational sector. Gender differences between men and women were seen as important within this idea of emancipation. While some feminists, such as Helene Stöcker, demanded sexual autonomy for women, this autonomy was bound up with the problematic aim of improving the German race and excluded women whose genes were deemed inferior. In particular, the altruistic woman who sacrificed herself for the purpose of motherhood and care-giving represented the highest form of autonomous self-realization (Vinken 177ff.).

The Duchess Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz – Queen consort of Prussia – was perceived as a loving wife and mother by the German public. She became a symbol of altruistic motherhood in Germany prior to National Socialism, caring for her children on her own, instead of using childminders, and she regularly took part in charitable events (Vinken 161ff.). The Nazis later viewed Queen Louise's practice of performing caring tasks as a perfect template for German women. Nazi ideology propagated the home as a natural place for women. Within the National Socialist movement, all women who did not want to become mothers were seen as degenerate. The conservative idea of women as mothers, in the home and being responsible for religious practices within the family (*Kinder-Küche-Kirche* [Children-Kitchen-Church]) was integral to Nazi ideology. In this way, religious practice was supposed to be substituted for teachings of national ideology,

as the Nazis intended to dissolve Christianity into one single pagan state church. According to Claudia Koonz, many women believed that “[m]asculine will, [...] had to achieve political victory; but ‘feminine faith’ alone could restore domestic harmony in the wake of revolutionary violence” (Koonz 128). Womanhood, therefore, was equated with motherhood in National Socialism and mothers of multiple children received public recognition through the award of the Cross of Honour of the German Mother (Ehrenkreuz der Deutschen Mutter) (Koonz 128, 226; Vinken 217ff., 262).

After the end of the Second World War and during Germany’s period of division, the life of mothers was constructed very differently by both regions. The FRG understood the socialist system of the GDR, in which it was common for women to work full-time and have access to free childcare, as a counter-discourse for their own politics. In Western Germany it was – and is often still – believed that a mother had to take care of her child for the first three years. East German mothers, in contrast, were described by West Germany as *Rabenmütter* (uncaring mothers) and their work was portrayed as coercion. While motherhood within the home was seen as a woman’s natural destiny in the FRG, more people were required on the labour market in the 1960s. Therefore, a three-phase-model became common for women, which divides a woman’s life into three periods of work, staying at home to care for the child(ren), and work again. Until 1977, a West German woman had to have the permission of her husband to be able to go to work. Until then, the German Civil Code stated: „Die Frau führt den Haushalt in eigener Verantwortung. Sie ist berechtigt, erwerbstätig zu sein, soweit dies mit ihren Pflichten in Ehe und Familie vereinbar ist“ (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch 1958, § 1356). (The wife is responsible for leading the household. She is allowed to work as long as this does not interfere with her responsibilities in marriage and family.) During Germany’s division, it was common for a mother in the GDR to receive full-time care for her child(ren) and go back to work shortly after having given birth. In the FRG, in contrast, a conservative

understanding of motherhood persisted and influenced maternal politics later in a reunited Germany (Correll 112, 121ff., 132ff.).

After Germany's reunification, the West German ideology of motherhood gradually gained currency in the former East to become the dominant maternal model in the new Germany across all social classes. Even though the definition of the family was widened and single parents as well as homosexual couples were considered more frequently in the formation of family policies in the 2000s, traditional family values were, and still are, the bedrock of these policies. Still today, a deeply embedded maternal myth defines German womanhood and sees motherhood as a natural desire and source of fulfilment for women. Those without children, on the other hand, are often pitied, and a mother who does not want to stay at home to care for her children but instead goes to work is widely understood as a *Rabenmutter*. German society generally supports the belief that the mother is best situated within the home – at least for the child's first three years. Katrin Bartz Schiefer showed in 2005 that in Germany women in general had a particularly negative stance towards women being in the workforce, indicating that gender stereotypes are perpetuated by women and men (Bartz Schiefer 176). The German political system especially provides specific support for married women who want to leave the workforce. While income splitting provides tax relief for single-earner households, parental career breaks are subsidized by the state for up to 14 months. The system of reunited Germany, therefore, follows the maternal ideals of the FRG and strongly values stay-at-home motherhood (Vinken 49f.; Correll 70ff., 141ff., 184f.; Kreyenfeld 227).

Due to the widespread belief that mothers should stay at home, part-time work is seen as a popular way to combine work with motherhood in Germany. Some 68.5% of mothers with minor children work part-time, while only 5.9% of men do so in 2017 (Statistisches Bundesamt, "Teilzeitquoten"). The failure of cultural institutions to take responsibility is often ignored as they still follow an idealised picture of the traditional family with the

man as breadwinner and the woman as carer (Vinken 67). The availability of crèches in Germany only started in August 2013 and full-time school and kindergarten is also quite a new concept in Germany. While the availability of full-time schools is increasing steadily, a school that supplies a minimum of three days full-time care is considered to be a full-time school (Bundesministerium für Bildung; Kultusministerkonferenz). This understanding of “full-time” can make it impossible for both parents to work 40 hours a week and often requires one parent to stay at home at least part-time.³ Maternal employment statistics show that in 2006, just 60.6% of German mothers were employed and only 30% of these were working in full-time positions (Bundesministerium für Familie 26, 46). A mother’s three-stage scheme of working life, caring time and return to the workforce (mostly part-time) is partly responsible for the low participation by women in the workforce and their lower wages.⁴

³ While childcare fees are charged differently in each municipality, these subsidized fees are often adjusted to the parents’ income and are affordable in contrast to the commercial childcare available in Ireland. However, one of the problems parents encounter if they rely on institutional childcare is the fact that, even though there is, since 1996, a legal entitlement to a day-care place for children over three years of age and since 2013 for children over one year, this entitlement only covers four hours per day (20 hours per week) (Deutscher Bildungsserver; Deutsche Anwaltsauskunft). Parents, and especially working mothers, depend on the support of grandparents or other family members and on childminders, if available.

⁴ Of additional note in this context is that Germany offers part-time apprenticeships for young mothers to integrate them into the job market. However, the situation of limited day-care spaces complicates this reintegration. In an article in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Oliver Schmale explains that these part-time options are not well known, even though they have existed for almost ten years (Schmale). Whereas it was difficult in Germany before 2013 to find a kindergarten place for children under the age of three, single mothers were able to receive help from the state in the form of one of these sought-after spaces. Even now kindergartens must prioritise children of those mothers in greatest economic need in allocating places. However, since places are still very limited, the social security code (SGBII) implies in § 10.1.3 that it is not expected that single mothers with children under the age of three will integrate themselves into the labour market (*Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) Zweites Buch (II) - Grundsicherung für Arbeitssuchende*). Furthermore, childcare places are often only available in the form of half days and are not guaranteed to be continued into the next year. This does not offer sufficient support to single mothers who work at least part-time and would not allow a young mother to complete an apprenticeship, which usually lasts three years.

1.1.4. Women and Motherhood in Ireland

In his influential 2009 book *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, the historian Diarmaid Ferriter argues that in Ireland, religion and state policies were particularly entwined, influencing the experiences of women and mothers. In the 19th century and early 20th century, Ireland was strongly influenced by the societal ideals of its British rulers. However, due to many deaths and emigration during the famine in the late 1840s, as well as the shift towards peasant proprietorship, reproductive rates plummeted in Ireland. As a result, many Irish people married later in life or remained unmarried, tending to their farms instead. Therefore, after the famine, Victorian middle-class ideals⁵ spread slowly in Ireland and caused cultural contradictions. While motherhood was understood as a natural and desired path for women, the high rate of unmarried people and the stigma of unmarried motherhood made it difficult for women to achieve this. According to Ferriter, Irish society particularly idealised “the chaste woman whose ambitions lay solely in the direction of homemaking” (15). Ferriter shows that, just like in Germany, the concept of womanhood in Ireland was closely connected to that of motherhood.

This situation did not change when Ireland achieved independence from Britain in 1921. Article 41.2 of the Irish Free State’s constitution (1937) explicitly defined women as mothers:

In particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

⁵ Which also embrace Rousseau’s above-mentioned philosophy, according to which the desires of mothers are subordinate to the needs of their children (Mitchell 140f.)

The constitution equates the concept of “woman” with that of “mother” and positions all women within the domestic sphere. While the article was intended to protect women from a double burden of public and private work, many women were essentially restricted by the so-called “marriage bar” for civil servants, introduced in 1932. Once married, women civil servants were restricted from employment, lost their individual social rights and were financially dependent on their husbands thereafter (Coakley 207ff.). With this definition, the understanding of womanhood and motherhood merged into one, and being a mother became a duty for all women in Ireland.

The Catholic Church influenced State affairs in Ireland from early on and also influenced the definition of an ideal family model. In the patriarchal organisation of society, the paternal God represents the strong male figure at the head of the holy family. In the Bible, on the other hand, women are servants to men and became the bearers of God’s punishment. For disregarding his rules in the Garden of Eden, Eve was condemned to give birth in pain. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, a woman’s duty is to bear her husband as many children as possible, while the avoidance of pregnancy is perceived as sinful. The Church, and with it the Irish State, propagated marriage as the ideal living situation and forbade abortion as well as contraception. By doing so, the State took responsibility for the female body and declared married motherhood as the ideal situation (Hilliard 139ff., 146ff.; Guilbride 170ff.).

The Catholic Church provides a conservative moral framework for the family based on two understandings of motherhood – spiritual and biological motherhood. While these teachings are subject to the institution of the Church and not necessarily Irish tradition, they still influenced the perception of women in Catholic Ireland. Within the teaching of the Catholic Church, sex and biological motherhood are associated with sin. The female body, and especially the pregnant body as the embodiment of sin, is less valued and perceived as impure in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The Virgin Mary, on the other

hand, stands as a symbol for ideal motherhood. The Madonna embodies chastity and self-sacrificing motherhood. She lives solely for the well-being of her son and has no individuality outside of this unity. The Catholic Church particularly stigmatised and excluded “fallen women,” that is unmarried mothers and prostitutes, from this ideal. Analysing the stigma of unmarried motherhood and teenage pregnancy in Ireland, sociologist Ciara Bradley argues that this social exclusion functions to preserve the ideal of the nuclear family in Ireland (Bradley 163; Ferriter 16; Thurer xi ff.; Hilliard 139ff.).

It was only with the Social Welfare Acts of 1973 and 1974 that unmarried women, wives that have been left by their husbands and prisoner’s wives were able to receive social welfare independently from a potential husband.⁶ As Eileen Conway describes:

Significant developments in improving the status of the Irish single mother were the introduction of the Unmarried Mother’s Allowance in 1973, which established her right to a regular income, and the enactment of the Unfair Dismissal Act (1977), which ensured that a woman could not be sacked from her job because of her pregnancy. (184)

While women were still defined as mothers, they were now able to mother without a husband. Being able to finance a single parent household enabled many to keep their children. While the State gave allowances to single mothers, a social stigma regarding lone parenting remained in Ireland (Smith 228).⁷

⁶ Compare: Deserted Wife’s Benefit (Section 17, Social Welfare Act 1973), Unmarried Mother’s Allowance (Section 8, Social Welfare Act 1973), Prisoner’s Wife Allowance (Section 9, Social Welfare Act 1974).

⁷ In 1990, the Unmarried Mother’s Allowance, the Widow’s Benefit and the Deserted Wives Allowance merged into the Lone Parent’s Allowance. According to Ciara Bradley, “[t]his removed the gender clause and the hierarchy of deserving and undeserving categories of those parenting alone” (157). In 1997, the One-Parent Family Payment was introduced. Under this allowance a single parent is able to receive the payment as long as his or her gross payment does not exceed €425 per week (effective since 2008). Therefore, the One-Parent Payment does not allow the combination of childcare and the possibility of progression within the workplace (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection). Single mothers are further disadvantaged by tax law. While married couples receive tax reliefs, singles have to pay the standard amount. Families with one stay-at-

In 1979, the Family Planning Act finally loosened the prohibition of contraceptives in Ireland by allowing married couples to buy condoms with a prescription. Nevertheless, this was still a rather uncomfortable solution for women, as Ann Marie Hourihane describes it:

the 1979 Family Planning Act is what was on the books, which said you had to be married and you had to have a prescription in order to obtain condoms. [...] women came into family planning clinics in secret, it was unusual if their partners came with them frankly. (Ferriter 464)

The responsibility to prevent pregnancy often lay on women, as Hourihane explains. Even though the prohibition on contraceptives loosened in 1979, a social stigma of being sexually active remained, and the difficulty of obtaining contraception still forced many women into motherhood. This was in particular influenced by the fact that only married men and women were able to obtain condoms, and the fact that the Catholic Church still restricted sexual education for both men and women in Ireland.

In contemporary Ireland, a complex interplay between traditional ideals and modern understandings of family life exists. This is also mirrored in Irish TV and film representations. In particular during the Celtic Tiger era, a contrasting representation of the modern, sexually active, young women and the traditional trope of the “Irish Mammy” flourished in Irish TV and film. While these representations show young women exploring their sexuality, the archetypal Irish Mammy devotes her life to her children, looks out for them and functions as their main carer (González-Casademont 263; McGinley). While the traditional, deeply embedded influence of the Catholic Church endorses a family model that is based around a mother providing full-time care for her family, resistance to this ideal exists throughout history. Current neo-liberal policies that

home parent especially benefit from tax reliefs, while single parents have to pay slightly more taxes than the married, one-earner household (Reddan).

favour market demands over societal demands, such as low payments during a short period of paid maternity leave, entice mothers to go back to work as soon as possible after giving birth. For many women, being at work implies being successful and active, while motherhood is still not fully acknowledged as valuable labour. Many mothers are torn between staying at home with their children to nurture them full-time, or going back to work (O'Hagan 1, 8f., 63ff., 78ff.; White 30ff.).

Clare O'Hagan, whose research focuses strongly on neo-liberalism, expresses the urgent need for Irish society to develop a dual-earner/dual-carer model with an option of affordable childcare. Instead, about 3,000 mothers leave the workforce annually due to high childcare costs. Childcare and early education fees in Ireland are amongst the most expensive in Europe, compared to wages, and many women still feel responsible for the main caring role within the family (O'Hagan 180ff.; Baker; Woods). In 2016, 98% of those who looked after family and home were women, even though the number of men who were main carers doubled in the previous ten years (Central Statistics Office). Employers are often sceptical of parental leave, and work is built around the idea that every mother has the option of receiving full-time care for her child. The fact that many mothers cannot afford childcare or that full-time childcare does not cover their actual working hours is often ignored by the workplace. As O'Hagan argues,

[t]he inequalities women experience are constructed as private troubles, and their privileges are constructed as the outcome of their freely made choices, which is why women appear to accept a situation which is patently unfair (O'Hagan 180).

The Irish State passes on the financial responsibility for childcare to the individual, which mainly affects mothers and supports the division of gender roles within the home. Affordable childcare is, therefore, an important step towards gender equality and enables both men and women to share both financial and caring responsibilities.

1.1.5. Maternal Representations in Film and Media

1.1.5.1. Maternal Representations

Maternal film theory mostly developed in the 1980s and 1990s along with a rising interest in motherhood within several academic disciplines, including the social sciences. In 1992, Suzanna D. Walters gave a valuable historical overview of maternal representations from the 1930s onwards. During the Great Depression, films largely focused on class issues and highlighted the need for mothers to sacrifice certain aspects of their lives to improve the lives of their children. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood mostly represented conflict between mother and daughter that often led to a (temporary) separation of the pair, such as in *Stella Dallas* (Vidor, 1937). Binary oppositions represented female characters at this time as being either mothers or childless women, either nurturing or sexually active, and/or either situated in the public or the domestic sphere. In the 1940s, however, this focus changed to a representation of gender differences; maternal characters became overprotective of their children and were blamed for smothering them. After World War II, films celebrated the domestic sphere as the most suitable place for women and mothers. In particular, the argument of a natural maternal instinct was represented to prevent women from entering the workforce. According to Walters, “the old language of biology as destiny often merged with the new language of functionalist social science to provide ample evidence for the ineluctability of rigid gender positionings” (74). In the 1950s and 1960s, the paternal character frequently functioned as guide for his daughter to leave the house and find a husband.

In the 1960s and 1970s, one out of three mothers were part of the workforce and a new concern about female identities emerged. At this time, representations of mothers in magazines and television followed a more feminist agenda than film representations did. Sitcoms, such as *Maude* (Lear, 1972-1978), introduced divisive themes like abortion and female sexuality. According to Walters, “the 1980s and early 1990s do present some

striking themes that differ sharply from both their feminist 1970s predecessors and the more class based discourses of the 1930s and the psychological and domestic discourses of the 1940s and 1950s” (189f.). In the 1980s and 1990s, films represented how daughters had to separate from their mothers in order to overcome their conflict-laden relationships. Films such as *Mommie Dearest* (Perry, 1981) represented narcissistic mothers from the children’s perspective but failed to give insight into the mother’s point of view. In the late 1980s, however, father-son stories gained more popularity and mother-daughter narratives started to disappear, according to Walters.

In her 1996 book *Cinematernity*, Lucy Fischer further analyses maternal representations within different genres, two of which – documentary and melodrama – are of importance for my analysis of contemporary German and Irish films. Fischer argues that films, and in particular genre films, are mostly made from a male perspective. This male domination also applies for documentary, even though documentaries often suggest an objective point of view. Just like other genres, the documentary film can never be understood apart from the culture that produces it. According to Fischer, maternal documentaries are rare and mostly depict mothers in a domestic setting, such as in *Grey Gardens* (Maysles and Maysles, 1975). Feminist documentaries in the 1980s and 1990s often represent the daughter’s view of the mother. Fischer further argues that documentaries of childbirth are divided into mainstream and underground films. While mainstream childbirth documentaries portray an objectified female body and often focus on the husband in hospital, underground documentaries depict the point of view of the mother during birth (Fischer 30, 179ff.). The melodrama, with its sub-genre of the maternal melodrama, explicitly focuses on representing motherhood. Here, the *raison d’être* of women is to get married, bear children and to become (mostly sacrificial) mothers.

E. Ann Kaplan further differentiates between the maternal melodrama, which is

subordinated to a patriarchal structure, and the maternal women's film, which actively resists the former (*Motherhood* 3ff.). The maternal melodrama follows Kaplan's idea of the psychoanalytic film in which the characters are unconscious about the structures and ideologies surrounding them, whereas the resisting women's film follows the idea of conscious-rational figures that are aware of institutional structures. Also, Laura Mulvey describes the structure of the melodrama as patriarchal and phallogentric, even though the genre targets a female audience (Mulvey, "Notes" 56).⁸ Mary Ann Doane further suggests that the melodramas of the 1940s "bring into play the contradictory position of the mother within a patriarchal society – a position formulated by the injunction that she focus desire on the child and the subsequent demand to give up the child to the social order" (*Desire* 74). According to Doane, the female audience is only able to reach a masochistic identification, as the woman on the screen ultimately represents a victim ("Woman's Film" 69). While the films in my analysis differ in time and nationality to the American melodrama discussed by Fischer, Kaplan, Mulvey and Doane, they are still influenced by these early definitions of the genre.

E. Ann Kaplan's book *Motherhood and Representation* (1992) analyses American mainstream film and media from the early twentieth century up to the 1980s. Kaplan's in-depth analysis of maternal representation serves as a significant foundation for my own analysis of how motherhood is depicted in contemporary European film. In her analysis, she posits three different representational spheres of motherhood. This involves the socially constructed institution of motherhood (the historical sphere), motherhood within the patriarchal unconscious (the psychoanalytic sphere) as well as the sphere this study will focus on, the fictional one, which combines the other two (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 3ff.,

⁸ While Laura Mulvey is a central figure in psychoanalytic film theory, her arguments mainly concern spectatorship and, in particular, the male gaze (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure"). As this dissertation's textual analysis of maternal representations focuses on narrative and image, it does not include a detailed review of Mulvey's work.

180ff.). Kaplan mentions six maternal discourses that evolved from the 1980s onwards in American media: the working mother; the abusive mother; the lesbian mother; the absent mother; the woman-who-refuses-to-mother; and the self-fulfilled mother.

According to Kaplan, in the 1980s and 1990s, American media represented the working mother as either single or married, with the cases of single motherhood exceeding those of single fatherhood. The discourse on the working mother encodes a fear of the diminishing power of traditional gender roles within society, which is why American media tries to highlight the domestic role as equally desirable for women. With this, the media counteracts societal concerns and propagates a return to traditional gender roles. American print media – such as the *Wall Street Journal* (5 October 1984) – criticises the representation of the executive mom, misrepresenting the task of combining work and motherhood as fairly easy, and not acknowledging the difficulties mothers face in combining the two roles. According to Kaplan, this depiction of beautiful – yet not sexy – mothers with happy babies especially encourages women to follow an ideal that, though it is represented as being effortless, requires hard work. Both the executive mom and the super-mom are part of Kaplan’s definition of the working mother. Instead of focusing equally on career and motherhood, the super-mom concentrates on the development of her child by offering the very best education and nutrition. Films like *Baby Boom* (Shyer, 1987), for example, depict a super-mom, for whom it is impossible to combine all three aspects of sexuality, motherhood and career. Furthermore, the increasing representation of the stressed “two-career” marriage communicates a social anxiety about ostensibly rich, neglectful parents, who leave their children with non-qualified carers, implying that the main responsibility for family matters still lies with the mother, according to Kaplan. In none of the three variations of the working mother is she able to refuse the role of main carer (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 188ff.).

According to Kaplan, the abusive mother is often depicted in American mainstream

media as having an alcohol or drug addiction. She is personally blamed for her social status and addictive behaviour instead of the blame lying with the government or on the lack of social or financial help, as recently portrayed in *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016). She produces “damaged” children, as she is psychologically and/or physically harming them (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 192). Furthermore, the abusive mother regularly uses her children to finance her addiction. Kaplan underlines the judgemental stance of the middle class towards these, mostly poor, mothers. This representation of the abusive mother constitutes a judgemental viewpoint that highlights the abusive mother’s inability to fulfil an ideal image of motherhood upheld by society. Instead of being neglectful, society expects mothers to be altruistic and caring. In contrast, abusive fathers are of less interest for the audience and do not attract as much public attention as abusive mothers do (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 192f.).

According to Kaplan, the discourse of the lesbian mother demonstrates that mainstream American media represents lesbian sexuality, for example in the film *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992), but not necessarily lesbian motherhood. While the media depicts the fear that lesbian motherhood, as well as artificial reproduction, could harm the children of homosexual partnerships, feminist scholars try to open up the narrow concept of motherhood built by the patriarchy to produce an alternative depiction of the nuclear family. Kaplan highlights that lesbian motherhood has the potential to deconstruct the patriarchal understanding of motherhood that she analyses in her book (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 193). The representations of motherhood in this thesis, also have the potential to deconstruct the dominant understanding of motherhood.

The representation of the absent mother presupposes a nurturing father, such as in the recent American sitcom *Baby Daddy* (Berendsen, 2012-2017). The departure (or sometimes death) of the mother forces him into the role of lone father. As the protagonist of the film, he gains the sympathy of the audience. The mother, if still alive, will later

come to regret her maternal absence. In particular, comedy films in which a community of men takes care of a child, such as in *Full House* (Franklin, 1987-1995), offer a representation of the absent mother (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 184ff.). The priorities of the woman-who-refuses-to-mother lie in ensuring her own comfort rather than in her caring for her child, as at the start of the film *Baby Boom* (Shyer, 1987). The categories of the absent mother and the woman-who-refuses-to-mother overlap. While American media attempts not to judge these mothers, their representation demonstrates anxiety about the fact that women can now decide whether or not to mother, according to Kaplan (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 193).

By the end of the twentieth century, the depiction of the self-fulfilled mother does not present motherhood as a duty anymore, but as an active choice that can bring happiness to a woman's life. Women with well-paid jobs who choose maternity over career or unsatisfactory partnerships are usually white and middle-class. At the end of the films, motherhood will be the only important factor left in the protagonist's life. In the 1980s, comedies record an increase in the depiction of not just self-fulfilled mothers but also fathers, babies and parenthood in general – such as *Look Who's Talking* (Heckerling, 1989). The films focus on emerging social issues, such as divorce and questions of custody, the contrast between mothering and fathering, and a nostalgia for the domestic sphere. Within the depiction of the self-fulfilled mother, the countryside is preferable to the city as the place in which to raise children, and if the mother has to work, a small company is preferred to a demanding high-level job.

According to Kaplan, traditional discourses of mothering are still portrayed as part of the country's institutions, and a return to the nuclear family is the preferred outcome of most movies about motherhood. In contrast to the depiction of fatherhood, women are portrayed as striving to make progress in their career until a baby comes along. Men, by contrast, fulfil their sexual desires and do not have to change much, sexually or career-

wise, when a baby enters their lives. American mainstream media seldom represents sexuality within the nuclear family, though single mothers are depicted as able to have a fulfilling sex life. While single women can be associated with a high-level career – even though they are often portrayed as rather masculine or undesirable – mothers cannot be associated with the same career success unless their children are already grown up. Finally, the representation of mother and daughter as a close unit often appears in connection to the self-fulfilled mother, eliminating any visual difference between the pair. Kaplan argues that this symbiosis of mother and daughter addresses a “denial of pain, conflict, contradiction and disturbance” (*Motherhood* 200f.), and refuses to acknowledge the aging or individuality of the mother (*Motherhood* 193ff.).

Kaplan’s categorisation of maternal discourses builds the starting point from which my analysis develops two more categories of contemporary, non-traditional motherhood; young and ambivalent motherhood. As this thesis shows, the contemporary European discourse of non-traditional motherhood, deviates from Kaplan’s categorisation and it is thus in need of a further development. Furthermore, I offer an account of German and Irish filmic national contexts that are missing from Kaplan’s US-centric analysis, and from maternal film scholarship in general. I, therefore, analyse the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in German and Irish films as an addition to Kaplan’s originally American categorisation of maternal representation.

1.1.5.2. A Middle-Class Perspective: The Representation of the Working Class and Young Motherhood

As mentioned above, Douglas and Michaels argued that mass media, including filmic representations, play an important part in promoting unrealistic standards of motherhood. In particular, it fosters the myth that motherhood is fulfilling for all women, whereas only perfect mothers are able to represent “good” mothers. Mothers who live on social welfare,

however, are constructed as villains by the media. So-called “welfare mothers” allegedly create “an endless cycle, reproduced from one generation to the next, of dependency, promiscuity, irresponsibility, and corpulence” (Douglas and Michaels 174). As a result, the “welfare mother” represents a counter-image to the idealised celebrity mother (or “yummy mummy”, and this can be seen even in the technical convention by which these different maternal types are visualised. In contrast to the celebrity mother, who is often represented with backlighting that creates a halo around her, the “welfare mother” is represented in subdued lighting and barely smiles. I argue that this finding by Douglas and Michaels also applies to the young and ambivalent mothers on social welfare in contemporary German and Irish films. In both instances, Douglas and Michaels’ account and the films in my analysis, the story of working-class/welfare mothers is told from a middle-class perspective to a mostly middle-class audience. This perspective at the level of production ultimately supports and re-enforces stereotypes of the working-class.

This middle-class perspective often applies also in the representation of young motherhood, in particular, teenage motherhood. According to Lisa Arai, news media most often represent teenage mothers from a lower socio-economic class. As in the case of the “welfare mother,” the representation of the teenage mother also vilifies mothering teens, associating teenage motherhood with criminality, ignorance, promiscuity and alcohol abuse (Arai 50). Arai argues that this representation influences the public perception of teenage mothers and ultimately creates a negative sentiment towards them.

Hetty Frampton further argues that the media differs in the way it represents the young working-class mother/pregnant woman and the young mother/pregnant woman from a middle-class background. Their class determines whether the media constructs their pregnancies/motherhood as the distasteful other, in case of the working-class representation, or frame the experience of the middle-class young mothers/pregnant women sympathetically. According to Frampton, the representation of the working-class

mother suggests that she caused her situation, while the representation of the middle-class mother depicts her as a victim of her circumstances. Frampton argues that the representation of the young working-class, “chav” mother in British media reinforces class hatred, as it invites a middle-class audience to voyeuristically view and judge lower-class subjects. I argue that the German and Irish films discussed in this thesis also represent young motherhood as the mysterious other. However, my analysis further shows that this applies to the young mothers and pregnant women from both working and middle-class backgrounds. While race also effects maternal representations, the films that I study do not provide enough material for an analysis. Therefore, I leave it to future researchers to study the influence of race on maternal representations in German and Irish films.

In contrast to this negative media representation, research by the sociologists Mary Patrice Erdman and Timothy Black shows that young motherhood can actually lead to positive outcomes for some young women from working-class backgrounds. Instead of staying in poverty, their pregnancies motivated them to finish school, go to college and to refuse drugs. According to Erdman and Black’s findings, many young women were eager to create a stable living environment for their children. Sociologist Kyla Ellis-Sloan further argues that the negative media representations foster negative self-perceptions for young mothers, as they are aware of the fact that they cannot achieve the image of idealised motherhood (212ff.). Additionally, a study by Harrison et al. shows that many young parents perceive the media representation of young parenthood as damaging for their own reputation. In the study, the participants particularly criticise the stereotypical representation of absent fathers, partying teens and drug abuse. According to Harrison et al., “many teens felt a sense of heightened surveillance and scrutiny from both the general public and their HCP [Health Care Provider]” because of these negative media representations (Harrison et al. 689). I argue that the young mothers in both contemporary

German and Irish films also suffer from stigmatisation and are expected to be “bad” mothers by peers and family, while they take very good care of their children.

1.2. Comparing German and Irish Films

While Germany and Ireland differ in many aspects, both countries share an idealisation of the mother. In both countries motherhood was understood as a sacred duty to God and as a duty to the state for a long time. In recent decades, both Ireland and Germany moved towards a more secularised population that celebrates individualism. In particular, they share the European Union’s practice of social democracy, which somewhat unites their differing national and religious backgrounds. While it is important to understand the cultural differences and commonalities between German and Irish society regarding motherhood, I will further outline why I compare German and Irish film culture. This comparison offers a rich example of two contrasting (film) cultures within Europe, while at the same time permitting this thesis to pinpoint commonalities in their representation of motherhood, especially non-traditional motherhood, such as young and ambivalent mothers.

Germany and Ireland differ in many aspects, which, in turn, affect the varying influences on both film cultures. While I described the religious influences in both countries – predominantly Protestantism versus Catholicism – above, also population, size and geo-political aspects are of importance. In contrast to Ireland with its population of about 4.8 million, Germany’s population is much larger with around 83 million people. Also, the geographical size of Ireland and Germany differs greatly, with Germany being approximately five times the size of Ireland. This contrast in size and population influences film culture. With a population of around 83 million people, even smaller German groups, for example niche audiences who are interested in independent films, are

generally still of a larger size than in Ireland. Because of this, independent film movements can be more easily sustained in a country like Germany.

Furthermore, the countries' geo-political positioning and language are important factors for Irish and German film cultures, which developed independently from each other to a great extent. While Germany is positioned in the middle of Europe, Ireland is at its periphery. This peripheral position, the fact that most Irish people are English native speakers and a colonial history that forced many Irish to emigrate, has produced a unique relationship to America and with it to the biggest film industry in the world. While Hollywood is indeed a strong influence on all Western film industries and audiences, Irish film inherits a deeply rooted connection to American film. Due to large numbers of emigrants and a nostalgic reimagining of the Irish diaspora, films like *The Quiet Man* by John Ford (1952) were highly influential for the representation of Ireland on screen. German film, in contrast, is more strongly influenced by a European film context such as the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, even though American influences gained great importance in recent years. The Catholic, Anglophone, more transnational Irish film culture, therefore, presents a useful contrast to the larger, European influenced, Protestant German film culture. This contrast permits an exploration of the variety of maternal representations in European film, while, identifying commonalities that might be applicable to a wider representation of motherhood in Europe.

From the late 1960s to the 1980s New German Cinema developed in Germany, following the European trend towards an auteur-driven cinematic realism that involved the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism. Directors such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Alexander Kluge developed a highly personalised style of filmmaking that adopted long shots and a Brechtian approach of audience engagement with the film material that allowed for reflection. New German Cinema communicated social and political issues of the time by portraying marginalised members of society,

such as the societal struggle of an older woman and her immigrant husband in *Angst Essen Seele Auf/Alte: Fear Eats The Soul* (Fassbinder, 1974). Female filmmakers of New German Cinema became important in the representation of femininity and motherhood, as

[t]he women filmmakers of the 1970s were the first whose works treated the formerly excluded themes of contraception, the German abortion laws (Paragraph 218), pregnancy, and motherhood, as well as the question of the compatibility of career and family. (Möhrmann 69)

The filmmakers of New German Cinema did not need to focus on the marketability of their productions due to state subsidies. This allowed filmmakers to experiment in form and to effectively portray marginalised voices of German society (Clarke 3).⁹

The 1970s and 1980s in Ireland also constituted a period of experimentation with film form that was influenced by the European movement. Filmmakers such as Thaddeus O'Sullivan and Pat Murphy created low-budget films that engaged with Irish political and social issues as well as aimed to deconstruct Irish stereotypes that were mainly formed by Hollywood depictions such as *The Quiet Man*. In contrast to New German Cinema, the Irish experimental films did not benefit from the formation of a distinctive grouping of filmmakers that supported each other through promoting and selling each other's projects. Their main financial support was secured through the Irish Film Board which was established under the Irish Film Board Act in 1980. It especially funded indigenous feature films and documentaries. Due to financial troubles, the Irish Film Board was suspended in 1987 and with it the financial support for indigenous Irish films (McLoone 111ff.; Barton, *Irish* 85ff.). From the 1990s onwards, tax incentives lured international

⁹ However, according to Renate Möhrmann, "female characters continued to be pigeonholed as comrades and pin-up girls, wives and mistresses, mothers and whores, saints and sinners – dichotomies that can be traced back to the medieval dualism of vice and virtue" (72).

film industries into Ireland and a shift to commercial cinema was, and is still, visible in Ireland.

Also, in Germany, this shift towards commercial cinema developed after unification. The coalition of CDU and FDP decided that Germany needed to produce more accessible mainstream cinema than elitist art-house productions. Therefore, the German film industry moved towards more financially lucrative productions that borrowed Hollywood genre conventions such as faster editing techniques and action-driven continuity. According to David Clarke “[t]he director is thereby downgraded from the status of auteur (Autor) to that of a skilled technician, who keeps a close eye on the marketability of his or her product” (1). While these German genre films such as *Das Leben der Anderen/The Lives of Others* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) gain international recognition, critics mourn the loss of aesthetic experimentation and a critical examination of political and social issues in contemporary society. They conceive this so-called “cinema of consensus”¹⁰ as reaffirmation of the status quo in Germany by mostly portraying middle-class characters with no financial troubles. In 2007, the director of the German Film Academy, Günter Rohrbach, publishes the essay *Das Schmollen der Autisten* (The Pouting of Autistic) in which he in turn questions these critics who downgrade box office successes such as *Das Parfum – Die Geschichte eines Mörders/Perfume: Story of a Murderer* (Tykwer, 2006) and celebrate small productions like *Sehnsucht/Longing* (Grisebach, 2006) that are mostly overlooked by audiences (Rohrbach 156).

These small, low-budget productions emerge from a new filmic movement in Germany, the so-called “Berlin School”. Directors discussed in this thesis such as Henner Winckler, Maria Speth and Ulrich Köhler are part of the second generation of the Berlin

¹⁰ German cinema of consensus only partially uses mainstream cinema conventions. Films by Tom Tykwer, for example, fall under the definition of cinema of consensus, while at the same time being aesthetically more experimental than the standard Hollywood blockbuster.

School. They draw a lot of its aesthetic tradition from New German Cinema. Like Fassbinder et. al, the directors of the Berlin School are interested in an auteur approach to cinema and focus on the representation of marginalised members of contemporary German society. This emphasis makes the movement especially valuable in order to find representations of non-traditional motherhood in contemporary German film.

As Marco Abel points out, the low-budget films of the Berlin School are often overlooked by the audience and are not in line with the “officially” preferred representation of Germany, defined by public figures such as Rohrbach. Abel claims that the consensus films that German functionaries such as Rohrbach want to promote,

cater to an audience that can find in them both confirmation of its own preconceived notions about Germany (“the Nazis!”, “the Stasi!”) and the comforting, even feel-good perception that this (sic!) people has finally managed to shed its totalitarian past and join the community of “normal” nations. (Abel 206)

The films of the Berlin School constitute a counter-cinema to this implied political agenda. While the Berlin School represents marginalised members of society such as non-traditional mothers, this representation occurs within a marginalised space of German cinema that is not widely popular with the audience. It rather exists for a specific niche audience of festival goers and is often spread further by institutions or educational programmes, as it is exactly that material that offers a critical engagement with contemporary issues. While commercial films secure private funding and sell comparatively well, Berlin School films are often financially supported by *Das kleine Fernsehspiel* (The Little Television Play) by ZDF, Germany’s second television channel. This financial source allows the filmmakers to produce more independent and critical topics and secures them a broadcasting slot in German television, which in turn allows for a slightly wider audience than a sole theatre release offers these art-house movies

(Cooke and Homewood 12f.). While giving young and ambivalent mothers a voice, it is questionable how far this voice can travel through the medium of low-budget, aesthetically challenging Berlin School films. It merely stays inside an intellectual circle of audiences who actively seek to educate themselves on certain subjects of cultural importance.

Further, documentaries represent young and ambivalent motherhood in Germany to small audiences. While documentary filmmaking is on the rise, only 2% of audiences go to the cinema to see them (Basler and Hampel 131).¹¹ Additionally, documentary festivals, such as DOK Leipzig, offer a stage for exhibition that caters to specific audiences who are interested in the genre. While public broadcasting channels (*öffentlich-rechtlich*) widely finance documentaries, they often allocate late screening times and, therefore, these films do not reach a big audience either. Both the Berlin School films and documentaries still exist as niche products that mostly reach selected audiences. Nevertheless, this selected audience often consists of film critics and prominent figures who influence the cultural circuit of festivals and public debates, as well as reflect on the symptomatic material that engages with societal issues.

In contrast to German film since the 1990s, Irish film developed a more transnational film culture without developing the opposition of a counter-cinema such as the movement of the Berlin School. Co-productions between Irish and foreign producers are common and the group effort within film production is more highly valued than a director's authorship. This international financial interest can bring a representational disadvantage as Martin McLoone states: "The danger is that, to attract financial support, such films propose a view of Ireland that is already familiar to international funders and which funders in turn believe audiences are likely to recognise and identify with" (114f.).

¹¹ In 2012, over 70 German documentaries were screened in the cinemas (Basler and Hampel 131).

According to Ruth Barton, femininity is frequently tied to the representation of nationalism. Independent women and the portrayal of an Irish femme fatale are strongly connected with Irish history and the idea of a rebellion against colonialism (compare: Barton, *Irish* 119ff., 126ff.; Meaney 238ff., 244, 250). The representation of mothers is linked to the Irish land and to the Church in the form of the Virgin Mary. As Barton argues, “the mother figure is alternately and simultaneously, Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary, devoted and a-sexual, her own desires subsumed into the maternal” (Barton, *Irish* 114). While the international financial interest lures filmmakers to represent women in line with this filmic tradition, slightly more independent productions are able to present a more nuanced version of Irish mothers and women in general, being able to focus on individual female struggles and social issues.

Under Michael D. Higgins as Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, the Film Board was reopened in 1993, which meant a new start for more indigenous filmmaking, even though it has proved to be less aesthetically experimental than in the 1970s or the Berlin School. Additionally, the Irish television channel RTÉ had to allow 25% of its programming to be dedicated to the independent sector. Also, the Irish productions gain an additional platform through the option of a release in television that allows a wider audience for films that struggle at the box office. These, slightly more indigenous films – yet still rather transnational in a European comparison – often explore the downside of the Celtic Tiger era and the disadvantaged members of Irish society. (McLoone 115ff.; Barton, *Irish* 109ff., 186; Gillespie 55, 72f.)

In comparison to the Berlin School, however, these more indigenous Irish films, are still highly influenced by American film. Michael Patrick Gillespie even questions the existence of an Irish cinema in his book *The Myth of Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films*, due to the fact, among others, that many of the Irish film crew members work in Ireland and in America. While Irish film operates in a substantially transnational

framework, I define contemporary Irish films by their setting in Ireland, the Irish heritage of the director and their at least partial source of funding by Irish institutions. Therefore, the definition of contemporary Irish film in this thesis is based on Anthony Kirby's and James MacKillop's definition of Irish cinema: "(a) one made in Ireland, with (b) an Irish director, (c) produced or backed by an Irish company, and (d) based on a text by an Irish writer, or a compelling minority of those four elements" (Kirby and MacKillop 182). Gillespie challenges Kirby and MacKillop's definition as he goes so far as to question the existence of an Irish nation state. While this thesis acknowledges Gillespie's objection, Kirby and MacKillop's definition comes closest to satisfying the need to provide a working definition of contemporary Irish cinema, acknowledging not just American but also British and European influences.

Besides the feature film, the short film was and is an important medium in Irish film production. In particular, during the years when the Irish Film Board was closed, short films still offered an alternative, low-budget way of filmmaking. Furthermore, short films often reveal themselves as stepping stones for emerging artists and allow engagement with more radical ideas. As McLoone argues, "[t]his is true, also for feminist cinema in general and even for the ability of women directors to break through into film-making at all" (160). The films chosen for this thesis, reflect this trend, as both Irish feature and short films offer a valuable source of non-traditional maternal representations.

Conn Holohan proposes a differentiation between short film and feature film similar to the difference between short story and novel. While the feature film is able to portray a variety of narrative strands that are representative of a wider reality, the short film is often limited to a singular narrative which transforms reality and is in need of an audience that is able to place this reality back into its historical context (Holohan, "Short" 184ff.). Therefore, in keeping with Holohan, the audience of an Irish short film must be familiar with the reality of contemporary Ireland in order to understand the deeper meaning of its

metaphorical content. Feature films, in contrast, mostly explain the historical context they are set in. Therefore, the impact of the message of a short film is often limited to a national audience that is able to understand the context of the short.

In conclusion, while German and Irish cinema developed out of different historical contexts, an overall European trend is still distinguishable. Both film cultures were influenced by a European trend towards aesthetically challenging filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed for a deconstruction of stereotypes and representation of marginalised members of society. State subsidies of these films ensured their financial independence and the ability to experiment with film form. In both countries, this trend receded from the 1990s onwards and a strong focus on international marketability arose, supporting mainstream film productions. In Ireland, this focus promotes especially a transnational production. Nevertheless, the counter-cinema of the Berlin School in Germany and the rather indigenous productions in Ireland still support the emergence of culturally marginalised voices such as non-traditional mothers. Both can exist through television subsidies and the possibility of increasing their audience by exhibition both in cinemas and on national television. The marginalised voices of single and ambivalent mothers are, furthermore, to be found in documentary filmmaking in Germany and in short films in Ireland. While the documentary in Germany caters only to a small niche audience, the format provides valuable insight into the lived experiences of young and ambivalent mothers. The short film in Ireland offers a low-budget, radical opportunity for (emerging) filmmakers, such as Naomi Fagan, to represent challenging concepts of motherhood for a national audience that is able to contextualise the narrative.

1.3. Research Methodology

In order to show how contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional motherhood, I analyse 13 films. These 13 case studies are comprised of seven German and six Irish films. This qualitative method allows me to apply a textual analysis to individual films and to compare them in order to highlight European commonalities and national differences. This hermeneutic analysis of the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in contemporary German and Irish film considers the individual social and historical context in which the films are respectively embedded. In contrast to phenomenology, I do not aim to describe the essence of a maternal experience but see German and Irish films as texts that emerge from a specific cultural background and respond to societal norms and prejudices regarding motherhood. Even though the German and Irish films offer an intriguing consistency in their representation of young and ambivalent motherhood, they also offer divergences. Their representation of non-traditional motherhood is, therefore, consistent and dynamic at the same time. As German and Irish film constitutes only a small part of European cinema, I hope to provide an initial framework for future research on the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in European film.

In the case studies, I analyse filmic techniques that create the way in which contemporary Irish and German films represent young and ambivalent motherhood. While I sometimes underline my representational observations with the intentions a director expressed in published interviews, I do not fully investigate the intentions behind the film making process. Nor do I research the audiences response to the films. These two perspectives lie beyond the scope of this research project and present an interesting subject for future examination. My textual analysis of German and Irish films examines how audio-visual narrative represents non-traditional motherhood in both filmmaking contexts and highlights their commonalities and underlines their points of divergence.

As this thesis analyses the representation of non-traditional motherhood in contemporary German and Irish films, I initially reviewed recent films from 2000 onwards that included a non-traditional maternal character in order to define my film corpus. Due to the fact that mothers are often supporting characters, a film with a matricentric focus is difficult to find in both the cinemas studied. Nevertheless, I mostly selected films with a non-traditional maternal protagonist, as it offers a more complex representation of young and ambivalent motherhood than a maternal supporting character does.¹²

During my review of the films, three types of non-traditional maternal characters emerged most often: the young mother, the mother who feels ambivalence and the lesbian mother. As the contemporary Irish films do not offer a sufficient number of films representing lesbian motherhood, I narrowed my research down to young and ambivalent motherhood. This film corpus represents all films that offer a young or ambivalent mother in a main role and depict biological instead of step-mothers in contemporary German and Irish films. I am specifically interested in how contemporary culture represents non-traditional motherhood through the medium of film.

Based on feminist literature as described above – and especially in terms of Kaplan’s definition of maternal discourses – I divided my analysis into three points of interest: the relationship between motherhood, work and sexuality; how young and ambivalent mothers are influenced by societal norms and prejudices; and their positioning within the heterosexual family. Even though I acknowledge that there are many more aspects of motherhood that could be analysed, I narrow my focus to these three significant categories and leave it to future research to expand on this analysis. A woman’s stance regarding both work and sexuality was and still is a defining topic for feminism. While second-

¹² Only Jean in *Glassland* is not the protagonist of the film, yet her character provides significant insight into the experience of maternal ambivalence. Therefore, *Glassland* is an invaluable case in this research.

wave feminists fought for women's rights in the workforce and campaigned to liberate female sexuality, third-wave feminists highlight the importance of choice. This thesis explores how especially young and ambivalent mothers are represented in connection to both work and sex.

Furthermore, according to matricentric literature – be it psychoanalytical, sociological or historical – societal pressures are prevalent for the experience and construction of motherhood. Therefore, I demonstrate how contemporary German and Irish films represent the influence of societal norms and prejudices on young and ambivalent mothers, and how the family set-up and expectations construct the maternal role. I do not focus exclusively on the representation of the dynamic between mother and child, but instead analyse the maternal character as an individual who is, nevertheless, influenced by her relationships to child(ren), partner and society. As each viewer responds to a film in a unique way that resonates with his or her own experiences, it is important to note that my subjectivity impacts the textual analysis of the selected films and its focus on the above mentioned three categories. I do not claim that my reading of the films is the only correct interpretation and acknowledge the various different angles from which the films could be examined.

Instead of just focusing on one genre, the filmic cases in this research are comprised of documentaries, feature films (partially from the Berlin School) and short films. Each textual analysis considers the distinctive mode of representation for these differing filmic forms. The documentary sets itself especially apart from feature and short film due to its unique relationship to reality and its distinctive representational approaches. While feature films discussed in this thesis try to create a believable reality, the documentaries offer a mediation of an “antecedent, historical reality” (Nichols 232). While some viewers may assign a higher level of truthfulness to an argument made by a documentary than a fictional film, it is important to highlight that filmic process, such as camera angles,

editing and the director's choice of which information will be revealed and which will be withheld, still mould the representation of a certain subject in documentary filmmaking. As John Corner argues, “[d]ocumentary is *authorial* in that it is about creativity and transformation based on vision. In being this, it is also emphatically *dramatic*, as part of its bid for the public imagination [...]” (14). I do not claim that one format offers a more truthful representation than the other and do not detach my analysis of the documentaries from my analysis of the fiction films. I do not claim that this is an ideal solution to treat the issue of format, yet it proved valuable for my purposes. In my ensuing analysis of *Vierzehn – Erwachsen in 9 Monaten /Fourteen* (Grünberg, 2013), *Achtzehn – Wagnis Leben /18 – Dare to Live* (Grünberg, 2014) and *Regretting Motherhood* (Grimme and Hoffmann, 2017), I consider both the unique relationship of the documentary to reality and the fact that documentaries are also subjected to filmic processes. In order to analyse the different representational modes within documentary filmmaking, I draw on John Corner's influential categorisation, which divides vocal and visual representations into multiple sub-categories.

While Corner assigns four representational modes to the documentary image, he allocates three to speech. Since only two representational modes regarding image and speech respectively are important for the documentaries analysed in this thesis, I focus my introduction on those of significance. The visual representation in Grünberg's documentaries, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, mirrors Corner's “evidential mode 2 (proactive observationalism)” (28). In this mode, the documentary creates a continuous narrative through *mise-en-scène* and composition, amongst other means. In contrast to fly-on-the-wall observationalism, a range of shots and perspectives can be offered within one scene. Some documentaries underline the constructability of such a filmic practice, while others do not. According to Corner, in this mode “the depiction has been more heavily coded, perhaps more richly inflected, as a result of the increased management of movement and

space as well as of shooting” (28). Regarding speech, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn* display two modes. “Evidential mode 1 (overheard exchange)” (Corner 29) describes the conversations the social actors have during their daily lives. Here, the documentary records the pro-filmic action and the social actors are usually not asked to respond to certain questions during the overheard exchange of their dialogues. The second mode that is evident in Grünberg’s documentaries is “evidential mode 2 (testimony)” (Corner 29f.) in which the social actors are subject to interviews. The editing of the image in combination with these interviews can determine how, and whether or not, the audience is manipulated into a certain feeling or opinion by the documentary.

In Grimme and Hoffmann’s documentary, *Regretting Motherhood*, the same mode – evidential mode 2 (testimony) – exists regarding speech. The image, however, differs from the mode of *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*. In *Regretting Motherhood*, the visual “evidential mode 3 (illustrative)” is evident. In this mode, the “visualisation is subordinate to verbal discourses” (Corner 29) and they can even contrast each other. Due to the request for anonymity, *Regretting Motherhood* detaches the verbal and the visual discourse, which introduces an additional layer of representation. This layer does not always support the verbal accounts of the social actors.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into two sections: young motherhood and ambivalent motherhood. Both sections explore the central research question of how contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional motherhood. Each section is divided into three chapters. The first chapter in each section demonstrates the relationship between motherhood, work and sex; the second highlights societal challenges; and the final chapter examines the young and ambivalent mothers position within the heterosexual

family. These chapters demonstrate that, on one hand, contemporary German and Irish films succeed in lending a voice to non-traditional mothers and offer a valuable representation that is often missing in mainstream cinema. On the other hand, the young and ambivalent maternal characters are still unable to escape a positioning against traditional ideals and societal norms within these representations. This impossibility of escaping the traditional frameworks of motherhood depicts a complex interplay between the films attempt to highlight current maternal conditions, and subconscious process during the filmmaking process.¹³ Finally, the conclusion further highlights the European commonalities and national differences between the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in contemporary German and Irish films, defining an additional categorisation to Kaplan's originally American description.

In the following chapters, I show how contemporary German and Irish films still do not represent young and ambivalent mothers in connection with both work and sex, and if they do so, the three aspects create a great tension in the non-traditional mothers' lives. Even if nothing negative happens to the children during the films, the non-traditional mothers are still subject to prejudices. They suffer under maternal idealisations and society's expectation that they will fail as mothers. Finally, I demonstrate that both German and Irish films situate the young and ambivalent mothers in families that offer a challenge to them. Their relationship to a male partner, especially challenges the non-traditional mothers and influences their own maternal experience negatively. This thesis constitutes the first in-depth analysis of the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in both contemporary German and Irish films. It offers an initial framework for future researchers, in order to analyse other national accounts of non-traditional motherhood

¹³ It is essential to keep in mind that "media do not always mirror reality" (Shoemaker and Reese 7) but instead offer rather an index of a "cultural temperature" (Hansen et al. 92).

Section I:

Young Motherhood

in Contemporary German and Irish Films

2. Young Motherhood and The Impossible Triangle: Motherhood, Work and Sex

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that contemporary German and Irish films represent both work and sex as being either incompatible with young motherhood or a cause of tension for the young girls and women. With this, I aim to show that contemporary German and Irish films link the representation of non-traditional motherhood, such as young motherhood, mainly to challenges and do not represent non-traditional motherhood as desirable. Both a woman's position within the domestic or public life and the acknowledgment of female sexuality constitute an important point of discussion within feminism over centuries. I study the young mothers' representation in the German and Irish films in relation to both work and sexuality, based on E. Ann Kaplan's analysis, in which she examines American mainstream film and media from the early twentieth century up to the 1980s. Due to the mothers' young age the term *work* encompasses also educational responsibilities, such as school or university. This chapter explores how contemporary German and Irish films represent the young mothers' struggle between work and motherhood and whether the films acknowledge an active sexuality to these young mothers. I illustrate the persistence of the "impossible triangle" (Kaplan, "Sex" 409) between motherhood, work and sex, as described by Kaplan, regarding young motherhood in the films.

Kaplan mentions six maternal discourses that evolved from the 1980s onwards in American media. The German and Irish discourse of non-traditional motherhood, however, deviates from this and is in need of a different categorisation. In this chapter, I provide a German and Irish filmic national context that is missing in Kaplan's US-centric analysis. I, therefore, complement Kaplan's original American maternal categorisation and make it suitable for using in a European context. In particular, I offer a new category

that was not considered before by Kaplan's maternal discourses: the representation of the young mother.

Elsewhere, Kaplan underlined the failure of maternal representations to adequately situate the maternal character as a sexual, working mother in mainstream American film. While presenting the new category of young motherhood, this chapter specifically shows that motherhood, work and sex are still not shown to be compatible in contemporary Irish and German film, despite their more independent production cultures. The young single mothers act outside of what Orna Donath calls a "cultural-temporal heteronormative logic", which locates motherhood within a heterosexual relationship and follows a conventional pattern of life, leading from school leaving to marriage and motherhood (Donath, "Choosing Motherhood" 203). The young single mothers deviate from this norm, finding themselves striving for an ideal they can hardly fulfil. In the films, this struggle is particularly clear when young mothers attempt to combine motherhood with work on the one hand or an active sex-life on the other. While the contemporary German and Irish films manage to break away from traditional maternal representations by depicting young motherhood, they still reinforce traditional gender roles by representing motherhood as incompatible with both work and sexuality.

This chapter enhances our understanding of the representation of young motherhood in German and Irish film and contributes to the sparse literature on the subject. Influential feminist scholarship on motherhood such as Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic approach and Shari L. Thurer's historical/sociological approach informs the textual analysis of the case studies in order to gain a deeper understanding of the maternal representations in a German and Irish context. Furthermore, scholarship on teenage motherhood by Ciara Bradley, Kateresea Ford and Kyla Ellis-Sloan adds to our understanding of which stance the films' representation takes on young motherhood. While Ford focuses on negative outcomes of young motherhood, underlining the young mothers' socio-economic

struggles and difficulties with their peers, Bradley tries to break with negative stereotypes and focuses on positive effects, such as the finding that young mothers are more responsible, connected and competent than their peers (Ford, *Negotiating Identities* 24, 103; Bradley 150). This chapter demonstrates that while negative stereotypes are dominant in the representation of these non-traditional mothers in both German and Irish films, the representation of young motherhood in the Irish short film *Heartbreak* (Tynan, 2017) and the German feature film *Am Himmel der Tag/Breaking Horizons* (Beck, 2012) offers some positive outcomes of young motherhood.

This chapter is divided into two parts; work and sex. I argue that in contemporary Irish and German films motherhood and work are still understood as incompatible concepts, even though the young mother sometimes shows ambition to join the workforce or return to education. I show that the films represent sexuality as a threat to the happiness of the young mother from a working-class background and that the young pregnant woman from a middle-class background is desexualised in both German and Irish fiction films. I illustrate that, despite the more independent approach of the selected contemporary German and Irish films, motherhood is still depicted as incompatible with full-time work, and with an active sex-life. While this visually reinforces contemporary struggles of young mothers, it, at the same time, demonstrates these struggles to the films' audiences.

2.2. Work/Education

2.2.1. Work/Shooling and Motherhood: *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*

The representation of young motherhood in the German documentaries differs slightly from those in the fiction films. While the documentaries communicate the pressure that the young mothers encounter in combining motherhood with work, most of the fiction films represent young motherhood and work as incompatible. I argue that the

documentaries do not represent young motherhood as desirable, as it enhances the pressure for some of the girls to do well in school in order to proof their abilities to mother. I do not claim that either the documentaries or the feature films represent a more valid truth about young motherhood in Germany. I merely highlight the representational differences within these two filmic forms. While documentaries are often perceived as actuality, I underline that also documentary filmmaking is subject to decision-making processes that determine which particular truth will be told. Therefore, the representation of the young mothers is understood as *mediated* reality and not mere truth in the following analysis.

The documentaries *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn* show the difficulties young mothers face in growing up faster than their peers and in finding a childcare place for their children, as well as a workplace that gives appropriate consideration to the special requirements of a young single mother. In particular, the combination of motherhood with either school or work constitutes a major struggle for the four girls. At the beginning of *Vierzehn*, the girls describe their dreams and plans for the future to the audience during an interview, while the editing converts their diegetic voices to a non-diegetic voice-over, during which the camera lingers on their silent faces in close-up.¹⁴ This way of filming is designed to provoke scepticism within the audience from the beginning that these girls will be able to pursue their chosen paths mentioned in their initial voice-over. *Achtzehn* will later show the actual paths of the four girls, of which only one achieved her initial dream.

One of the girls, Lisa, states that she wants to be a kindergarten teacher or midwife. However, as the audience learns in the second documentary, *Achtzehn*, she will drop out of school to become a stay-at-home mother of three children, requiring the help of her parents and siblings. Steffi mentions that she would like to work on a farm and move

¹⁴ *Vierzehn* 00:02:30 - 00:03:07 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

away from the small village of Sterbfritz. Instead, she struggles to find an apprenticeship or kindergarten place near her home, after finishing school at the lowest level possible in Germany (Hauptschule – equivalent to a lower secondary education). In her initial dreams, Laura focuses more on having children than on an occupation, but she mentions that she could imagine becoming a teacher in the future. However, she ends up struggling with the mental burden of motherhood, though she manages to finish school at the highest academic level possible in Germany (Gymnasium). Fabienne’s thoughts about the future mainly concern a nuclear family life with a partner who has a good job. While *Vierzehn* shows her trying to accomplish this with the biological father of her child, *Achtzehn* shows how she actually created this vision with Memo, her new partner, who is not the biological father of her son Valentin. Fabienne pursues a part-time apprenticeship in a bakery, while Valentin goes to kindergarten during the day.

In the documentaries, combining motherhood with work is a constant point of struggle for the young mothers. This is the case, whether this struggle revolves around the combination of work and motherhood or around the struggle to find work and appropriate childcare as a young mother in the first place. All four girls struggle with the demands that are placed on them to succeed in either school or work in order to prove their ability to mother. The films mirror the findings of sociologist Kyla Ellis-Sloan that show that young mothers face unique challenges in order to be perceived as “good” mothers. According to Ellis-Sloan,

[w]hilst ‘good’ mothering discourses pose a challenge to all mothers, those parenting outside of cultural norms (such as young parents) face particular problems, particularly as there is a conflict between what is required of them as ‘good’ mothers and as ‘good’ *teenage* mothers. For instance, mothering full-time may conform to the norms for some older mothers of small children, but it puts

young mothers at odds with what is expected of them, namely, to engage in education, employment or training. (212)

The documentaries especially underline how important day-care facilities are for young mothers to be able to pursue their education, start an early career and secure their independence. Only two of the girls are able to pursue an apprenticeship (Fabienne) or school (Laura), and both of them underline the importance of parental help to do so. This, as well as the expansion of state-subsidised childcare, indicates a change in German society towards acceptance of institutional childcare spaces as a safe and important option to rear children, at least for young parents. In the documentaries, parental help and state support enable the young women to fulfil the demands they are faced with to somewhat combine motherhood with work or school in order to be accepted by society.

In the documentaries, work cannot be effortlessly combined with motherhood, in contrast with Kaplan's indication in her categorisation of the Executive Mom. The girls clearly highlight their struggle with the combination and Steffi often compares her life with that of her sister, who did not become a mother at such a young age and is able to pursue a career instead. Work becomes the unreachable ideal for Steffi that could have allowed her to leave the small village of Sterbfritz. Because of her child, however, she is unable to find suitable part-time work and is not able to leave the small village. Laura also struggles to meet the demands of her school, while minding a toddler, and Fabienne struggles emotionally with leaving her child at the kindergarten when going to work. The documentaries communicate the struggle of young mothers to combine motherhood with work or schooling, instead of glossing over the issue, as it is the case in Kaplan's description of American mainstream films and the Executive Mom. In *Achtzehn*, Lisa, Steffi and Laura describe the opportunities they missed due to motherhood, whether this is a higher school education, the ability to go to university, or a job that is compatible

with being a young single mother. Only Fabienne is able to embrace her maternal role seemingly delighted about her son, while trying to build her own family life.

2.2.2. Career/Schooling or Motherhood: *Am Himmel der Tag*, *Jelly Baby* and *Twice Shy*

While the combination of motherhood and work represents a struggle for the girls in the German documentaries, in the German and Irish fiction films, the young women decide in favour of either work or motherhood. I argue that the German feature film *Am Himmel der Tag* and in the Irish feature film *Twice Shy* (Ryan, 2016) as well as the Irish short film *Jelly Baby* (Fagan, 2017) represent work as incompatible with motherhood. This struggle underlines my thesis statement that contemporary German and Irish films mainly link the representation of young motherhood to challenges. The mothers in the films have to decide whether they want to stay at home with their child full-time or whether they want to pursue a career. In *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara (Aylin Tezel) chooses to give up her architectural studies in order to raise her child, even before the child is born. During her pregnancy, Lara loses any remnant of her already low interest in studying architecture and focuses on her future as a mother. At no point does she consider pursuing motherhood and a career simultaneously.

Am Himmel der Tag visually uses Berlin's architecture and its sky above to position the young pregnant woman in between the options of pursuing a career or of becoming a mother. The city's high-rise buildings are a reminder of her studies in architecture, while the shots of the horizon open up a possible future for Lara which will be found through motherhood and later lost again. Motherhood becomes a chance in the young woman's life to make an active decision in favour of something she looks forward to, in contrast to the studies that she continues out of obligation. The combination of Lara's face in close-up shots and the establishing shots of the high-rise buildings surrounding her apartment

create a claustrophobic sense of space (figure 1), while wide camera shots of the horizon (figure 2) break with this by promising a brighter future for the protagonist. Also, the title of the film *Am Himmel der Tag*, which in a direct translation means *the day is on the horizon*, refers to this promise. This mirrors the trend of American mainstream films of the 1980s, in which women found their true purpose in motherhood, according to Thurer (289ff.). In the end of *Am Himmel der Tag*, in contrast, the film will not keep this promise for the young pregnant woman as she miscarries her baby. Therefore, while the film briefly suggests that Lara can only find personal freedom and happiness in motherhood, the film ultimately avoids to present this as the only option for the young woman.



Figure 1 - *Am Himmel der Tag*: High-rise buildings that surround Lara's apartment.



Figure 2 - *Am Himmel der Tag*: Lara's point of view of the sky.

In the film, Lara and her friend Nora (Henrike von Kuik) each represent career and motherhood respectively. Neither of the characters combines the two aspects, nor do the characters show any interest in the other's pursuit of either work or motherhood. In the middle of the film, when Lara meets her friend Nora in a maternity clothes shop, Nora is wearing a casual smart jacket.¹⁵ This is a visual contrast between these two characters, with Lara representing the young single mother on one hand, and the future young business woman represented by Nora on the other. Both women struggle to pay attention to each other, as their conversation circles around their own individual interests. The camera focuses on the uninterested faces of the two friends, barely placing them as a unit within its *mise-en-scène*. When the camera does not show the faces in close-up, it positions the women in two corners of the screen, sitting at opposite ends of one sofa. Nora and Lara barely physically interact with each other in this scene and are visually separated by objects in between them. Only when Lara feels her child kicking inside her belly does she take Nora's hand to let her feel the movement. Nora does not seem to appreciate the gesture and pulls her hand back politely. *Am Himmel der Tag*, therefore, visually represents motherhood – represented by Lara – and career – represented by Nora – as strictly separated spheres within a woman's life.

Also, the Irish short film *Jelly Baby* creates an antagonism between the working female and the young, stay-at-home mother who is restricted in her ability to do whatever she wants. I argue that both films represent work and motherhood as separate spheres and that work is seemingly unreachable for the young single mother, Stacey (Charleigh Bailey). She is from a working-class background and is not able to actively choose between motherhood or work. In *Jelly Baby*, Stacey does not receive any help by family members

¹⁵ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:43:52 - 00:45:39 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

and her limited financial resources do not allow for expensive childminders. These circumstances make it difficult for Stacey to pursue a career, while being a single mother.

Stacey and her former friend Shauna (Ericka Roe) represent motherhood and work respectively.¹⁶ Stacey usually walks through the streets of Tallaght, passing time, while her daughter (Megan Bramble) is in school. Sitting at the playground, she runs into Shauna, who is taking a break from work. The difference between the stay-at-home mother and the young, working woman is demonstrated in the following dialogue:

- Stacey** Home from work?
- Shauna** Yeah, just going off to get a few coffees. You look great.
- Stacey** Thanks.
- Shauna** How long has it been, a year?
- Stacey** Lauren's fourth birthday. She's nine on Saturday.
- Shauna** Come here, it's Claire's 24th on Saturday, if you'd like to come.
- Stacey** Ehm, no, sure. I've her birthday on Sunday. So, I can't be dying you know.
- Shauna** Bring her with you.
- Stacey** No, thanks. Here, will you tell her I said 'happy birthday'.
- Shauna** God, you never used to be like this.
- Stacey** Like what?
- Shauna** This.
- Stacey** Well, I'm a mum now.
- Shauna** Alright, suit yourself. I better go, alright?!

In the scene, the young mother rejects an invitation to a birthday party due to her responsibilities for Lauren. Her decision is met with annoyance and a lack of

¹⁶ *Jelly Baby* 00:02:35 - 00:04:19 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to Vimeo specifications).

understanding by her former friend, with whom she lost contact five years ago. The scene examines the sacrifices Stacey had to make in order to raise Lauren – not being able to find work and losing her non-supportive friends. While her former friend focuses on work and having fun, Stacey’s attention is devoted to caring for her daughter.



Figure 3 - *Jelly Baby*: The young mother, Stacey, has to reject an invitation to a friend's birthday party due to her maternal responsibilities.

This scene represents the two characters differently. Stacey is positioned inside a fenced playground and Shauna stands outside of it. The fence confines Stacey to the playground and builds a barrier between the two women (figure 3), situating them in opposing spheres, representing the maternal and the working young female respectively. The *mise-en-scène* hinders Stacey from getting through the fence, hinting towards the difficulties Stacey encounters in connecting with her former friend’s world of independence. At the same time, Shauna seems to pity Stacey and does not accept her decision to take responsibility for a child instead of joining her and the other girls for a party. Kateresea L. Ford’s study on adolescent motherhood describes the negative impact young motherhood has on women and highlights in particular their struggle to refuse having fun with their friends once being mothers (*Negotiating Identities* 139). Stacey does indeed struggle with this, as she later decides to go to the party anyway. Besides Stacey’s

struggle to decide whether to have fun with her friends, *Jelly Baby* further highlights their lack of acceptance of the young mother's responsibilities. In the Irish short film, the Stacey, therefore, is not just expected to reject the idea of having fun with her friends but is furthermore denied acceptance by her peers. Consequently, motherhood is linked with responsibilities and adulthood in *Jelly Baby*, while the working young female is represented as being independent and self-interested.

While *Jelly Baby* links motherhood with having more responsibilities, in contrast to the working young woman, the film, at the same time, closely connects stay-at-home young motherhood to poverty. Stacey and her daughter live in a little apartment and cannot afford much. When Lauren asks her mother whether they can go to America for her birthday, Stacey looks exhaustedly to her right, into the camera and down at the remote control which she uses to turn the music louder, replying: 'Yeah, we'll see.'¹⁷ Stacey tries not to admit to her daughter that they do not have the means to fulfil her wish. Young single motherhood, therefore, is associated with poverty, and the young mother has few opportunities to continue either education or to start a job whilst mothering full-time. While Ireland's neo-liberal system clearly favours women to be part of the workforce (see for example: O'Hagan), Stacey does not meet this definition, being confined to the domestic sphere in *Jelly Baby*. The film confirms Ford's findings that "most teen pregnancies tend to have a negative impact on both mother and child because of the lack of basic resources and the need to depend on others for daily necessities [...]. Teen pregnancy and motherhood [...] directly impact the teen mother's social mobility and chance of completing school" (*Negotiating Identities* 24). While *Jelly Baby* offers a rare insight into the representation of young motherhood in Ireland, the film, at the same time, supports the depiction of negative outcomes of young motherhood such as poverty

¹⁷ *Jelly Baby* 00:04:23 - 00:04:55.

and isolation. Because of this, I argue that *Jelly Baby* mainly represents young motherhood as undesirable.

In contrast to Stacey in *Jelly Baby*, who had to give up school and/or work, Maggie (Iseult Casey) in *Twice Shy* is just about to finish school and start university when she realises that she is pregnant. The young Irish woman makes the decision to have an abortion, deciding to focus on her degree instead of motherhood. The representation of her decision to have an abortion and being forced to start a journey to London in order to do so is crucial in an Irish context as abortion was highly restricted until the recent referendum in 2018 that paved the way to legalise abortion for the first time in Ireland. Being able to finance an abortion outside of the country, Maggie is in the privileged position of being free to decide in favour of employment and education before having a child. Her family's financial background allows Maggie to live out a neo-liberal understanding of fulfilling individual desires, while this option was often excluded from the lives of many women from poorer backgrounds in Ireland.

In *Twice Shy* motherhood constitutes a threat to the young woman's relationship and to her ambition to live an independent life. According to Maggie in *Twice Shy*, this independence can be achieved through studying, as she expresses in a conversation with Andy (Shane Murray-Corcoran):

Andy So, um, why do you want to get into engineering?

Maggie Um, I don't. Yeah. I have, um, no interest in going to college. But I want to live in the city and mum and dad are going to be paying for me, so I might as well just give it a go.

Andy And you're going to go ahead and do it then? It's a tough career choice.

Maggie Yeah. Well, I do the course and I'll try to stick with it but, I mean, it is just regurgitating what is in the books, isn't it? I'll fly through it.

During this conversation, Maggie and Andy are at the school ball.¹⁸ This background, as well as the conversation, frames her within a working/schooling setting and communicates to the audience from the beginning that Maggie will choose in favour of her studies rather than a maternal identity. The conversation shows that college life is closely connected with the city and independence from her parents. Maggie is not fully interested in the course but merely studies to gain this independence. Motherhood, on the contrary, hinders her from doing this, and the unplanned pregnancy comes as a potential threat to her independence, as well as her relationship with Andy, who is not the father of the child. By going ahead with the abortion, Maggie actively decides in favour of an independent working life instead of young motherhood, reaffirming the binary understanding of either motherhood or work. I argue that all three films represent young motherhood as incompatible with work and do not highlight a necessity to combine both spheres.

2.2.3. Young Motherhood and the Ambition to Work or Go to School: *Lucy* and *Heartbreak*

While work and motherhood are still separated spheres in the Berlin School film *Lucy* (Winckler, 2006), Maggy (Kim Schnitzer) has the ambition to work. She mentions her

¹⁸ *Twice Shy* 00:09:54 - 00:12:44 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to Volta.ie specifications).

desire to join the workforce to have something in her life she can enjoy.¹⁹ She describes this to her friend, Nadine (Ganeshi Becks), who is a hairdresser in the following dialogue:

- Nadine** Nächste Woche darf ich endlich schneiden.
 (I am finally allowed to cut next week.)
- Maggy** Das ist ja schon voll die Verantwortung.
 (That's quite a responsibility.)
- Nadine** Verarschst du mich?
 (Are you making fun of me?)
- Maggy** Nein. ... Ich hätt' auch gerne was, was mir Spaß macht.
 (No. ... I would also like to have something that's fun.)
- Nadine** Du hast doch Gordon.
 (Well, you have Gordon.)

Even though Lucy is in kindergarten during the day, Maggy does not work or go to school. She is from a working-class background and is financially supported by her mother. In the scene where she tells her friend about her wish to work, Maggy is placed on the right side of the screen, standing behind Lucy's stroller and in front of a large window that allows the audience a view into the hair salon her friend works in. The glass window, however, separates Maggy visually from the work space. Furthermore, the frame of the window bisects the *mise-en-scène*, placing Maggy and her friend, who pursues an apprenticeship as a hairdresser, on opposite sides (figure 4). As a result, Maggy is visually disconnected from the work sphere, firstly by the window between her and the inside of the salon and secondly, through the division of the frame between her and her working friend. Therefore, work and motherhood are incompatible in *Lucy's* *mise-en-scène* and Maggy has no access to the work sphere.

¹⁹ *Lucy* 00:38:18 - 00:39:01 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).



Figure 4 - *Lucy*: Maggy tells her working friend that she would also like to work instead of being a full-time mother.

Even though Maggy wants to join the workforce, her friend does not accept her wish as valid desire. Maggy's longing for individual fulfilment via a job is quickly dismissed by her friend, who points out that Maggy has her boyfriend Gordon (Gordon Schmidt) instead. Even though Maggy has the ambition to work, the working woman and the stay-at-home mother are still understood as separate concepts for the characters in *Lucy*. This representation constitutes a continuation of a historically grown separation between motherhood and work that persists in Western society. Thurer analyses maternal myths that are often based on patriarchal idealisations and highlights how these myths influence the female experience. She argues that

[m]otherhood and ambition are still largely seen as opposing forces. More strongly expressed, a lack of ambition – or a professed lack of ambition, a sacrificial willingness to set personal ambition aside – is still the virtuous proof of good mothering. For many women, perhaps most, motherhood versus personal ambition represents the heart of the feminine dilemma. (287)

The expectation on Maggy to set aside her ambition to work mirrors Thurer's description of the feminine dilemma. While Thurer referred to mothers in general, *Lucy* adopts the same premise for the young mother, Maggy. In *Lucy*, Maggy's wish to join the workforce

is not taken seriously by her friend. I argue that work and motherhood is still incompatible in the German feature film, *Lucy*, even though Maggy has the ambition to work. Her community does not accept her wish to gain fulfilment outside of motherhood and her relationship with Gordon.

In contrast, the Irish spoken-word short film *Heartbreak* shows that YoungOne (Jordanne Jones) is indeed able to work. Young motherhood motivates her, in particular, to go back to school. This move ultimately promises empowerment and a better life for her son in *Heartbreak*. YoungOne finds her voice through motherhood and the resulting ambition to gain autonomy over her bodily perception by society. This representation of a young single mother supports the argument of Irish sociologist Ciara Bradley that “motherhood has made them [young mothers] feel stronger, more competent, more connected and more responsible“ (150). Bradley’s research proves that young motherhood does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes for young women but instead can be empowering. While YoungOne is initially represented without direction in life, hanging out with her friends and smoking, the young mother is later motivated to find her way through life via employment and education. Her initial employment is defined by a zero-hours contract in which “the employee is available for work but does not have specified hours of work” (Citizens Information). She is initially stuck with insecure working conditions as a cleaner, due to restrictions growing up in a working-class environment and her status as a young mother. Nevertheless, YoungOne is ambitious to exit this spiral of poverty by re-entering education. Mirroring Bradley’s argument, motherhood ultimately enables YoungOne to find her own voice and to be financially independent. It leads to YoungOne’s pursuit of living a stable life, finding work and education which will lead to her understanding of her own position in a patriarchal system.

By becoming a mother, YoungOne realises the importance of responsibility, work and education. While she was mainly hanging out with friends before her pregnancy, she later is represented being at home or working towards a better future. Therefore, even though YoungOne was rendered powerless through her pregnancy and financial inability to have an abortion, as described below, she gains agency via self-motivation inspired by the need to care for her son and for herself. YoungOne becomes an active citizen of Ireland who finds her own voice through education. In *Heartbreak*, education does not just offer a possibility of higher wages but the understanding of the government's mistreatment of women by denying them rights over their own bodies as described in the short film's voice-over:

Emmet Kirwan Progression, she feels, will only come through education. The boy [her son] grows tall and strong and school becomes a place for her too. And now inspired by a brilliant teacher, she got that yearning for learning. But she's not learning for earning. No, she's just learning for learning's sake. So, that she can articulate this incandescent rage between all the young women of Ireland in 2016. She learns things like constitutional refusal of bodily autonomy.²⁰

The year 2016 refers to the year in which the UN announced that Ireland's strict abortion regulations violated women's human rights and "called on the Irish government to reform its restrictive abortion legislation" (Gentleman). Education plays the important role in *Heartbreak*, as it represents a way for the young mother to both gain autonomy from the state within a patriarchal society and to be a role model for her son as described later in

²⁰ *Heartbreak* 00:04:10 - 00:04:37 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to YouTube specifications).

this thesis. The spoken-word delivery is underlaid with the visual representation of YoungOne, first at her job and then at school. While a close-up of her face staring into space demonstrates her desperation about long working hours and little pay, at school she is represented smiling, communicating the positive effect education will have on the young mother, such as the ability to gain agency.

While the young mother in the German feature film, *Lucy*, is not able to join the workforce because of the societal expectation of her to mother full-time, the young mother in the Irish short film *Heartbreak* stands up against the patriarchal understanding of altruistic motherhood and joins the workforce as well as education. Nevertheless, even though *Heartbreak* intends to raise acceptance of the young mother from a working-class background to combine motherhood with work, it ultimately reinstates YoungOne into a neo-liberal ideal in order to do so. While Maggy's family and friends accept her as full-time mother and do not take her ambition to work seriously, *Heartbreak* communicates the need for the young mother to join the workforce or education. I argue that both *Lucy* and *Heartbreak* mainly link young motherhood to challenges by either highlighting the incompatibility of motherhood and work, as in *Lucy*, or by underlining the need to represent YoungOne's ambition in order to be accepted as a young mother.

2.3. Sex

2.3.1. Sexuality as a Threat for the Working-Class Young Mother: *Lucy*, *Jelly Baby* and *Heartbreak*

I further argue that contemporary German and Irish films represent young motherhood as being incompatible with sexual and long-term romantic relationships. In *Lucy*, motherhood and serious relationships are incompatible and sexuality creates tension in the mother-daughter relationship. Sex is only directly shown once (when Maggy has a

one-night stand with a stranger (Jonas Hien)) and implied a second time during a conversation between Maggy and her mother Eva (Feo Aladag).²¹ During this conversation between Maggy and her mother, sex is represented as something that divides mother and daughter but at the same time indicates that Maggy's relationships resemble what she learned from her mother's actions. In the scene, both of them are shown in close-up shots, highlighting the rather emotional discussion. When she encounters her daughter with a guy in the kitchen, Eva confronts Maggy, stating her opinion about her daughter's behaviour:

Eva Ja, findest du das normal?

(Well, do you think that is normal?)

Maggy Was denn?

(What?)

Eva Dass du dann gleich mit dem ins Bett gehst?

(That you go to bed with him straight away?)

Maggy Musst du gerade sagen.

(You should talk.)

Eva Wieso?

(Why?)

Maggy Na meinst du ich habe dich hier noch nicht ficken gehört?

(Don't you think I haven't heard you fucking in here?)

By defining an active (and somewhat promiscuous) sex life as abnormal for a young, single mother, Eva others and condemns the maternal character for being sexually active. Furthermore, the final statement does not represent sex positively but simply blames the mother for the supposedly bad traits of her daughter. In *Lucy*, young motherhood is a

²¹ *Lucy* 00:30:33 - 00:31:40, 01:23:29 - 01:24:49.

source of conflict in relation to sex and, as described below, incompatible with serious relationships.

As film theorist Lucy Fischer argues regarding American film: “In many films, the mother is blamed for her transgressions or for the ills she visits upon her offspring” (30). In the German film *Lucy*, mothers are blamed for both, as the film represents Eva as an integral influence on Maggy’s decisions. The psychoanalyst Chodorow argues that mothers teach their daughters about their presupposed future roles. This encompasses the point that daughters become care-takers if their own main carer was female. However, according to Chodorow, this reproduction of mothering is by no means fixed and can be altered when fathers take on the role of main carer instead (Chodorow 7). I argue that, in *Lucy*, the mother hands down not just traits that are positively perceived by society, such as care-taking, but also those that are negatively perceived. Because of Eva’s young age, it is likely that she was a relatively young mother herself. As Maggy learnt her sexual behaviour from her mother, this also suggests that Lucy (Polly Hauschild) will likely be a young mother in the future. By blaming Eva as the source of Maggy’s behaviour, the film indirectly implies that Maggy will teach the same traits to her daughter, Lucy. Here, the film positions the female child within an unconscious circle of reproducing motherhood as learnt from a maternal role model, in line with a “feminist view, drawn from social or cognitive psychology, which understands feminine development as explicit ideological instruction or formal coercion” (Chodorow 30). While Chodorow critiques this “role-training model” as insufficient, I argue that it also proves to be problematic for the message of the film. Even though the films of the Berlin School claim to simply show reality without judgement, by adapting this role-training model, the male director opens up the possibility of judging the women for their behaviour in *Lucy* and denies the young mother agency over conscious decision-making.

Out of fear of being rejected, Maggy initially tries to hide her motherhood from potential new partners. She neither tells Gordon that she is Lucy's mother, nor does she share this fact with the one-night stand she sleeps with to overcome her sadness about the break up with Gordon. After figuring out that Maggy is Lucy's mother, and not her sister, Gordon is initially still interested in a relationship, and the two of them move in together. Experiencing the demands of parenthood, however, Gordon questions this arrangement after a while. Maggy's only option to save their relationship is to give Lucy away to her mother. Therefore, she ultimately must abandon her maternal identity to secure a long-term relationship, while her life before was predominantly shaped by her daughter. This split between sexual identity and maternal identity will resolve itself in favour of the latter, as Maggy later decides to move out of Gordon's apartment and possibly back to her mother by the end of the film. Motherhood and long-term relationships are ultimately incompatible in *Lucy*.

Lucy exposes the dilemma that motherhood comes with occupational and social restrictions, which leads to an eager pursuit of creating a heteronormative family model for Maggy. Living with Gordon allows the young mother to be partially independent from her own mother, while being financially supported by her boyfriend. The sociologist Donath defines the cultural-temporal norm as reaching certain milestones in life at the right time. Since motherhood is a milestone that should be reached once married and financially independent, according to this norm, young mothers are rarely able to fit into it (Donath, "Choosing Motherhood" 203). Situating the young mother in *Lucy* within a quasi-nuclear family model mitigates society's anxiety about dependent young women who become parents outside of the cultural-temporal norm Donath describes. However, this financial security only lasts as long as her relationship to Gordon. By the end of the film the young mother's own parent is the most dependable source of support, instead of the partner. I argue that young motherhood is incompatible with both an active sex life

and long-term relationships in *Lucy*. This representation of sex as being challenging further renders young motherhood undesirable. Maggy's sexuality poses a threat to the wellbeing of her family and Eva and Maggy's conversation ultimately blames both for handing down supposedly negative traits. The narrative of the male-directed German film stays within a rather traditional, patriarchal understanding of womanhood that somewhat criticises both female sexuality and young motherhood.



Figure 5 - *Jelly Baby*: Stacey and her daughter Lauren dance at a birthday party for one of Stacey's former friends.

Also, in both of the Irish short films analysed below, sexuality poses a threat. I argue that while in *Jelly Baby* sexuality creates tension between mother and daughter, in *Heartbreak*, young women and mothers suffer from being sexualised by men within a patriarchal society. In the Irish short film *Jelly Baby*, the young mother's sexuality causes tension between her and her daughter, and the film focuses more on the negative consequences for Lauren than on the positive aspects for the young mother. At a party, Lauren and Stacey dance to the music. The two of them are visually detached from the rest of the room, as the camera focuses on the pair via a medium shot that gives the impression that mother and daughter are the only people on the dance floor (figure 5). When a guy, Luke (Tony Doyle), approaches Stacey to dance with her, she turns away from Lauren, enjoying the man's attention. Instead of focusing on her mother's joy, at

that moment, the camera shows in close-up Lauren's disappointment over the competition, as she leaves the dance floor to hide in the bathroom. In this scene, the camera communicates the consequences of Stacey's decision for Lauren and directs the audience to feel for the child instead of the mother.²² While the film focuses mostly on Stacey, this scene differs from the rest and positions the young single mother in a difficult tension to her daughter, negotiating her own identity outside of motherhood.



Figure 6 - *Jelly Baby*: Stacey is concerned about her daughter, who just found her mother in bed with a stranger.

As in *Lucy*, young motherhood is not compatible with sexuality or relationships in *Jelly Baby*. The morning after the party, Stacey and Luke wake up together on her couch, as Lauren enters the room with a cake, singing "Happy Birthday" to herself.²³ Her voice is audible off screen, while the camera focuses on the distressed mother who is concerned that her daughter will see her lying in bed with a man (figure 6). Seeing her mother with a man indeed upsets Lauren, and she throws the cake on the ground, running out of the room crying. A close-up of the destroyed birthday cake on the ground signifies the destroyed happiness of the child and communicates that the young single mother cannot have sex without it causing conflict with her daughter. While *Jelly Baby* constitutes the

²² *Jelly Baby* 00:06:25 - 00:10:23.

²³ *Jelly Baby* 00:10:28 - 00:11:00.

only Irish film representing a sexually active mother after pregnancy, Stacey is required to suppress her own sexual needs to be able to be a “good” mother for her daughter.

In contrast to television and film representations during the Celtic Tiger era, which either represented women to be mothers or to be sexually active (González-Casademont 263), Stacey is able to break out of this dichotomy as a sexually active young mother in *Jelly Baby*. While this can be seen as progress in terms of representing motherhood in Irish film, the representation of the sexual act as negative for the child diminishes this achievement and highlights the associated tension for the young mother. The focus remains on Lauren’s disappointment and, therefore, on the consequences of maternal sexual behaviour for the child instead of portraying it as an achievement for the young mother. Even though the film depicts the conflict for the young mother in negotiating motherhood and sexuality, *Jelly Baby* underlines the fact that sex is usually not represented in Irish film, unless it is linked to negative consequences (González-Casademont 264), in this case, negative feelings on the part of the child such as jealousy and disapproval. While the film manages to show young mother’s struggle to combine motherhood and sex, the narrative is problematic, in that it indirectly suggests that her abstaining from sex would improve the child’s wellbeing. I argue that sexuality causes tension in the relationship between mother and daughter in *Jelly Baby*. Sexual activity constitutes a threat to the possibility of being a “good” mother, as the narrative focuses on the child’s loss of happiness, instead of on the positive aspects for Stacey. *Jelly Baby*, on one hand, manages to represent young motherhood in conjunction with sexuality. On the other hand, it fuels this connection with tension. Therefore, I argue that young motherhood is ultimately incompatible with sex in *Jelly Baby*.

In contrast, *Heartbreak*, denies its protagonist an active sex-life and represents YoungOne as a passive recipient of the sexual act. I argue that the short film represents female sexualisation within a patriarchal society as a threat. *Heartbreak* underlines the

sexualisation of the young female body in Irish society both by boys of the same age and of older men through the representation of the fifteen-year-old YoungOne.²⁴ This sexualisation causes the protagonist emotional trauma and poses a threat to the young girl. Here, the visual representation of male predatory behaviour (figure 7) supports the following narrative:

Emmet Kirwan Recently, YoungOne has got breasts and attention. But not just boys, I should mention. But fully-grown men who remark ‘she’s an old fifteen, but an absolute ten.’ And that was when the boys started yelling: ‘here, here, come here, come here, come here. Let me shout sweet obscenities in your ear.’ Heartbreak. She does double take and sees Sean. She feels she likes this one boy because he didn’t shout.

In this scene, the narration is underlined by the representation of YoungOne walking distressed through the streets of Dublin. The scene focuses on YoungOne in the foreground, while the men stand in the background, following the young woman’s every move with their eyes. She holds her upper body protectively and is annoyed by the old men’s gaze, seeming uncomfortable in the public situation. In this scene, *Heartbreak* underlines the objectification of women in Ireland and represents this sexualisation as a threat to the women’s feeling of security and comfort.

²⁴ *Heartbreak* 00:01:06 - 00:01:30.



Figure 7 - *Heartbreak*: YoungOne walks through the streets of Dublin, feeling uncomfortable due to the sexually predatory behaviour of men.

Being in public as a young woman exposes YoungOne to predatory male behaviour, and men are the antagonists of the short film, in that they threaten the young woman's wellbeing. Sexualisation leads to women trusting quieter men, who ultimately also do not treat them with respect. The film communicates a highly sexist society, in which especially young women are objectified and disrespected by all men. By doing so, the film exaggerates its characters to portray the societal hardship young women live with. In his study on sex and society in Ireland, historian Diarmaid Ferriter states that "[i]n 2008, it was asserted that 42% of women in Ireland had experienced sexual violence" (460). This statistic supports the film's suggestion of a male-dominated environment that permits predatory behaviour towards women, underlining the need for change and for men to respect women.

Besides being sexualised as a young woman by men and boys, *Heartbreak* represents YoungOne as the passive recipient of the sexual encounter, denying her any agency over her own sexuality. The sexual act between Sean (Dillon Potter) and YoungOne is described via the narrator, Emmet Kirwan.²⁵ It is visually accompanied by the depiction

²⁵ *Heartbreak* 00:01:30 - 00:01:51.

of the young couple walking around in the streets of Dublin (figure 8). The film shows YoungOne smiling, apparently unaware of the hardship that lies ahead, while the narrator states:

Emmet Kirwan YoungOne is special, young fella said. She always thought her first time would be in a bed. Not a wet patch of grass with a dog barking at the back end of where two housing estates meet. And I think when he said it, he meant it, he truly did. Cause he's not like all the other boys. But he is still just a boy who's pulling out late and now pulling out early.

Here, sex comes as a disappointment to YoungOne, and she seems to have no influence on the location of their sexual encounter. The film represents her as naively following Sean instead of demanding comfort for her first sexual experience. Because Sean “pulls out late” she conceives her child and has to raise him by herself, as Sean is “pulling out early.” The narrative indicates that the young woman is not able to articulate her own needs, to speak up and to demand a condom or the morning-after pill. This representation takes agency away from the young woman, and this is only later partially restored in the short film, when YoungOne is able to speak up against some men on the streets.



Figure 8 - Heartbreak: YoungOne starts to like Sean and trusts him.

While previous Irish films, such as *The Snapper*, challenged “traditional Irish notions of women’s sexuality” (Pramaggiore 111), *Heartbreak* breaks with this and condemns YoungOne’s mother’s (Deirdre Molloy) sexual activity and reinforces the young woman’s passivity.²⁶ Additionally, Kirwan’s narrative of the short film repeatedly glorifies YoungOne’s position as a young helpless female, who is in need of male compassion:

Emmet Kirwan Her face is a picture of grace. [...] She learns things, like constitutional refusal of bodily autonomy. Thinks, this is backwards blasphemy. [...] ‘I’ll treat and respect and help to create an Ireland that will stand in awe of all mná [women].’

While the narrative communicates the need to value the female body and to show respect to women, it positions the young mother in a traditional, Catholic understanding of the sexually passive and glorified maternal being, whose main task is to teach her son. In fact, sex is described by words such as “obscenities”, and the sexual act becomes something not worthy of the deified young female. *Heartbreak* connotes sexual activity as a negative masculine trait, while the passive female needs to be protected from it.

The appeal to be “in awe of all mná” is problematic within its narrative. While the film intends to highlight the importance to respect women, the suggested glorification of the same draws on a Church’s ideal that ultimately shows little respect of women and pressures them into an unreachable position. Women, and especially young single mothers, stay the *Other* within society and are not ascribed a complex individuality.

²⁶ In contrast to the sexually passive YoungOne, her sexually active mother poses a threat to her young daughter. She is depicted as unreliable and not caring, as she parties during the weekends. The fact that she brings home men gives YoungOne reason to move out with her baby into a Bed and Breakfast, from which she will later be sent back home. Sex, therefore, is either a passive act over which the young female has little influence or a threat to the family in *Heartbreak*. The glorification of the young innocent woman is here in strong contrast to the damnation of the older single mother, who has an active sex life.

Heartbreak's protagonist embodies the nation's struggle "as sweet, wild girl" and "as suffering and nurturing mother," attributes that often represent Ireland in film (Meaney 243). Consequently, Ruth Barton's comment regarding the representation of mothers in Irish films that "[t]he mother figure is alternately and simultaneously, Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary, devoted and a-sexual, her own desires subsumed into the maternal" (Barton, *Irish* 114) is still applicable to the representation of the young single mother in this contemporary Irish film.

I argue that *Heartbreak* does not ascribe women an active sexuality and represents sex as a threat to women. The film describes sexuality as a masculine trait from which the young female needs to be protected. The narrative positions YoungOne within a traditional ideal of a-sexual womanhood that was originally constructed by patriarchy, the very structure that the film intends to criticise. I argue that in all three films, the German feature and the two Irish short films, sexuality represents a threat in relation to young motherhood. While the European films represent young motherhood in relation to sex, they construct sexuality as negative and mainly link the combination of motherhood and sex to challenges for the young mothers.

2.3.2. The Desexualisation of the Young Pregnant Woman: *Vierzehn, Am Himmel der Tag* and *Twice Shy*

The German documentary *Vierzehn* mainly mentions sex in relation to conception. The girls talk with their friends about boys, their first dates and the sexual encounters that led to their pregnancies.²⁷ All of the girls are sexually inexperienced, and they communicate their lack of knowledge regarding contraception as a reason for their pregnancies. *Vierzehn* highlights the confusion about contraception and the girls' misunderstanding

²⁷ *Vierzehn* 00:07:56 - 00:17:00.

that having sex once without protection will do no harm. All four girls used condoms as contraception, since asking their parents for the pill was either too embarrassing – as in Steffi’s case – or fraught with concerns, such as the fear of gaining weight. *Vierzehn*, therefore, stresses the need for better sex education in Germany, as well as the necessity of teaching parents about how to build a space of trust between themselves and their children, so that an open conversation about sexuality is possible without fears and prejudices. While the girls consider the circumstances of conceiving the children during interviews, sex is not a topic of importance anymore afterwards.

In *Vierzehn*, Grünberg investigates the contradictory understanding of fourteen-year-olds being too young to mother, but not being too young to have sex. In the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, Grünberg mentions that she was wondering

[...] wie die Mädchen mit dem Widerspruch fertig werden, ihre Sexualität freier als frühere Generationen ausleben zu können, im Fall der Schwangerschaft jedoch als zu jung gelten. (Lenssen)

(how the girls handle the contradiction between the assumption that they can act out their sexuality more freely than previous generations but that they are deemed too young if they get pregnant.)

In the documentary, this incongruity shows through the insecurity regarding contraception, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy. In this way, the film does not just question whether having a child at fourteen is really too early but also whether such a freely lived sexuality, without an effective sex education, is advisable.

I argue that *Vierzehn* excludes sexuality from motherhood after contraception. While the girls communicate their sexual encounters before becoming pregnant via interviews and overheard exchanges with their friends, sexuality is either ignored or not perceived well by their families afterwards. The documentary presents especially the lack of knowledge regarding contraception as a reason for the early pregnancies. By doing so,

Vierzehn indirectly campaigns for a better sex education for children. I argue that in *Vierzehn* young motherhood and sex is incompatible and that the documentary represents young motherhood as undesirable by highlighting the girls' misinformation regarding the practice of safe sex.

The fiction films represent and, in particular, desexualise young women from a middle-class background. Both middle-class women in the fiction films will not give birth by the end of the film, as the German woman has a miscarriage and the Irish woman has an abortion. The German fiction film *Am Himmel der Tag* visually reduces sex to the conception of Lara's child and while sexuality is accepted in conjunction with womanhood, this is not the case for motherhood. Only one scene shows Lara being sexually active and no other sex scene exists in the film. In the scene further described below, Lara has sex with a barkeeper in a public bathroom. While Lara still has a sexual desire after becoming pregnant, she is not represented as sexually active any more due to men's lack of interest in her. The film narrative embraces the young female character's sexuality, visually showing the conception of the young mother and her desire for Martin (Godehard Giese), while underlining the struggle of having a fulfilling sex life once pregnant, due to the refusal of men.

In *Am Himmel der Tag*, sex is only actively portrayed in conjunction with the act of conceiving; afterwards, the pregnant woman is desexualised by men. When Lara is clubbing with her friend Nora, Lara meets Martin, her university teacher.²⁸ The two engage in a conversation and flirt with each other. However, while Lara goes to get herself another drink, her friend Nora leaves the club with Martin. In *Am Himmel der Tag*, sex triggers a conflict between the two main female characters. Lara, frustrated about the libidinous rivalry, continues dancing and consuming drugs. At this point, the camera changes to a faster rhythm and like Lara, loses focus. This subjective use of the camera

²⁸ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:07:43 - 00:13:15.

narrows the cinematic space around her, while refusing to fully take her point of view. The audience still stays outside of Lara's world, observing her closely and at the same time being invited to share part of the experience via a blurry focus. The fast editing of blurred backgrounds, of people and of lights represent Lara's search for a direction in her life. In order to find this direction, however, Lara chooses – and needs – to lose herself in the moment first. The fast editing of mainly close-up shots, of which most are blurred, continues during Lara's sex with the barman (Kai Michael Müller) in the bathroom of the club. Her attempt to lose herself through drugs and sex, therefore, ultimately leads to her pregnancy, and with this comes a direction in her life outside of having a career.

Am Himmel der Tag highlights the desexualisation of mothers by men. Although Lara is sexually active before her pregnancy, this stops abruptly once she knows that she is pregnant. When Lara and Nora finish painting Lara's baby's room, the editing slows down and captures both girls in an intimate close-up shot, while they are having a discussion about sex and their current situation.²⁹ When Nora alleges that a pregnancy is perceived by men as sexy, the camera distances itself from the women, showing them in a medium shot, instead of the former close-up. In this way, the camera distances itself not just physically from Nora, but also from her assumption, implying a position of scepticism. When Lara explains that in her experience, most men are sexually repelled by pregnant women, the camera changes again to a close-up shot. During this, the focus of the *mise-en-scène* lies on Nora's face, even though Lara is the one who is speaking, as if waiting for her to respond to her friend's explanation. Nora, however, refuses to acknowledge the maternal difficulties, instead changing the subject to herself, as she complains that Lara never asks about her relationship with Martin. The scene shows the struggle especially young mothers encounter to explain themselves to their peers who have not yet experienced motherhood and highlights that the mother's sexuality is

²⁹ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:39:03 - 00:40:32.

hindered by men's perception of the pregnant body. I argue that *Am Himmel der Tag* desexualises the young pregnant woman from a middle-class background, representing motherhood and sex as incompatible. While the film represents the conception of Lara's child, it excludes sexuality from her life afterwards. With this the film communicates the struggle for young pregnant women to be sexually attractive in the eyes of men and to share these concerns with their friends who did not experience motherhood yet.

Also, the Irish feature film *Twice Shy* desexualises Maggie, a pregnant young woman from a middle-class background. I argue that the film only uses the conceiving act as a narrative vehicle and refuses to represent Maggie in relation to sex afterwards. Sex is not directly depicted but merely suggested for the young woman, Maggie, before she is pregnant. A flashback shows how Andy and Maggie travel to London for a holiday.³⁰ As Maggie accidentally ordered a twin bedroom instead of a double, the couple moves the beds together so they can sleep in the same bed. The camera represents the closeness between the two young adults via an extreme close-up of their hands (figure 9) moving the two beds together and a close-up shot of the two beds meeting in the middle. Then, the camera cuts to a high angle, showing Andy and Maggie half lying across the bed, their heads meeting in the middle, while their feet hang over the sides of the bed (figure 10). The close-up shots, as well as the physical closeness of the protagonists, communicate an emotional intimacy between them and suggest that they are more than likely sexually active. At the same time, the positioning of the two protagonists' bodies pointing in opposite directions, while their heads meet in the middle, signify their opposing stances on the issues that will be important for the film, such as abortion. Here, the *mise-en-scène* creates a tension and gentle acceptance between the opposing characters that exists continuously throughout the entire film and is further explained below in the following

³⁰ *Twice Shy* 00:18:11 - 00:20:12.

chapters. While Maggie is sexually active before she conceives her child, the young women is not sexually active any more during her pregnancy.



Figure 9 - *Twice Shy*: Maggie and Andy move two single beds together in order to share one bed.



Figure 10 - *Twice Shy*: Maggie and Andy move two single beds together to share one bed.

In *Twice Shy*, the act of conceiving the child functions as narrative vehicle for the progression of the story. *Twice Shy* does not depict the sex act and only briefly mentions how the unplanned pregnancy occurred in the following dialogue:

Maggie I'm pregnant ... I'm sorry. It's Brian's. It was a couple of weeks ago. It was this huge mistake, and we'd both been drinking, and I

Kira J. Collins

was still really upset about the break-up and he was just there, and
...

Andy The break-up? What are you talking about?

Maggie Well, this was after we'd broken up.

Andy We never broke up.

Maggie Yes, we did. We kept fighting.

Andy We just needed to take some time apart. That's all.

Maggie Taking time apart is the same as breaking up.

[...]

Andy Why are you telling me this?

Maggie I just really need someone to talk to.

Andy Then talk to Brian.

Maggie I don't want to talk to Brian.

Andy What are you going to do?

Maggie I'm ... I'm having an abortion. I don't want the baby. I don't want any of this. I don't even want this getting out. So, if you could please, please don't tell anyone about this.

Andy Jesus, does Brian know?

Maggie About the abortion? Yeah.

Andy And what, he ...?

Maggie Yeah, he's fine with it. ... I'm sorry. I just really need someone to talk to.

Andy Get out.³¹

The pregnancy leads to conflict between the pair regarding abortion and only serves as a narrative vehicle for building tension to progress the couple's relationship. Even though

³¹ *Twice Shy* 00:52:00 - 00:54:05.

Andy asks Maggie to leave, the knowledge of her pregnancy and her cry for help initiate his support during the trip to have an abortion in England. Furthermore, the unplanned pregnancy ultimately challenges the couple to deal with their personal and their interpersonal issues, both with each other and with Andy's family. The sexual act of conception primarily leads to the film's driving conflict. Sexuality is not of importance anymore after the conflict is established and is therefore ignored in the rest of the film.

While sex and pregnancy outside of marriage was highly stigmatized in Ireland in the past, this has changed in recent decades (Bradley 151). Nevertheless, Maggie is still ashamed of being pregnant and does not want anybody to know about her circumstances, a situation which highlights the lingering influence of Catholic teaching in Ireland. Andy tries to convince Maggie to keep the child by offering to create a nuclear family with her. In this way, the film communicates the still rather conservative idea that a child needs to be raised within a nuclear family and excludes the possibility of success for the young single mother outside of this family structure. Through the decision to have an abortion, however, Maggie is able to escape this patriarchal setting that was among others created in Ireland by the Church and is reinforced in *Twice Shy* by Andy's understanding of parenthood. *Twice Shy* desexualises the pregnant young woman and, with this, reinforces the historically grown desexualisation of Irish women. I argue that the German documentary, *Vierzehn*, the German fiction film, *Am Himmel der Tag*, and the Irish fiction film, *Twice Shy*, represent sex as a challenge for the young mothers. The films do not represent young pregnant women as sexually active and while sexuality represents a threat to the young mothers from a working-class background, sexuality is incompatible with pregnancy.

2.4. Conclusion

The young mothers in contemporary German and Irish film constitute a new category outside of Kaplan's original definition of maternal representations in American media. The young mothers in both German and Irish film represent a form of non-traditional motherhood which exists outside of the cultural-temporal heteronormative logic Donath describes and which is often ignored within maternal representation. Young mothers are mostly represented in independent film forms, such as those of the Berlin School or short films. While young motherhood constitutes a new maternal category, this chapter shows that the young mothers are still not depicted as having access to both work and sex. This underlines the persistence of what Kaplan calls the "impossible triangle" (Kaplan, "Sex" 409) in contemporary, European film. Camera work, mise-en-scène and narration especially detach young motherhood from work and from having a long-term relationship or active sex-life in the German and Irish films. Even though European films offer an alternative mode of representation that invites the audience to reflect on current conditions, in contrast to the mainstream films Kaplan describes, which rather construct images of ideal motherhood, the ideological norms of ideal Western motherhood are still inscribed in these European films.

None of the Irish and German films discussed in this chapter depict motherhood in combination with both work and sex. While in some films, all three aspects are addressed, motherhood constitutes an antagonism to either one or both of them. The German documentaries *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, as well as *Heartbreak*, allow motherhood to be combined with work, whereas *Lucy* and *Jelly Baby* depict motherhood in combination with sex. *Am Himmel der Tag* does not manage to combine motherhood with either sex or work, and *Twice Shy* mainly concentrates on work, while motherhood is incompatible with it.

The German documentaries, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, highlight the young mothers' struggle to succeed in either work or school and to be a mother at the same time. Balancing work and motherhood is essential for the girls to prove to their parents and other people in their community that they have the ability to manage motherhood. In particular, available childcare and the financial support of their parents are important factors enabling a young mother to succeed. Both documentaries highlight the challenge of combining motherhood with work and do not dismiss the stress that this combination can lead to for the young mothers. As in most of the films discussed in this chapter (in all films, except *Lucy*), sexuality is only mentioned in terms of their sexual behaviour before their pregnancies. The girls tell the audience about their misunderstandings about contraception and their romantic experiences with boys before they became pregnant. Sex, however, is not a topic of discussion once they are young mothers.

In the Irish spoken-word short film *Heartbreak*, YoungOne only has sex before she is pregnant. The young woman is represented as sexually passive and she seems to have no agency within the sexual act. Sexuality becomes a threat, imposed by patriarchy, and is depicted as unworthy of the almost glorified young female character. YoungOne finds the ambition to do well in school due to her responsibilities as a young mother. Education allows her to be independent from the state and to gain agency in a patriarchal society. The short film is the only Irish example that highlights the positive outcomes of young motherhood, as described by Bradley. While the other German and Irish films offer some positive readings, they tend to conform to Ford's focus on the negative outcomes of young motherhood, such as poverty and isolation. *Heartbreak* combines positive and negative outcomes in its representation of young motherhood.

In the German film *Lucy*, work and motherhood are separate concepts, even though the young mother expresses her wish to join the workforce. This representation contradicts Ellis-Sloan's finding that many young mothers need to prove their ability to

mother through the combination of motherhood and work; a similar representation is offered by the German documentaries and *Heartbreak*. To be able to pursue a heteronormative partnership, the young mother is forced to deny her motherhood; sexual identity and maternal identity are thus clearly separate concepts. The narration positions sexuality as a point of conflict between the young mother and her own mother, Eva, while blaming Eva for the young mother's supposed promiscuity. Even though the films of the Berlin School hint at a critique of contemporary social conditions and, in this case, allow the viewer to identify with the issues faced by a young mother, *Lucy* ultimately does not challenge dominant discourses.

As in *Lucy*, motherhood and work are two separate concepts in the Irish short film *Jelly Baby*. While work represents independence and self-interest, young motherhood signifies responsibility and adulthood. The young mother struggles financially and is not able to provide her daughter with expensive trips for her birthday. Instead, on her daughter's birthday, she ends up sleeping with a man, which causes conflict between the mother-daughter pair. While the representation of sexually liberal young women increased in Irish film during the Celtic Tiger period, this liberalisation of sexual representation does not apply to young mothers in contemporary film. In order to be perceived as a "good" mother, Stacey needs to deny her sexuality, and it is suggested that her having intercourse could ultimately harm her child.

As in *Jelly Baby*, in the German film *Am Himmel der Tag*, work becomes strictly separated from the young mother's maternal identity. Both German films, *Am Himmel der Tag* and *Lucy*, detach the work sphere from motherhood through plot and framing, following a German traditional ideal of the stay-at-home mother who sacrifices herself for her maternal duty. Lara's pregnant body is desexualised by men and sex is merely depicted in relation to conceiving the child. Only the woman who is not a mother is able to pursue a lasting relationship and allowed to have an active sex life. *Am Himmel der*

Tag detaches young motherhood from both work and sex. For Lara, motherhood will become her new *raison d'être* and all other possibilities are mere distractions.

In the Irish film *Twice Shy*, Maggie decides against motherhood and in favour for her studies by having an abortion. The possibility of raising a child at such a young age does not appeal to her. In particular, Andy's idea forming a quasi-nuclear family, living in the city, is not presented as a positive alternative to keeping her independence as a young woman while concentrating on her studies. As in most of the films discussed in this chapter, motherhood and work are understood as binary oppositions. Furthermore, as in the previous films, the young pregnant woman is not represented in combination with sex once she is pregnant. Sexuality is, again, only linked to the young woman who is not pregnant.

My analysis demonstrates that individual circumstances of working-class mothers especially forces them to choose motherhood over work in fiction film. While Stacey in *Jelly Baby* and Maggy in *Lucy* are not able to work, YoungOne in *Heartbreak* is the only working-class character who is able to join education by the end of the short film. The young mother's social background especially defines the characters' possibilities and choices in the films; the middle-class women are in the position to actively choose between work and motherhood (*Am Himmel der Tag* and *Twice Shy*), whereas the young mothers from a working-class background are forced by their individual circumstances to favour motherhood over work (*Lucy* and *Heartbreak*). While *Am Himmel der Tag*, *Jelly Baby* and *Twice Shy* represent motherhood and work as conflicting concepts, *Lucy* and *Heartbreak* especially highlight the young mother's wish and ambition to seek employment.

This chapter shows the relation of young motherhood to work and sex in German and Irish film. In the films of both countries, the combination of these three aspects is problematic and not fully articulated in any of them. Even when the young mothers have

the ambition to work, work and motherhood are still separate spheres that cannot be reconciled for them. Only YoungOne in *Heartbreak* is able to join both spheres. While sexuality constitutes a threat to the working-class young mother, the pregnant bodies of the young mothers from a middle-class background are desexualised in both German and Irish film. Even though the films are set in a contemporary context and are independent productions, a somewhat conservative understanding of the non-traditional mother persists in these European films, in which the young mother is bound to the domestic sphere and not able to enjoy a (promiscuous) sex life and still be perceived as a “good” mother. The films, therefore, reinforce traditional gender roles, while trying to break away from it by representing non-traditional mothers. Only the Irish films *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak* allow their protagonists to break out of the sole focus on motherhood by either following a neo-liberal ideal of work *instead of* mothering (*Twice Shy*) or by combining education and motherhood in order to find agency (*Heartbreak*). Even though Irish and German films represent young motherhood and offer their audiences the possibility of reflecting on maternal struggles that are otherwise absent from mainstream films, they still do not represent young motherhood as desirable and mainly link the young mother’s lives to challenges.

3. The Stigma of Young Motherhood

3.1. Introduction

This chapter continues my argument that both contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional motherhood as undesirable and mainly link it to challenges for the young mothers. Here, I argue that the German documentaries *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, the German feature films *Lucy* and *Am Himmel der Tag*, as well as the Irish feature film *Twice Shy*, and short films *Heartbreak* and *Jelly Baby* represent the stigma towards young mothers. The comparative case study highlights that European film does represent non-traditional mothers, such as young mothers, as their protagonists. While the films intend to represent current struggles for young mothers, they ultimately often fall back into a traditional understanding of “good” motherhood – an ideal most young mothers are not able to reach in the films.

The young mother’s representation as being situated within a state of crisis, and external expectations of failure is studied based on E. Ann Kaplan’s maternal discourses, as further described in the introduction of this thesis. In order to incorporate the category of the young mother, however, German and Irish film is in need of an additional maternal categorisation, thus Kaplan’s categories are used solely as a launching point for discussion. By analysing the representation of young motherhood in German and Irish film, I bring a European focus on non-traditional motherhood to Kaplan’s original American categorisation of mainstream media.

This chapter contributes to the limited literature on non-traditional motherhood in film and brings a German and Irish focus to the filmic representation of young motherhood. Sociological and psychoanalytical feminist literature by Shari L. Thurer, Suzanna D. Walters and Nancy J. Chodorow supplement the textual analysis of the European films. While this interdisciplinary approach considers the sociology of actual mothers, my

textual analysis is merely informed by their arguments. Furthermore, Ciara Bradley's findings about *The Construction of Teenage Parenting in the Republic of Ireland* is used to show how the treatment of young mothers in the past influences their representation in contemporary Irish film. With this chapter, I show that both German and Irish films still stigmatise young mothers and they are expected to fail as mothers. Their maternal experience is defined by a private or public crisis and the representation draws on the idea of the young mother as potentially "bad" mother.

The history of institutionalised discrimination and stigmatisation towards young mothers plays an especially important role within an Irish context. For example, the former occasional practice of signing young pregnant women into so-called Magdalene Asylums shows the influence of the Catholic Church in private matters and the stigma of deviancy towards young motherhood in the Irish past. This practice intended to conceal young unmarried motherhood from the public eye and to avoid prejudice towards the young woman's family (cf. Bradley 151ff.). From the 2000s onwards, this stigma related to young, unmarried motherhood decreased and the country started to become more accepting of practices such as lone parenting and cohabitation (Richardson 247). While the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland had declined strongly over the past decades, all three Irish films discussed in this chapter still highlight residues of this stigma by depicting the young women in a state of crisis, and the public's expectation that they will fail to be "good" mothers.

This chapter argues that stigma faced by young mothers leads to social isolation and autonomy restrictions, as well as the expectation that young women will fail as mothers in contemporary German and Irish films. I demonstrate that in the German documentaries, in *Lucy, Am Himmel der Tag* and in *Jelly Baby*, the young women are socially isolated from their peers and struggle to share their maternal experience with others. The domestic sphere isolates the young mothers, and they feel uncomfortable in public due to social

judgement. In *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak*, the women experience the restriction on their bodily autonomy, as they are not able to avail of an abortion in Ireland. While the young pregnant woman from the middle class is able to travel to England to have an abortion, the young pregnant woman from a working-class background is forced to have her child because she cannot afford to circumvent the strict abortion regulations of the country. Moreover, the young women in both German and Irish films are expected to fail as “good” mothers. Either their family (*Am Himmel der Tag*), the public (*Heartbreak*), their child’s teacher (*Jelly Baby*), or the audience (*Lucy*) expects them to struggle with their maternal responsibilities. I show that while the films manage to represent young motherhood and some of the struggles these women encounter, the films ultimately do not challenge dominant discourses as they fall back into a traditional understanding of “good” mothering. The films do not represent young motherhood as desirable outcome and mainly depict challenges for the young women.

3.2. Young Motherhood: Social Isolation and Autonomy Restrictions

3.2.1. Social Isolation: *Vierzehn*, *Achtzehn*, *Lucy*, *Am Himmel der Tag* and *Jelly Baby*

Both the German documentaries and the fiction films, as well as one Irish short film, represent the young mothers’ social isolation. I argue that the young mothers struggle with being socially isolated from their peers and often having to deal with their maternal experiences on their own. With this, the films do not represent young motherhood as desirable. In the Irish short film, *Jelly Baby*, the domestic sphere isolates the young mother from her peers and the mother-daughter pair depicts a strong unity. In the German feature films, the young women are positioned within liminal spaces that highlight their isolation during the transition into motherhood. The German documentaries, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, represent the girls’ struggles with classmates and partners. In particular

Steffi reflects how living in the countryside limits her opportunities and confines her to the domestic.

In *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, all of the girls experience a detachment from their peers once they have had their babies. They remain outside of the school dynamic, standing out as the only mothers. They come late to lessons and have to feed their babies during their breaks, while the rest of the class has to stick to the school's schedule. Their special treatment detaches them from their peers and at the same time, they start to perceive their peers as being too immature to understand their situation. The following dialogue highlights Lisa's frustration with her class-mates after she returns to school:

Lisa Es war so anders, so ungewöhnlich. So, als wäre ich neu auf der Schule und dann musste man sich so da rein finden. Weil die Kinder auch alle so doof geworden sind. Die haben sich alle so verändert. Ja, die unterhalten sich halt nicht mehr mit einem. Die sind noch kindisch. Weil die alle nur, die unterhalten sich alle nur so über Alkohol und dann gehen sie da am Wochenende saufen. Nur so was reden die. Das ist, weil ich jetzt so in der Schule nicht mehr mitgekommen bin. Und dann bin ich in manchen Fächern so schlecht. Und dann denken die so, die können mich so, dass sie mich so runter machen wollen.³²

(It was so different, so unusual. As if I was new to the school and had to find my way in. Because the other children also became so silly. They have all changed so much. Yes, they just don't talk to you anymore. They are still childish. Because all they talk about is alcohol, and then they go out drinking at the weekend. That's all they talk about. It is because I missed much in school. And I am

³² *Vierzehn* 01:02:59 - 01:03:41.

very bad at some subjects. So, they think that they can, they want to talk me down.)

While Lisa's class mates are interested in drinking and having fun at the weekend, Lisa has a different set of interests, related to caring for her child. She perceives that they have changed, not realising that it is she herself who underwent on a rapid transition to motherhood, a situation that her peers are not able to understand, due to their lack of experience. This separates the young mother from her class-mates, while she finds comfort and support from family members instead.



Figure 11 - *Vierzehn*: Fabienne travels back and forth from the hospital in which her son is treated after giving birth.

While Fabienne in *Vierzehn* constantly commutes between her home and the hospital to see her son as often as possible, her friends and the child's partner offer little support for the young mother. Valentin's father only visits sporadically and some of her friends do not visit at all. During her commute to and from the hospital, the documentary often depicts Fabienne within the liminal space of buses (figure 11).³³ Here, the documentary's design of proactive observationalism frames its discursive use of mise-en-scène in a similar way to the use of liminal spaces in the feature films, as described below. Opting

³³ *Vierzehn* 01:03:48 - 01:04:31.

repeatedly to position Fabienne within this liminal space, the documentary visually underlines Fabienne's isolation as a young mother who gains little support from her friends and family in the situation. Her transition from being a young girl into adulthood is defined by hospital visits that leave her uncertain about the future of her child and separates her from her peers.



Figure 12 - *Achtzehn*: Steffi tells the camera that she is not able to find work in her village and that it is impossible for her to get anywhere without a car.

For Steffi, social isolation is closely linked to living in the countryside. Living in the small village of Sterbfritz diminishes Steffi's chance of finding either work or day-care for her son and forces the young mother to stay at home full-time.³⁴ The camera places her repeatedly in front of open windows looking on the street, underlining her longing for opportunities and work, while being confined to the domestic space as a stay-at-home mother (figure 12).³⁵ In the following interview, Steffi explains why she is frustrated that her village is not bigger or near a city:

³⁴ In Germany, social isolation is an issue for many mothers with children under the age of three, according to an article published by the German Federal Centre for Health Education (Reis).

³⁵ *Achtzehn* 01:23:23 - 01:23:54 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

Steffi Du kannst hier nicht viel machen, du bist hier verloren. Sterbfritz ist einfach Sterbfritz, tot. Ich wüsste auch gar nicht, wie ich das mit dem Jason hinkriegen würde. Wenn das hier eine Stadt wäre, wo du sagen könntest, du kannst irgendwo hier im Umkreis 'ne Ausbildung machen, das ist wieder was anderes. Aber was gibt's denn hier, einen Penny und einen Rewe. Ich will ja unbedingt 'en Auto. Ich komm ja hier nirgendwo hin.

(You can't do much, here, you are lost here. Sterbfritz is just Sterbfritz, dead. I also wouldn't know how to handle it with Jason. If this were a city where you could do an apprenticeship, that would be different. But what is there here, a Penny and a Rewe [both are supermarket chains in Germany]. I really want a car. As I can't go anywhere here.)

The countryside is presented here as a place of limited possibilities, in which nothing but stay-at-home motherhood is feasible for Steffi. By contrast, she perceives the city as full of opportunities for her. While in Kaplan's description, the countryside is the ideal place to raise children full-time, in the German documentary, it limits the young mother's possibilities of finding either a job or childcare. In the documentaries, full-time mothering is not desirable for the young mothers and is linked to social isolation for Steffi.³⁶

I argue that both documentaries, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, mediate the social isolation of the young mothers, highlighting the challenges they face with their peers. They are separated from their peers, partners and especially Steffi struggles with living in the countryside. The documentaries' mode of representation mirrors Corner's description of proactive observationalism that composes a compelling narrative by offering a variety of

³⁶ In contrast, Laura could not imagine to live in a city, as she associates parental support with living in the countryside. Both her parents and grandparents live with her in the countryside.

different camera angles and shots (28). As described above, the documentaries' mise-en-scène is indeed coded and, in conjunction with the girls' interviews, further underlines their social isolation.

In the German fiction film *Lucy*, young motherhood also leads to social isolation and stigma. While Maggy still has infrequent contact with her friends, the film indicates that she does not share a close bond with them. Her friends are at a different stage of their lives, enjoying going out at night without restriction and/or pursuing apprenticeships, so, unlike Maggy, they do not have to be concerned about parental responsibilities or deal with the restrictions this might bring. The camera highlights Maggy's detachment from her peers, even when she appears to be surrounded by them. During her birthday party, Maggy isolates herself more and more from her guests until she decides to leave the room to sleep in Lucy's bed.³⁷ In the scene, the camera often places Maggy as the focal point, ignoring the other guests (figure 13). This film technique underlines Maggy's feeling of isolation as the only mother in the room. The scene shows that even though Maggy does indeed have friends, she is not entirely connected to them.



Figure 13 - *Lucy*: Maggy does not interact with her guests at her birthday party and leaves early to join her daughter in bed.

³⁷ *Lucy* 01:01:04 - 01:06:00.

The urban setting in *Lucy* visually aids Maggy's isolation. By placing her behind the walls of apartments with narrow rooms, in which a precise and almost static mise-en-scène signifies her domestic confinement and highlights the demands that come with being responsible for a baby (figure 14), the urban setting visually and atmospherically enhances the young mother's separation from the outside world. The mise-en-scène in figure 14 frames Maggy through a doorway into her daughter's room. The walls on either side enclose the mother-daughter pair and leave little room to move within the frame of the camera. The fact that Maggy is from a low-income household and unable to work while having a toddler further underlines her inability to escape her confined living situation.



Figure 14 - Lucy: Maggy comforts her daughter Lucy. The camera stands outside the bedroom, framing the mother-daughter pair within a static mise-en-scène.

As the apartments of Maggy's mother and of Gordon become spaces of confinement, so too does the public sphere restrict the mothers possibilities. When Maggy goes outside of her apartment, the camera repeatedly places her behind glass walls, and obstacles such as road barriers are positioned between her and the camera (figure 15). Both the public and private spheres representing challenges for the young mother. The domestic sphere confines Maggy's focus to maternal tasks, and the public sphere does not offer her an

alternative and points to the impossibility of finding something outside of motherhood. The film highlights this restrictive sense of space in the domestic through its static composition and further excludes the public urban sphere as a positive alternative that promises possibilities outside of motherhood for Maggy.



Figure 15 - *Lucy*: Maggy runs across the street from her apartment to pick up dinner.

Maggy's positioning within liminal spaces communicates the young mother's need to find her place in life to escape her social isolation. These liminal spaces visually position Maggy in-between private and public settings within the *misè-en-scène* of the film. Near the end of the film, when Maggy moves out of Gordon's apartment and does not know yet where to stay, she stops at a café to have breakfast.³⁸ During this scene, the camera stays outside the café, observing Maggy drinking a coffee inside. While she watches the outside world passing by, the audience can see her view slightly mirrored in the window of the café (figure 16). Maggy is visually separated from the public sphere but not yet fully in a private sphere either. She does not know whether to move back in with her mother or to find her own place. This *mise-en-scène* of a liminal space also represents Maggy's transitional time as a young mother who is trying to find her place in life. In

³⁸ *Lucy* 01:25:20 - 01:25:41.

Lucy, therefore, liminality relates to young motherhood in regards to both space and time. The young mother occupies a position in-between adolescence and adulthood, exploring the boundaries that come with both young age and motherhood, represented via a transitional space in-between the private and the public sphere.



Figure 16 - *Lucy*: Maggy moves out of her boyfriend's apartment and does not know yet where to go next.

I argue that Maggy is socially isolated from her friends, even when she spends time with them. They do not fully understand the young mother's needs, as they never have been in Maggy's situation. An urban, domestic setting further confines Maggy, while also a public, urban setting restricts her possibilities. *Lucy* positions its protagonist in liminal spaces to highlight the woman's separation from friends and family and does not represent young motherhood as desirable.

The analysis of *Am Himmel der Tag* further considers that Lara isolates herself in order to protect herself from emotional pain, in particular. In *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara needs to find her place in life by herself, as neither her parents nor her friends fully support her once she is pregnant. Motherhood initially represents an unplanned disturbance in Lara's life and a point of conflict between her and her parents, as well as later between her and her friend Nora. Lara's surprise about the pregnancy triggers a withdrawal into herself while walking through the streets of Berlin. In this scene, the rain falls heavy on Lara and

the atmosphere is dominated by sound of raindrops and Lara's heavy footsteps.³⁹ The camera shifts in and out of focus, following Lara, who walks absentmindedly into the street and nearly collides with a cyclist. The noise of the city rises, and a montage of close-up shots obscure her location. This representation underlines Lara's surprise about the pregnancy and her initial reaction to focus solely on herself, shutting out her environment in order to deal with this life-changing news. This isolation will be a common thread throughout her brief maternal experience. As in this scene, pregnancy depicts a private challenge for Lara. She has to deal with all maternal events by herself, such as finding out that she is pregnant or later that she had a miscarriage, and she evidently has nobody to turn to.

Lara is positioned within liminal spaces at times when she has to make decisions regarding her pregnancy. These scenes are set in trains in which she is sitting alone, while the outside world becomes distant.⁴⁰ In contrast to the groups sitting near her, she is the only passenger on the train who travels by herself. Furthermore, the scenes fall into a liminal space within the narrative of the film as they are precisely placed during times of change in Lara's life. The first scene of Lara in a train appears after her visit to a counselling centre. There, she was informed about her options regarding abortion and confronted with the question of whether or not she wants to have the baby. In the train, she watches her peers enjoying life before she turns to stare out of the window, contemplating her own future. After telling her parents about the pregnancy, Lara is again depicted on a train. Stroking her belly, she decides to have the baby, despite her mother's concerns (figure 17). On the train journey, Lara is separated from her peers and her parents and she is presented as being alone with the difficult decisions she faces. The

³⁹ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:19:24 - 00:19:55.

⁴⁰ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:23:55 - 00:24:17, 00:26:26 - 00:27:21.

liminal space of trains becomes a space of detachment from her previous life and leads her into the transition into motherhood.⁴¹

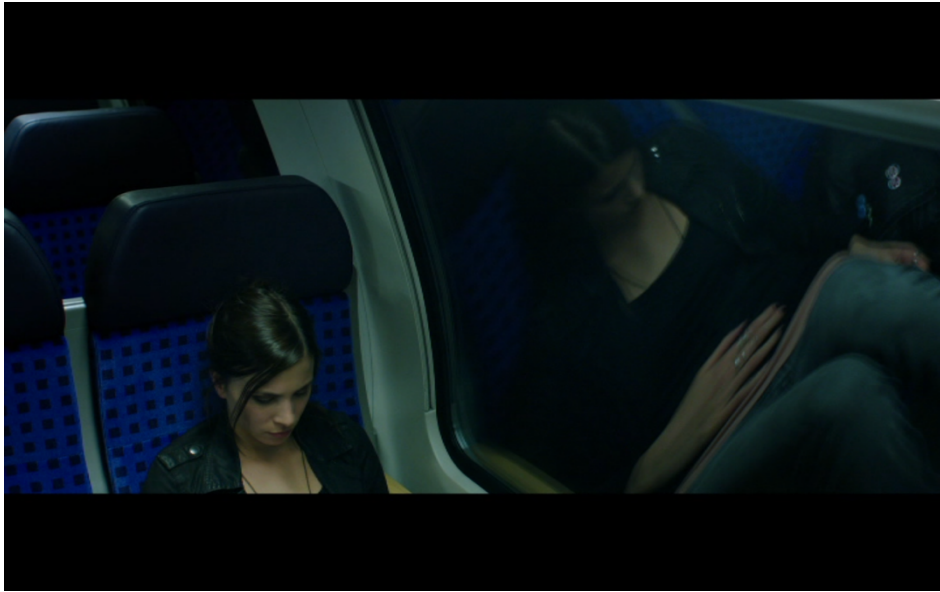


Figure 17 - *Am Himmel der Tag*: Lara rides home from her parents, increasingly liking the idea that she is pregnant.

In both German fiction films, *Lucy* and *Am Himmel der Tag*, a birthday party is used to represent isolation and loneliness. While in *Lucy* it is the young mother's own birthday, in *Am Himmel der Tag* it is her father's party.⁴² After the rejection of Lara's pregnancy by her mother (Marion Mitterhammer), Lara is not able to share the fact of her miscarriage with anybody and she withdraws increasingly when people repeatedly ask her about the pregnancy. It is especially difficult for Lara to pretend that everything is alright during the birthday song for her father. The German song *Wie schön, dass du geboren bist* (How nice that you were born), and the two children playing catch and screaming "Du kriegst mich nicht" (You can't catch me; literally: You won't get me) become a bitter reminder for Lara that her child will never be born and that she will indeed, as the song declares, miss the unborn person very much in her life. When her father ironically calls the birthday

⁴¹ The depiction of this liminal space will change drastically after the end of Lara's pregnancy, later in the film. After the gynaecologist announces that her baby has died, the editing depicts the train merely as an indication to the audience that Lara changes her location. Now, it passes by instead of transporting Lara.

⁴² *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:56:03 - 00:59:11.

party “hell”, he is not aware of the truth he is speaking regarding Lara’s experience of the event. Lara increasingly feels the necessity to pretend to her family and to herself that her pregnancy is continuing without complications. As in *Lucy*, the young woman feels most alone while being surrounded by people with whom she is not able to share her maternal experience.

After the birthday party, Lara is again positioned on a train, isolating herself from her environment.⁴³ This time, the cinematic portrayal of the underground train, with its enclosed space full of people, constitutes a contrast to the open space of the train earlier. The large crowd of people on the train recreate her experience of entrapment at her father's crowded birthday party and enhance her need for isolation to deal with her feelings. In order to escape the crowd on the train, Lara wears a white mask that she found earlier at the party, a relic of her own childhood. During her train journey, a series of shots show Lara holding her belly in a close-up, a close-up of her face covered by the white mask (figure 18) and a subjective shot showing Lara’s narrow view through the mask (figure 19). As Lara’s breathing becomes heavier, the music becomes increasingly agitated, underlining Lara’s distress. The young pregnant woman is alone with her maternal grief, despite the large crowd surrounding her. The mask functions as a protective shield for Lara that saves her from the need to share her emotional state in public. I argue that in *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara’s social isolation caused by her pregnancy leads to the need to isolate herself in order to protect the idea of motherhood, even after the loss of her pregnancy. She is socially isolated from both her peers and family. Additionally, she has to deal with her miscarriage on her own in order to protect herself from the emotional pain. This quasi-self-protective isolation prevents her from accepting her miscarriage and seeking help.

⁴³ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:59:20 - 00:59:35.



Figure 18 - *Am Himmel der Tag*: Lara hides her face behind a mask to isolate herself in the crowded space of the train.



Figure 19 - *Am Himmel der Tag*: Lara's point of view from behind the mask she is wearing during her train ride home from her father's birthday party.

The analysis of the Irish short film *Jelly Baby* shows that also the young mother in Irish film is socially isolated from her peers and family. In particular, the domestic sphere isolates Stacey from her peers and supports a close mother-daughter relationship. As described previously, Stacey is generally not able to spend time with her former friends, as she has to take care of her child, Lauren, full-time as a single parent. The only time

Stacey is represented together with her former friends is at a birthday party.⁴⁴ Here, the young mother rarely interacts with the guests, as they judge Stacey for bringing her daughter (figure 20). In *Jelly Baby*, Stacey is not able to gain any approval from her former friends. They judge her for initially refusing to join the party and then for showing up. This continuous judgement by her friends in combination with her maternal responsibilities as a young single mother leads to Stacey's isolation and forces her into a domestic role which mainly consists of spending time with Lauren.



Figure 20 - *Jelly Baby*: Stacey's former friend, Shauna, is shocked that Stacey arrives at the birthday party together with her daughter.

In *Jelly Baby*, the domestic sphere brings the young mother both isolation from peers and closeness with her daughter. In the apartment, Lauren and Stacey are visually and emotionally close to each other, dancing and cuddling on the couch.⁴⁵ The domestic represents a judgement free space, even though it isolates Stacey at the same time. The only disruption to her isolation from her peers within the domestic sphere is a one-night stand. This, in turn, disrupts the closeness between mother and daughter. The brief introduction of a man into the household constitutes a threat to Lauren's happiness, as

⁴⁴ *Jelly Baby* 00:06:25 - 00:10:23.

⁴⁵ *Jelly Baby* 00:00:18 - 00:00:57.

mentioned in the previous chapter. The close-knit unit of mother and daughter can only flourish as long as other people are excluded from the domestic. This enhances Stacey's social isolation as a young mother, while the relationship with her daughter becomes her sole focal point.

Stacey's focus on the domestic, maternal role and her consequent detachment from her peers are further highlighted via the visual similarity of the mother-daughter pair. The fact that Stacey and Lauren mostly dress in the same-coloured clothes creates a strong sense of them being one unit (figure 21). It is difficult for Stacey to escape this unity. In *Jelly Baby* the mother-daughter dynamic represents both struggle and harmony. While the visual connection between mother and daughter highlights their unity, this unity also sets them apart from the other characters in the film. In the short film, Stacey is permanently associated with being a young mother and is not able to form her own identity or fulfil her own needs outside of motherhood.



Figure 21 - *Jelly Baby*: Stacey and Lauren both wear the same clothes and visually build one unit.

I argue that both contemporary German and Irish films represent the young maternal characters as socially isolated from their family and peers, due to the negative stigma they face as young mothers. While the German documentary highlights the girls' isolation from classmates, partners and within the community, the German fiction films especially

highlight the women's liminal position within society. Both the German fiction film *Lucy* and the Irish short film *Jelly Baby* confine the young mothers to the domestic. In the Irish context, the domestic especially leads to Stacey's isolation. While the films represent the stigma that young mothers and pregnant women face in both Germany and Ireland, they do not allow their characters to break out of this negative perception of young motherhood. Instead of representing positive aspects of young motherhood, the films focus on the non-traditional mothers' struggles, not representing young motherhood as desirable.

3.2.2. Restrictions on Autonomy by the Irish State: *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak*

Irish film reacted to public debates on abortion even before the release of *Twice Shy*. Just after the referendum in 1992 that gave women the right to travel to England to have an abortion, the representation of female sexuality in the Irish feature film *The Snapper*, for example, presented a renegotiation of Irish traditions by the Catholic Church (Pramaggiore 112).⁴⁶ One year before the referendum of 2018 that finally permitted a change to the constitution in order to pave the way to allow abortion in Ireland, *Twice Shy* offers a continuation of this public negotiation on abortion in Irish film. Young pregnant women face the particular challenge in Ireland that abortion is not legalised in their country. In contrast to the German women, Irish women are forced to travel to England in order to have an abortion. The film transfers the contemporary, public debate to a private setting, highlighting the two opposing stances towards abortion between the

⁴⁶ Even though Sharon's parents offer her the option of having an abortion, she refuses instantly. The film narrative embraces the newly gained right for women to travel to England legally to have an abortion. However, abortion in general was still illegal in Ireland itself and not publicly accepted. This is mirrored by her father's denial of having spoken about having an abortion at all.

two protagonists, Andy and Maggie. Here, the film underlines contemporary anxieties of Irish society in Ireland that comes with a changing right for women over their own bodies.

In *Twice Shy*, the protagonist's struggle with their attitudes towards abortion, becomes a microcosm of the actual abortion debate in Ireland. In Irish film, female characters often characterise the nation's struggle, as does Maggie in *Twice Shy*. The cultural theorist Gerardine Meaney argues that

the image of woman as Ireland, Ireland as woman, remains powerful and pervasive in the new Irish cinema. The new mirror being held up in the feminine image is to a violated, abused and confused Ireland. The now sexual, often pregnant, female body still suffers and still embodies the nation's suffering. (250)

In *Twice Shy*, the pregnant female body, represented by Maggie, still embodies the nation's struggle for abortion rights to ensure that (young) women do not have to travel outside of their home country for this medical procedure. Through the two main characters, the film examines the debate on abortion in a rather balanced way. While Maggie is in favour of abortion, her boyfriend, Andy, is initially against it. He challenges her decision to have an abortion and the character initially heightens Maggie's struggle to deal with her pregnancy.

While the film creates an opponent in Andy, he still offers Maggie support and does not judge her by the end of the film. The male protagonist only partially becomes the advocate of a pro-life stance, as he does not fight strongly for this opinion. Instead, the film focuses on Andy's development in understanding his girlfriend's decision to have an abortion and to support her, no matter what she decides to do with her body. By doing so, *Twice Shy* ultimately supports the pro-choice stance that gives everyone the right to choose, based on their individual circumstances. The film therefore mirrors the opinion of a majority of Irish citizens that led to the passing of the referendum to repeal the eight amendment in 2018.

In *Twice Shy*, Maggie experiences a certain powerlessness because of her pregnancy and the fact that she cannot have an abortion in her own country. While her being from a middle-class background enables her financially to travel to England, she is still not able to undergo the procedure in a familiar environment, in which family and friends could be of more support. The only way to partially gain her agency back is by actively deciding how to deal with her pregnancy. This decision only comes with a restricted autonomy for the young pregnant woman. Accessing an abortion clinic is only possible for her by travelling to England, and the maternal character is dependent on her boyfriend in order to do so. The Irish state renders the young pregnant woman powerless by forcing her to travel to Britain for the abortion procedure and refusing her treatment in her home country.

In *Twice Shy*, Maggie decides to keep her pregnancy from most of her family and friends to avoid the stigma associated with young motherhood. According to the Irish sociologist Ciara Bradley, who analyses young motherhood in Ireland, this

[s]tigma has a functional dimension in Irish society to preserve the nuclear family, an aspiration set out in the constitution in 1937 and under threat by demographic and social changes of which these women [young mothers] are a part. (Bradley 163)

While the stigma decreased with the decline of the Catholic Church, Maggie also fears the reaction of her friends and family regarding her decision of having an abortion. Maggie only confides in Andy and her sister (Mary Conroy) to some extent. While she tells Andy everything in the hope of getting his help, she refuses to admit to her sister that it is actually she who is the pregnant woman she refers to in the following dialogue:

Maggie Listen, promise you won't tell anyone this, ok?

Sister Sure.

- Maggie** One of the girls up in Dublin is pregnant. She is just a bit freaked out at the minute, because she just doesn't know what to do.
- Sister** Has she told many people about it?
- Maggie** Not yet, no. She wants to keep it to herself.
- Sister** It's fair enough. She'll be fine. Things like this happen more often than you think. She just needs to tell someone about it.
- Maggie** I don't think telling people about it will help.
- Sister** Why not?
- Maggie** Because, she doesn't want to keep it.
- Sister** Has she thought about this?
- Maggie** Yeah.
- [...]
- Maggie** How does she know she's making a mistake or not?
- Sister** I don't know. If your friend were here, I'd want her to know that she is not on her own. And that I would be there for whatever decision she makes. And then I would give her a big hug and tell her that everything will be ok. Everything will be ok.⁴⁷

When Maggie tells her sister about the pregnancy, the camera is positioned on the ground where the two women sit and shows their faces in close-up, allowing the audience to identify with Maggie. During the conversation, she is not able to look into her sister's eyes, being too afraid of her reaction (figure 22). *Twice Shy* suggests that the pregnant body of the young woman will be stigmatised, and its presence will need to be kept from society, especially because the young woman wants to undergo an abortion. Maggie's sister's indirect assumption that Maggie made her decision light-heartedly by asking her whether she "thought about this", shows how little faith people around her have in the

⁴⁷ *Twice Shy* 00:45:37 - 00:47:31.

decision to go ahead with an abortion. I argue that the stigma of young motherhood in combination with the illegality of abortion in Ireland translates into feelings of shame and Maggie's inability to fully admit that it is herself she is talking about, even though her sister indirectly supports the choice of having an abortion.



Figure 22 - *Twice Shy*: Maggie tells her sister that one of her friends is pregnant and wants to have an abortion. She is not able to look at her sister during this conversation, as it is she who is pregnant.

Also, *Heartbreak* addresses the nation's debate on abortion before the referendum in 2018. While the young middle-class pregnant woman in *Twice Shy* is able to decide whether to have her child, *Heartbreak* represents the pre-determent state of the young single mother from the working class who cannot afford to have an abortion. As in *Twice Shy*, YoungOne's private struggle with motherhood translates into the public concern of the nation in *Heartbreak*. The comparison of the two films allows to highlight the class related differences for young women in Ireland and supports Bradley's argument that

despite significant positive social changes in Ireland during the past fifty years, inequalities such as social class, educational opportunities and outcomes, [...] persist which intersect in ways that create the conditions for teen pregnancy to remain an issue in particular social locations more than others. (Bradley 147)

Supporting this finding, YoungOne's mother states in *Heartbreak*: "That's [abortion] only for those that can." *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak* show that while Irish citizens with financial security are able to avail themselves of abortion as long as they are willing to make the journey, it is a struggle for those citizens who are not financially able to afford travelling to England.



Figure 23 - *Heartbreak*: Emmet Kirwan addresses the audience directly in his spoken-word short film.

Kirwan's voice-over in *Heartbreak* expresses anger with the Irish government for restricting women's autonomy and with male citizens for their misogynistic treatment of women. While Kirwan delivers this anger via his voice-over in the short film, the depiction of YoungOne's journey as well as the portrayal of Kirwan speaking the poem both represent this anger on a visual level. During Kirwan's delivery of the narrative, the camera faces him and stays in a slightly lower angle. To address the camera directly with his speech, Kirwan must tilt his head to look down into the camera which gives him an elevated standpoint (figure 23). Through this visual the narrator gains the moral high ground and is not on one level with the audience. This technique puts him in the position of a preacher who lectures his audience on how to behave in order to change the present hardship of young single mothers from working-class families and for women in general. With this, *Heartbreak* mainly addresses a male audience and the people responsible for

social change in Ireland, such as politicians. By doing so, the short film fails to address a female audience. The narration of the film communicates the need for society to change in order to reduce the restrictions and challenges (young) pregnant women face.

For YoungOne, pregnancy constitutes a loss of control over her own body. *Heartbreak* shows that the young pregnant body is restricted by the Irish state. YoungOne does not have the ability to gain power over her own situation as she is denied a decision over having her baby or not. The state as well as her financial restrictions define the outcome of her pregnancy which creates an initial powerlessness for the working-class young mother. In contrast to Kaplan's description of women in American mainstream film in which '[w]omen have won the right to choose or not to choose motherhood' (*Motherhood* 215), in contemporary Irish film they still struggle to gain agency over their own bodies, which mirrors the actual state of the law in the two countries.

Additionally to the restriction of YoungOne's autonomy by the Irish state, also some of the director's filmic decisions restrict her agency. Kirwan as narrator of the spoken-word short film, speaks for YoungOne until the final scene in which she is finally heard. As the following dialogue shows, the young mother is not able to fully speak for herself though and her voice is always accompanied by the male narrator:⁴⁸

Kirwan	She says 'stop! Here,
Kirwan & YoungOne	c'mere c'mere c'mere.'
Kirwan	I am not defined by the fact that I am some
Kirwan & YoungOne	man's daughter, sister, cousin, mother. I am a woman
Kirwan	and I have agency just because
Kirwan & YoungOne	I'm breathing air mother fucker! And I'm standing here mother fucker.

⁴⁸ *Heartbreak* 00:05:01 - 00:05:21.

Kirwan

And you and this state are the ones who are trying
to fuck me.

While the camera stays on her eye level and does not take the gaze of the male characters on the street (figure 24), the editing overwrites YoungOne's agency by having the male narrator speak her words simultaneously. While Kirwan might intend to give her agency and show support for women by men through this technique, it raises the question whether the layered voices are necessary or whether this suppresses the possibility of having agency for the young mother. This 'ability to have a voice in society and influence policy' is characterised as one of the most important factors when it comes to the creation of women's agency, according to Fleming et al. (2013). I argue that having Kirwan speak over YoungOne, ultimately retains the patriarchal power structure of a misogynistic society the film criticises and prevents the young single mother from having her own voice. Mirroring McLeod's observation that patriarchy 'asserts certain representational systems which create an order of the world presented to individuals as "normal" or "true"' (McLeod 173f.), *Heartbreak* also normalises a limited agency for women.



Figure 24 - *Heartbreak*: YoungOne stands up against men on the street.

3.3. The Expectation of Failure

3.3.1. Social and Family Expectations: *Vierzehn*

I further argue that young mothers are expected to be “bad” mothers by various parties, such as society, family members, institutions and by the filmmaker’s assumption of the audience. In all cases, young motherhood presents a challenge and is not perceived as desirable outcome for the young women. In the documentary *Vierzehn*, the young mothers and their parents dread the societal judgement that comes with young motherhood. Out of shame and the question what society might think of a young pregnant woman, the girls initially try to conceal their pregnancies and even try to terminate them themselves. Lisa describes in an interview how she and her boyfriend initially tried to achieve an abortion by punching and kicking her stomach:

Lisa Der [Lisas Freund] hat gar nichts gesagt. Und dann hat er so gesagt, soll ich dir in den Bauch treten? Und dann hat er mir in den Bauch getreten. Ja, und dann hat der mich immer geboxt.⁴⁹
(He [Lisa’s boyfriend] didn’t say anything. And then he said, should I kick into your belly? And then he kicked into my belly. Yes, and then he always punched me.)

The societal pressure to fit within a norm motivates some of the young parents to turn against the girls’ pregnant bodies.⁵⁰ Likewise, the parents of the fourteen-year-old girls express their initial concern regarding society’s perception of their own ability as parental guardians. In the documentaries, the societal expectation of young mothers to be potentially “bad” mothers leads to feelings of shame and guilt for the young girls and feelings of inadequacy for the girls’ parents.

⁴⁹ *Vierzehn* 00:20:00 - 00:20:10.

⁵⁰ To escape the judgement in German society, Lisa and her family move to Hawaii. There, Lisa is able to share her experience with other young mothers since young motherhood is accepted and perceived as common in the area.

The decision about whether to keep their child or to have an abortion further isolates the young women. In contrast to Ireland, abortion is legal in Germany, and in the case of these young mothers, actively encouraged by medical practitioners, family, and friends. This encouragement leads to further isolation as, for example, Fabienne has the feeling that nobody shares her maternal happiness.⁵¹ She states that “die, alle, die nehmen dir die Freude weg” (all of them take your happiness away) by not believing that the young women could be “good” mothers. Fabienne’s statement highlights that society’s mistrust of young mothers diminishes their experience of motherhood and deprives them of their joy. This discouragement from having the baby stands in strong contrast to the idealised German idea of motherhood that supposedly brings women great happiness. This ideal, however, is reserved for mothers within the “right” circumstances, and motherhood at a young age is not deemed either appropriate or desirable. Despite society’s concern that the fourteen-year-old girls are too young to mother and the discouragement of friends, family and medical practitioners, all four girls ultimately decide to have their babies.



Figure 25 - *Vierzehn*: Laura and her boyfriend prepare dinner.

⁵¹ *Vierzehn* 00:24:30 - 00:26:06.

The rapid change from adolescence to motherhood brings challenges and expectations from friends and family with it. Laura's father, for example, links his daughter's ability to mother to her ability to fulfil domestic tasks. While Laura's father explains via voice-over the importance of mastering domestic tasks to be fit for parenthood, the camera visually counterpoints Laura's inability to succeed in the kitchen (figure 25).⁵²

Laura's Father Aber ich denke die müssen auch vor der Geburt des Kindes uns zeigen, dass sie den Aufgaben gewachsen sind. Denn aus Spiel ist jetzt Ernst geworden und sie müssen ihre Familie managen, sie müssen das in den Griff bekommen. Da gehören häusliche Pflichten dazu, die die Laura leider vernachlässigt. Die sie aber jetzt zeigen muss, jawohl ich kann das. Und ich muss das können, denn ich habe ein Kind zu versorgen. Und das ist nun mal keine Puppe mehr.

(But I also think that they have to show us before the birth of the child that they are up to the task. Because the play turned into severity and they have to manage their family, they have to handle it. Part of this are domestic tasks which Laura, unfortunately, neglects. Which she has to prove now, yes I can do this. And I have to be able to do this, because I have to provide for a child. And this is not a doll anymore.)

The documentary uses the father's voice-over to "re-focalise" the "visual portrayal" of failing to fulfil the domestic tasks that he deems important, in accordance with Corner's "evidential mode 2 (testimony)" (29f.). While the father underlines the importance of succeeding in managing a household, Laura is serving her boyfriend fries from the floor

⁵² *Vierzehn* 00:35:21 - 00:36:15.

of the kitchen. With this juxtaposition, the documentary questions Laura's ability to mother adequately as she clearly cannot fulfil her parents demands on the young mother. Family expectations, therefore, are difficult to meet for Laura and are mediated as vital to be accepted as a successful young mother. I argue that, in *Vierzehn*, family members and society expect the young mothers to fail as "good" mothers. The documentary does not depict young motherhood as desirable but instead highlights Laura's challenge to meet social and family expectations.

3.3.2. Family Expectations: *Am Himmel der Tag*

I further argue that the German fiction film *Am Himmel der Tag* highlights Lara's challenge to meet her mother's expectations, in particular, and positions this struggle as Lara's reason to continue her pregnancy. Lara is from a middle-class family and financed by her parents during her studies. Her decision-making process about continuing her pregnancy, is closely linked to her wish to rebel against her mother. While *Am Himmel der Tag* is the only film discussed in this chapter in which the young pregnant woman looks forward to having a child, this anticipation is lowered by her mother's refusal to support her daughter emotionally. It is her parent's commentary regarding her pregnancy that ultimately leads to Lara's decision to continue with it, as the following dialogue shows:⁵³

Lara Ich bin schwanger.

(I am pregnant.)

[...]

Claudia Du willst es doch nicht wirklich bekommen, oder?

(You don't really want to have the child, do you?)

⁵³ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:24:18 - 00:26:25.

- Lara** Und wenn doch?
(And if so?)
- Claudia** Du bist 25, du hast dein ganzes Leben noch vor dir.
(You are 25, your whole life still lies ahead of you.)
- Lara** Du warst doch noch jünger als ich.
(You were even younger than me.)
- Claudia** Ich hatte keine Wahl. Du hast doch ganz andere Möglichkeiten.
(I didn't have a choice. You have completely different options.)
- Lara** Wie du hattest keine Wahl? Wolltest du mich wegmachen lassen,
oder wie?
(What does that mean, you didn't have a choice? Did you want to
abort me?)
- [...]
- Lara** Vielleicht wäre ich ja `ne gute Mutter.
(Maybe I would be a good mother.)
- [Claudia laughs.]
- [...]
- Claudia** Du kriegst doch noch nicht mal dein eigenes Leben auf die Reihe.
Und immer schön Party machen ist dann auch nicht mehr mit Kind.
(You can't even manage your own life. And you can't go to parties
anymore with a child either.)

This dialogue shows that prospective motherhood becomes a form of rebellion for Lara and a chance of taking her life into her own hands. The young pregnant woman is not expected to be mature enough to mother and instantly perceived as a potentially “bad” mother. With her decision to continue the pregnancy, Lara distances herself from her own

mother who herself wanted to decide in favour of a career instead of motherhood when she was pregnant as a young woman.

3.3.3. Scrutiny by Public Institutions: *Jelly Baby*

Stacey, as a young mother, is under constant scrutiny by Lauren's teacher (Hilary Vesey) who repeatedly questions her maternal abilities. When Stacey fails to bring her daughter to school on time, she is scolded by the school teacher who demands her "to sort [herself] out," out, calling her behaviour ridiculous.⁵⁴ Stacey, in the meantime, sincerely worries about the fact that her daughter might be too late to class as a close-up of her worrying face reveals (figure 26). The teacher's aggressive posture while shouting at Stacey (figure 27), and her angry tone represent an inappropriate contact between the teacher and the mother that leaves the audience with the question whether the teacher would have talked in the same manner with an older mother. In the scene, the dark background of dirty brick wall further heightens the teacher's aggressive stance towards the young mother who is, in contrast, brightly lit. In *Jelly Baby*, the fact that Stacey is also a young mother increases her powerless position in front of institution representatives, such as the teacher who believes that she is in the position to reprimand Stacey due to her alleged immaturity.

⁵⁴ *Jelly Baby* 00:02:14 - 00:02:34.



Figure 26 - Jelly Baby: Stacey worries that her daughter, Lauren, is too late for class.



Figure 27 - Jelly Baby: Lauren's teacher gives out to Stacey that her daughter is too late.

The stigmatisation of the young mother by institutional officials further shows when Lauren comes to school with a black eye, following an accident at a party.⁵⁵ The teacher is immediately suspicious of Stacey. The following dialogue shows that the teacher suspects troubles at home as the cause of the black eye, doubting the young mother's abilities to look after her child.

⁵⁵ *Jelly Baby* 00:11:26 - 00:12:55.

- Teacher** What's going on?
- Stacey** What do you mean?
- Teacher** What's the story with Lauren's eye?
- Stacey** That, the eye was just, it was an accident.
- Teacher** How did it happen?
- Stacey** Ehm, I was getting something out of the wardrobe and when I came down she was standing there, and I just, she was standing behind me like. Obviously, it was an accident.
- Teacher** So, no need to be worried about her?
- Stacey** No.
- Teacher** Ok. Ok, I'll see you tomorrow then, right?
- Stacey** Ok. Can I go?
- Teacher** Yes.

While the teacher is obligated to question the situation if she suspects physical abuse, the dialogue in conjunction with the teacher's highly accusing tone underlines the heightened pressure for young mothers from a working-class background to be accepted by those with institutional power. By asking whether she can leave the conversation, the dialogue establishes a power imbalance between Stacey and Lauren's teacher. The narrative positions Stacey as powerless against the teacher's suspicions. Stacey's private behaviour intersects with her public perception as she is under special scrutiny as a young single mother in *Jelly Baby*. Here, the Irish institution of the school questions the young mother's ability to be a "good" mother. I argue that the film shows a lack of confidence in young single mothers from working-class backgrounds by public institutions, stigmatising their abilities to care for their children adequately and to be able to make their own decisions. At the same time, the working-class young mother, Stacey, accepts the teacher's authority and does not show any resistance against her assumptions. In *Jelly*

Baby, young motherhood does not seem to be a desirable outcome for young women in the eyes of the institution official.

3.3.4. Anticipated audience Expectations: *Lucy*

While the three films discussed above represent the struggles that young mothers face in society, the German feature film *Lucy* slightly deviates from this representation. While the films above give the audience space to learn about specific maternal struggles, the narrative of *Lucy* anticipates the audience to judge the young mother. I argue that the anticipated audience expectation that Maggy must be a “bad” mother drives the narrative of the film and underlines the idea that young motherhood is undesirable. This, on one hand, allows the audience to potentially recognise their own unconscious bias against young motherhood, yet, on the other hand, reinforces a negative perception of young mothers. By playing with the anticipated prejudices of the audience, namely the anticipation that young mothers lack the responsibility to be able to care for their children, the film addresses society’s negative perception of young motherhood. Since young motherhood is mostly not portrayed as an active choice and rather as something that happens to young women, they represent an anti-model to the “good” mother (Perrier 186ff.). Therefore, the audience of *Lucy* is expected to assume that Maggy, as the young mother from a working-class background, must fail. This assumption of the young mother from a working-class background as potentially “bad” mother creates the tension of the film.

However, while the audience is anticipated to expect Maggy’s failure as a young mother, the film refuses to present this negative ending. Even though none of the characters progress – at the end of the film, they are at the same point at which they started – nothing happens to Lucy and the idea of the German *Rabenmutter* is not fulfilled. On

the contrary, Maggy mostly takes good care of her child and is mainly represented as a responsible young woman. While Kaplan describes that in American mainstream film the maternal characters have to find back to the old values at the end of the film (*Motherhood* 198), *Lucy* refuses this narrative arch. The film positions Maggy back at her original starting point, trying to find a place to live with her daughter, outside of the nuclear family ideal that she imagines. By doing so, she does not adopt the values that could have potentially framed her as a 'good' mother in the traditional understanding observed by Kaplan. The narrative of *Lucy* subverts anticipated audience expectations and in doing so offers space for the representation of a young single mother who tries to find her place in life outside of a traditional understanding of 'good' motherhood.

Lucy's reviews share and reinforce the negative perception of young motherhood that the film anticipates, and fail to mention that nothing bad happens to Lucy by the end of the film or Maggy's many attempts to progress. Maggy and Gordon's attempt to build a family life is repeatedly described as playing grown up and is not taken seriously by critics (cf. Eismann). Another review further introduces a problematic infantilised rhetoric by stating:

Wie spielt man coole Freundin, wie kann man noch Tochter bleiben und schon Mutter sein, und wie spielt man kleine, glückliche Familie? (Thomas)

(How do you play a cool girlfriend, how can you stay a daughter and already be a mother, and how do you play happy little family?)

This rhetoric of *playing* girlfriend or family shows that young women are not perceived to be fit to mother. This rhetoric ultimately marginalises and others young motherhood. One of the reviews underlines this in the *Berliner Zeitung* by writing about Maggy: "Man mag es drehen und wenden, wie man will - mit 18 ein Kind zu bekommen, das ist ein bisschen früh" (Seitz). (Whichever way you look at it - to have a child at 18 is a bit young). Headlines such as Eddie Cockrell's in *Variety* that states: "A distressingly young

single mother makes some achingly bad decisions in the keenly-observed social drama ‘Lucy’”, only reinforces the negative perceptions of young motherhood. It remains unclear to which “achingly bad decisions” Cockrell refers. The critics of *Lucy* perceive young motherhood to be negative and blame the young mother for being too young to care for a child, reinforcing negative societal perceptions of young motherhood.

I argue here that both contemporary German and Irish films challenge the expectation that young mothers from a working-class background will fail as mothers. In the films, this stigma leads to feelings of guilt, shame, the wish to rebel against one’s parents, and the young mother’s powerlessness towards institution officials. Furthermore, in *Lucy*, it drives the narrative of the film. While *Lucy* refuses to fully cater to the negative perceptions of young motherhood by not representing Maggy harming her child, the film’s expectation of the audience presupposes a negative stigma of young motherhood. Even though Maggy does not fail as a mother, she is never able to become a ‘good’ mother. Instead she returns to the starting point of the film. None of the films represent young motherhood as attractive option, highlighting the stigma they face by society, family and friends. Only *Jelly Baby* introduces a desirable closeness between mother and daughter that is, however, undermined by the representation of Stacey as a potentially negative influence.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter analyses the representation of the young mother in relation to maternal stigma. This, in combination with the previous chapter, further underlines my main argument that contemporary German and Irish films do not represent young motherhood as desirable and mainly link it to challenges for the young mother. While Kaplan’s maternal discourses do not include young motherhood and film representations often

ignore the subject, German and Irish films occasionally offer the young mother as protagonist. This chapter shows how especially camera work, mise-en-scène and narration frame young motherhood as a crisis and underlines the expectation of family, institutions or the audience for the young mothers to fail as “good” mothers. While these European films do indeed represent young motherhood, ideological norms of Western motherhood that frames the young mother as potentially “bad” mother still underlie these representations. Even though the films manage to highlight current struggles for young mothers, their representation falls back into a traditional understanding of “good” motherhood and ultimately fails to challenge dominant discourses on young motherhood.

In the German documentaries, *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, most of the young mothers are socially isolated from their peers. They either receive little support from their former friends, as in Lisa and Fabienne’s case, or have little possibilities to meet other people, as in Steffi’s case. Society expects them to fail as mothers and they are repeatedly pressured into having an abortion by family, friends and their physicians. In Laura’s case, her parent’s idea that she can only prove her ability to mother by demonstrating domestic abilities puts further pressure on Laura. These expectations of failure lead to shame, guilt and feelings of inadequacy for all young mothers in the documentaries.

In *Lucy*, Maggy is also socially isolated from her peers, even though she spends occasional time with them. Especially at her birthday party, the film positions Maggy outside of the small groupings of her guests, seeking refuge in Lucy’s bedroom. Even though Maggy is often surrounded by people, she does not emotionally connect with them. The urban setting further underlines Maggy’s isolation as she is confined in small domestic spaces and encounters visual barriers that symbolically restrict her possibilities outside of the apartment. The audience is expected to see the young mother as a potentially “bad” mother, or *Rabenmutter*, and the critics of the film do indeed cater to this expectation. They infantilise and judge the young mother, mainly demonstrating their

own prejudices towards young motherhood as nothing bad happens to Lucy by the end of the film.

Also in *Am Himmel der Tag*, motherhood leads to social isolation for Lara. She is not able to share her happiness or the fact that she had a miscarriage with either friends or family. Travelling by herself in trains constitutes a liminal space for the young pregnant woman in which she can reflect and make decisions. Here, she is able to transition into a maternal role, accepting her pregnancy. When she is in crowded places Lara isolates herself from the people surrounding her, so she does not have to share her emotional state. In *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara is on her own regarding any vital decision concerning her pregnancy. Her mother does not believe that she is able to be a “good” mother and Lara’s embrace of the maternal role partially arises out of a rebellion against her mother’s negative expectations.

In *Jelly Baby*, the social isolation of Stacey mainly manifests in her domestic isolation. She is neither able to invite men into the house, nor is she able to join her friends at parties without consequences for her daughters happiness. Instead, she forms a strong unit with Lauren, which the film visually highlights by the fact that the mother-daughter pair mostly wears the same clothes. The domestic area gives Stacey a place of security, while she is judged in public spaces for being a young mother. Lauren’s teacher in particular believes that she is in the position to reprimand Stacey, who feels powerless against the officials accusations as she is barely able to defend herself. While the young mother builds a strong unit with her daughter, institution officials expect her to harm her child due to her young age.

This chapter demonstrates that in the German films and in the Irish short film *Jelly Baby* young mothers are isolated and forced into the domestic space, while society expects them to fail as mothers. This repositions the non-traditional mothers within a traditional, heteronormative domestic setting in which they need to succeed in order to

prove their ability to be “good” mothers. The other two Irish films discussed in this chapter, *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak*, depict young motherhood in connection with the debate on abortion rights as a public crisis rather than solely as a private crisis experienced by young mothers. With this, the films address the ongoing debate on abortion that led to a referendum, allowing a change of the strict constitutional regulation in Ireland.

Twice Shy shows that the Irish state renders (young) pregnant women powerless as they have to travel to England in order to have control over their own bodies. The film shows that young motherhood as well as abortion is still associated with stigma in Ireland, as Maggie prefers to keep the pregnancy to herself. This stigma leads to feelings of shame and denies the young pregnant woman a proper support network, aside from her boyfriend. Young motherhood is not desirable for Maggie, and the Irish state confronts her with the challenge of having an abortion outside of the country. While Maggie is financially able to travel to England, this option does not exist for women from a working-class background like YoungOne in *Heartbreak*.

In *Heartbreak*, there are more restrictions for YoungOne than there are for Maggie in *Twice Shy*. YoungOne’s family is not in the financial position to pay for an abortion abroad, and YoungOne is, therefore, forced to have her child. The narration expresses anger with the Irish state for restricting access to abortion and anger over the mistreatment of women by male citizens. The young mother has little control over her situation and no autonomy over her own body. By refusing to fully give YoungOne her own voice, as Kirwan speaks her words simultaneously, the film equally restricts the young mother’s agency and falls back into the patriarchal power structure it criticises.

Both *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak* depict being pregnant at a young age as a crisis for young women and highlight the necessity to change the abortion law in Ireland. The films especially show the class differences that enable some young women to have an abortion and forces others into motherhood. In contrast to the German films, however, neither

Maggie nor YoungOne is repositioned within a domestic setting. Both young women are reinstated into a neo-liberal ideal, working or gaining education, at the end of the films. Overall this chapter demonstrates that contemporary German and Irish films do not represent young motherhood as desirable and mainly link this non-traditional motherhood to challenges for the young mothers. These challenges include social isolation, the restriction of their bodily autonomy and the expectation of society, family, institutions and audience that they are potentially “bad” mothers.

4. The Family of Young Mothers

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that both the patriarchal structure of the nuclear family as ideal and the extent to which the young mothers receive support from their families, in particular by the fathers, influence the maternal experience of these young mothers mostly negatively. With this, I further show that contemporary German and Irish films represent young motherhood as undesirable and mainly link it to challenges for the young mothers. The films discussed in this chapter are the German documentaries *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, the German feature films *Lucy* and *Am Himmel der Tag*, the Irish feature film *Twice Shy*, and the Irish short films *Heartbreak* and *Jelly Baby*. Based on E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of six maternal discourses in American media from the 1980s to 1992, as discussed in section 1.1.5.1., I focus on young motherhood in contemporary German and Irish film, bringing a European focus to the subject.

Alongside her maternal discourses, Kaplan describes emerging representations of fatherhood (*Motherhood* 184ff.). Especially the nurturing father emerges in American media in the 1980s. This character type desires to participate in the parenting role and often even fathers in the absence of the mother, such as in the Hollywood blockbuster *Three Men and a Baby* (Nimoy, 1987). Films like this often situate the paternal character within the genre of comedy in order to reduce the anxiety that exists around lone fatherhood, while they still aspire to a nuclear family as ideal situation. Caring for the baby is represented in a light-hearted and comedic mode, and fatherhood does not take over the male identity. In contrast, motherhood often consumes female identity. Kaplan does not consider young fatherhood, which is discussed in this chapter, as it was not a main feature of US media at the time.

I extend the existing literature by exploring representations of paternity in relation to young motherhood and analyse the ideal of a nuclear family for the young mother figure in contemporary German and Irish film. Due to the lack of research in this area, matricentric feminist scholarship by Nancy J. Chodorow and Adrienne Rich further aid the textual analysis of the case studies and help to redefine Kaplan's original framework of maternal representations. While I use both psychoanalytic and sociological texts, my interdisciplinary approach is not entirely driven by, for example, the sociology of actual mothers. The texts merely inform my textual analysis. While Chodorow argues that the father is rarely the primary parent and that he does not need to reject his own emotional needs, in contrast to the mother, Rich's study shows how the nuclear family is constructed as a "normal" situation. It is from this norm that the family of the young mother mostly deviates in contemporary German and Irish film.

The chapter is divided into two sections, analysing the young mother's understanding of a nuclear family ideal on the one hand, and situating the young mother in relation to the role of the father on the other. I demonstrate that while the nuclear family model still looms as ideal in some of the films discussed, the films, at the same time, question this family structure, or do not promote it as a desirable alternative. Nevertheless, they still promote traditional gender stereotypes, such as stay-at-home motherhood. I explore how young motherhood is related to the nuclear family model in contemporary German and Irish film productions and further underline the role the biological father and/or substitute father plays within the family situation of the young mother. In contrast to Kaplan's findings with regards to American film, I argue here that the biological and substitute fathers do not find self-fulfilment in the paternal role and are predominantly absent from the family. While the fathers are absent, the films often represent their story through the eyes of the young mothers, who are left with the responsibility for their children. I further show that in the cases of both the self-fulfilled father in Kaplan's description and of the

father in the films discussed in this chapter, fatherhood is optional (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 197). The European films represent the young mother's family situation and the father's absence in a rather negative context, while single motherhood is only desirable as long as the young mother stays at home full-time.

4.2. Family Structure

4.2.1. Enforcing and Questioning the Nuclear Family Ideal: *Vierzehn, Achtzehn, Lucy* and *Twice Shy*

Here, I argue that while the films discussed break with the common representation of the nuclear family, some still understand this family model as an ideal. It is this ideal that the young women either struggle to fulfil or actively decide against. In the German documentaries, *Vierzehn and Achtzehn*, some of the fathers, as well as Fabienne, highlight their desire for a nuclear family. Especially at the beginning of their children's lives, the aspiration for a nuclear family dominates the imagination of the young parents, even though the young mothers strongly highlight the necessity of being supported by their own parents. Laura's boyfriend, Steven, wants to live within the structure of what he expects of a nuclear family in Germany – "ein schönes Auto, Eigenheim und, ja, Familie" (a nice car, one's own house and, yes, a family) (Grünberg, *Achtzehn*).⁵⁶ For the young man these goals signify everything he aims for in life. Thus, the nuclear family becomes the central marker of success and status. For some of the young parents in the documentary, creating a nuclear family constitutes an achievement, while living outside of this ideal signifies a lack of success.

⁵⁶ *Achtzehn* 00:06:03 - 00:06:12.

Also, Fabienne stresses the importance of a nuclear family and having a man as head of the family to share her life with. To achieve this, she prefers Memo, her boyfriend and her child's substitute father, over Alex, the child's biological father, who demanded respect and expected her to take care of all domestic tasks. When Fabienne introduces Memo, she highlights that he likes to cuddle, yet is still very manly and shows her limits. Grünberg intercuts Fabienne's interview with footage of Memo as a professional boxer (figure 28). This montage underlines Memo's masculinity and expresses rather fixed gender roles of the strong man who leads the way and the submissive female.⁵⁷ According to Rich, the nuclear family persists to be the "normal situation" across time and political systems, such as socialism and capitalism (55). Fabienne's initial drive to create an idealised nuclear family, without considering alternative forms, mirrors Rich's description of the nuclear family as the perceived normal situation for these young parents.



Figure 28 - *Achtzehn*: Memo enters the ring during a boxing match.

However, most of the girls realise that a nuclear family situation further positions them within the domestic sphere. They distance themselves from the idea of a nuclear family

⁵⁷ *Achtzehn* 00:17:21 - 00:19:58.

and decide to raise their children with the support of family members instead. Their experience within their own families and society tells them that women are expected to take care of all caring and domestic tasks, while men take fewer responsibilities, especially in the household. In *Vierzehn*, Laura highlights that living in an apartment with her boyfriend, Steven, would mean taking care of the household and the child, while her boyfriend demands that she should quit school, as the following dialogue demonstrates:⁵⁸

Laura Ich habe mich dazu entschieden, dass ich jetzt auf jeden Fall zu Hause [bei ihren Eltern] bleiben werde, weil, ja, weil ich hier einfach eine Belastung weniger habe. Also, dass ich den Haushalt nicht noch machen muss. Weil da habe ich ja noch meine Eltern, die jetzt meinetwegen, das andere Zeug alles sauber machen. Und so müsste ich ja im Prinzip alles sauber machen. Und das wäre noch eine Belastung mehr.

(I decided that I will definitely stay at home [with her parents], because, well, I have one less burden here. So that I don't also have to do the housework. Because I have my parents who clean all the other stuff. Otherwise, I would have to clean everything in principle. And that would be an additional burden.)

Steven Ja toll, und was mach' ich? Dann hat das Baby keinen Papa die ganze Zeit.

(Great, and what about me? This means that the baby will not have a father all the time.)

[...]

Laura Es wird mir aber kaum jemand dazu raten, dass von Anfang an ganz alleine zu machen. Was soll ich denn da alles machen? Du

⁵⁸ *Vierzehn* 00:32:21 - 00:34:22.

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bist bei der Zivildienststelle, gut für dich, kommst abends heim, schläfst und gehst wieder fort. Toll, ich darf mich um mein Kind kümmern, darf den Haushalt machen und darf dann meine Schule in den Hintergrund stellen.

(But nobody would recommend me to do it all by myself from the beginning. What are all the things that I would have to do? You are at your civil service position, good for you, you come home in the evening, sleep and leave again. Great, I can take care of the child, the housework, and have to put my school aside.)

Steven Nein, wenn du zu Hause bist machst du keine Schule.

(No, if you stay at home, you won't go to school.)

The dialogue shows that Steven does not consider Laura's inability to continue school, if she lives with him instead of her parents, as a sacrifice, but simply decides that living as a nuclear family would be the best situation for the child. For Laura, in contrast, living with her parents means less work in addition to the new responsibilities of young motherhood, as well as the chance to continue school.

Vierzehn visually reinforces the struggle of the young mothers to deal with domestic tasks, such as doing laundry and cooking, when living in a nuclear family situation with their boyfriends. When Fabienne does the laundry, she is placed on the right side of the screen, seeming small in relation to the massive pile of laundry in front of her.⁵⁹ As shown in figure 29, Fabienne sceptically eyes the laundry pile, hoping that it will not fall over, symbolically burying her under the weight of her domestic tasks. Her son's biological father leaves all household work to her, while he earns money for the family. In the documentaries, parental support is essential for the well-being of the young mothers,

⁵⁹ *Vierzehn* 01:21:46 - 01:21:54.

while a nuclear family situation partially reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, with the mother being placed in the domestic sphere.



Figure 29 - Vierzehn: Fabienne does the laundry, while the biological father of their child is not aware of the amount of work that comes with running a household.



Figure 30 - Achtzehn: Laura stands in her now empty apartment that she shared with Steven and Stella Luna and stares out of the window.

While parental support is essential for the young mothers, and many of them are aware of the benefits that come with not living in a nuclear family situation, they still have a sense of failure when they are not able to make a nuclear family life work. In one scene in *Achtzehn*, the camera establishes Laura standing in her empty apartment (figure 30).

She and her boyfriend Steven broke up, and the temporary family moved out. In the scene, she stares out of the window of the empty room while her own commentary explains via voice-over how her life has now changed.⁶⁰ In her view, she has lost everything, her own apartment and family, and is left with nothing. The scene underlines how important it is for the young mother to act within the structures of a nuclear family which is held as an ideal in Germany. Failing to comply with the expectations of society, leads to depression and anxiety for Laura. In Laura's opinion, by becoming pregnant at a young age she acted against the socially acceptable path for a woman which includes a gradual progression of dating, staying at home with a partner and finally becoming pregnant and starting a family. This mirrors Donath's argument that society expects women to follow a heteronormative-temporal norm, in which they achieve certain milestones at the right time, as described above (Donath "Choosing Motherhood" 204). She explains how she is weighed down by the demands of child protective services, the work load in school, the prejudices of schoolmates and the threat of losing custody of Stella Luna to Steven's mother.⁶¹ While Laura is aware of the additional stresses that come with living as a nuclear family, she feels emotional pressures from not being able to meet this ideal family situation.

The documentaries show that heteronormative gender roles still play an important part in raising children in Germany.⁶² Fabienne's friend, who is also a young mother, plans to

⁶⁰ *Achtzehn* 00:30:17 - 00:31:03.

⁶¹ In fact, all the girls encounter threats of losing their children either by child protective services, extended family members or even by their own mothers. For example, Steffi's mother decides that Steffi is not able to care for her child on her own. She, therefore, initially takes away Steffi's right to visit her son and later only allows her to see him within certain visiting hours.

⁶² During an educational course on parenthood that is offered in Lisa's school, it is mainly girls who attend the class. It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of interest from the boys or whether the school tries to target young women in particular. The stated fact that mothers are largely responsible for caring for the child and the housework does not resonate with all participants, and especially one boy disagrees with this gender division. Lisa's argument that only mothers, and not fathers, are able to take care of the child, since they provide breast milk, underlines a bio-evolutionary understanding of the natural place

restrict her son from participating in certain activities such as ballet.⁶³ In her opinion, this activity could influence his sexual preference away from a heterosexual and towards a homosexual orientation. This does not just stereotype ballet as a gendered activity, but also reinforces a heteronormative set of behaviours which will be communicated to her son. While Fabienne vehemently disagrees with this notion, it still shows a division between activities that are considered appropriate for men or women, and prejudices towards homosexual men in Germany. *Vierzehn* depicts various family situations within German society, in which heteronormative gender roles in the nuclear family are consciously reinforced by some and, if not quite challenged but at least questioned by others.

I argue that even though the young mothers understand the additional pressure that comes with living as a nuclear family, instead of with their parents, they still embrace a sense of personal failure when they cannot fulfil the ideal of a nuclear family life. While some of the young parents in the documentaries aspire to a nuclear family situation, most of them understand parental support as more beneficial. Grünberg's choice of composition that suggests "observational 'transparency'" in fact underlines gender stereotypes and highlights the young mothers' position within the domestic, when part of a nuclear family situation (Corner 28).

The analysis of one German and one Irish fiction film further examines the extent to which the films both enforce and question a nuclear family ideal. The German fiction film *Lucy* presents an ambivalent stance on the nuclear family. While the film reinforces

of the mother as main carer and ignores the possibilities of bottle-feeding. Another boy explains that they could not support the girls adequately, since they do not know enough about them. This argument shows that revised sex education might be necessary, not just to biologically inform children about the other sex, but also to enable all participants to gain an understanding of what parenthood might entail. By preparing not just girls but also boys for their future parental tasks, men might feel more responsible and at the same time more comfortable in caring for a child.

⁶³ *Vierzehn* 00:38:00 - 00:39:40.

traditional gender roles, they are occasionally challenged at the same time. On the one hand, the film continually situates his characters within problematic stereotypes. Gordon takes care of the tasks that are traditionally associated with men, such as installing the washing machine, earning the money and taking care of the grill during a barbeque with Maggy. The young mother takes the responsibility for the tasks that are traditionally associated with women, such as doing the laundry, taking care of the child and providing her boyfriend with beer during their barbeque (figure 31). Outside of domestic and maternal responsibilities, Maggy is not ascribed any competence. While *Lucy* succeeds in lending a voice to the experience of a young mother in Germany, the ideal of the heteronormative nuclear family persists and drives Maggy's actions throughout the film.



Figure 31 - *Lucy*: Maggy brings beer, while Gordon turns the meat on the barbeque.

On the other hand, these stereotypes are questioned occasionally in *Lucy*, especially when Maggy and Gordon are having their first barbeque on the balcony.⁶⁴ While Gordon is grilling on the barbeque, Maggy brings her boyfriend a bottle of beer. His ironic statement: “Wie sich das gehört” (As it should be) which is followed by their laughter, shows the couple's awareness of traditional gender roles and reflects their awkwardness

⁶⁴ *Lucy* 00:34:57 - 00:36:29.

with the new situation of resembling a nuclear family. While Kaplan states that “‘Mother’ and ‘Father’ as social roles are in transition in lived culture” (*Motherhood* 183), *Lucy* communicates the young mother’s wish to fit within the ideal of the nuclear family. Yet, when positioned within a nuclear family situation, the young parents feel out of place. *Lucy* presents a rather patriarchal understanding of the ideal, nuclear family, even though Maggy is not able to succeed in creating this heteronormative ideal by the end of the film, as she moves out of Gordon’s apartment. *Lucy*, therefore, does not deal with young motherhood in an “ideologically bound way” (*Motherhood* 183) as Kaplan describes, but rather repositions the young mother outside of the nuclear family at the end of the film, underlining that she cannot be part of the ideal that is aspired to by her and in mainstream German society.⁶⁵ I argue that *Lucy* both enforces and questions a nuclear family ideal. On one hand, Maggy aspires to create a nuclear family with Gordon. On the other hand, both young parents do not feel fully comfortable with this family dynamic, and Maggy moves back to her mother by the end of the film. For Maggy, the ideal of the nuclear

⁶⁵ This ambivalence about the idealisation of the nuclear family is mirrored in the director’s own ambivalent understanding of it. According to Winckler, the ideal of the nuclear family in combination with traditional gender roles is communicated to Maggy via television; as the following interview in the official press book shows:

[Maggy] hat Ziele, an denen sie arbeitet. Sie lernt Gordon näher kennen, wie sie es sich vorgenommen hat, sie zieht bei ihrer Mutter aus und versucht, ein Erwachsenenleben zu leben. Sie will es besser machen als ihre Mutter. Aber sie hat kein eigenes Ideal und greift zurück auf Vorstellungen von Familie, die sie vielleicht eher aus dem Fernsehen kennt. (Hoehnepresse.de 5)

(Maggy works on her goals. As planned, she gets to know Gordon better, moves out of her mother’s apartment, and tries to live an adult life. She wants to do it better than her mother. But she does not have her own ideal and, therefore, falls back on perceptions of family that she might know from television.)

The often traditional representations of family on German television⁶⁵ influence the young mother to believe that a nuclear family is the ideal family situation. On one hand, Winckler’s statement suggests his own bias about a non-nuclear family situation, blaming Maggy’s mother, Eva, for not providing a nuclear family. On the other hand, he recognises the option for Maggy to choose another family ideal outside of the nuclear family once she is more mature, underlining the mother’s age as the main problem of her struggles, while dismissing Gordon’s influence on Maggy’s experience as a young mother.

family ultimately negatively influences her maternal experience as she feels forced to give Lucy to her mother by the end of the relationship with Gordon.

In the analysis of the Irish fiction film *Twice Shy*, both protagonists take a clear stand either in favour or against a nuclear family ideal. While Andy wants to create a nuclear family situation to give Maggie security, Maggie refuses this ideal. To avoid confusion, I hereby highlight that the young German mother Maggy is written with a “y”, and the young pregnant Irish woman, Maggie with an “ie”. In *Twice Shy*, the two main protagonists represent both support for and opposition to a nuclear family. As discussed before, Andy wants to convince Maggie to keep her baby and offers her the possibility of a nuclear family life as solution to her “problem”. In his mind, a strong family is all the young pregnant woman needs in order to accept her maternal role. His offer to act as substitute father without people knowing that the child is not his, shows that Andy still associates stigma and anxiety to young parenthood and he views the young single woman’s pregnant body in need of male protection, while Maggie rejects this view. Andy’s character, therefore, communicates the patriarchal viewpoint of Irish society that the young mother needs to be embedded within a nuclear family in order to mother adequately.⁶⁶

Maggie, however, refuses to accept this patriarchal family structure. Andy’s offer of support does not change Maggie’s determination to abort her pregnancy. For her, abortion is the only suitable option in regards to her future well-being. With this, the film offers a

⁶⁶ The supporting characters in *Twice Shy* generally hint towards a still traditional division of gender roles in rural Ireland. While Maggie’s father (Pat Shortt) takes care of the farm full-time, her mother (Niamh Hogan) is portrayed during merely domestic tasks, such as breakfast and gardening work. She has little dialogue in the film and the fathers of Maggie and Andy dominate the scenes when on screen. In contrast to Maggie’s father, Andy’s father (Ardal O’Hanlon) battles with depression. He has a local repair shop, earns little money and is divorced. While the hardworking husband (Maggie’s father) is able to keep his family intact, the depressed divorcee (Andy’s father) is the reason for his son’s struggles. Through this representation, the film suggests that the support of a strong father figure in its traditional understanding benefits the family and the well-being of one’s children.

novel approach to the topic of abortion in Irish film. As discussed in the previous chapter, it addresses the referendum that was building in 2015 and 2016 to repeal the eighth amendment, which prohibited women from having abortions in Ireland. The option of having a nuclear family is not enticing to Maggie, and the young pregnant woman is now able to express this refusal in Irish film. This representational break with the nuclear family ideal can be understood as part of the process of modernisation and secularisation in Ireland (González-Casademont 270). It challenges rigid traditional gender and family roles as well as allowing the female protagonist to decide against motherhood. *Twice Shy* reacts to societal changes via its renegotiation of ideologies attached to mother- and fatherhood. The film allows the young pregnant woman to fully break out of the ideal of a nuclear family, even though patriarchal structures are constantly offered to her by Andy.

I argue that *Twice Shy* does both enforce and question a nuclear family ideal. In contrast to the German documentaries and fiction film *Lucy*, the Irish film clearly positions the differing opinions in favour and against a nuclear family between the two protagonists, Andy and Maggie. While abortion is legal in Germany, in Irish film, Maggie's wish to have an abortion represents a novelty that mirrored a very specific moment in Irish history and led to the right to change the eighth amendment. While the young women discussed here both enforce and question a nuclear family ideal, they are not able to find an alternative that pleases both them and societal demands on mothers. Instead, their struggle frames young motherhood as not desirable and is mainly linked to challenges.

4.2.2. Mothering Outside of the Nuclear Family: *Am Himmel der Tag*, *Jelly Baby* and *Heartbreak*

The young mothers in the German feature film *Am Himmel der Tag*, as well as in the Irish short films *Jelly Baby* and *Heartbreak*, mother outside of a nuclear family. The films do not enforce the nuclear family as ideal. Instead, the young women are single mothers who do not seek a male partner. However, *Am Himmel der Tag* and *Jelly Baby* still position the young women in the domestic sphere and reinforce a traditional understanding of motherhood. In contrast, *Heartbreak* follows a neo-liberal ideal of womanhood, in which the young mother goes back to work. I argue that while the films successfully represent the young women outside of a nuclear family ideal, this living situation is still mainly linked to challenges for them and fixed gender roles persist outside of the nuclear family.

In the German feature film *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara does not seek a nuclear family structure, yet she prefers to follow a traditional ideal of motherhood that is located solely in the domestic. She decides to raise her child on her own but later has a miscarriage. While she is interested in having a sexual partner, she does not search for a father figure for her unborn child. For Lara, a nuclear family does not represent the ideal situation. Nevertheless, Lara's decision to become a full-time stay-at-home mother reinforces the traditional maternal stereotype that is placed within the domestic sphere. The young pregnant woman's priorities signify an ambiguous stance between female independence without a male partner and the inability to find one's identity outside of motherhood. While *Am Himmel der Tag* accepts an alternative to the nuclear family ideal, it still reinforces a traditional understanding of motherhood within the domestic sphere.

Both decisions, rejecting a nuclear family model and seeking motherhood that is primarily embedded within the domestic sphere, develop out of Lara's drive to set herself apart from her own mother. The mother-daughter pair represents two contrasting maternal versions. Her mother is seemingly the main breadwinner of the family, and work is her

primary focus, while Lara receives financial aid from her parents and quits university after conceiving her child. Furthermore, the marriage between Lara's parents is crumbling, and as a result, Lara does not see the necessity of entering into the same dynamic with a male partner. The contrasting mother-daughter pair resembles Adrienne Rich's outline of the "mother" and "counter mother" who both often serve as an exemplary role model for young women (Rich 247f.). While Lara embodies the "mother" who is placed within the domestic sphere, her mother represents the "counter mother" who does not depend on her husband, is intelligent and focuses on her work. In contrast to Rich's outline, however, Lara's being is not centered around a potential male partner. *Am Himmel der Tag* presents the stay-at home "mother," or in this case the pregnant woman, as the main protagonist with whom the audience will eventually try to identify. In contrast, the film frames the working mother as antagonist to Lara, who teaches her daughter that a nuclear family is not desirable.

I argue that while the German feature film, *Am Himmel der Tag*, does not represent the nuclear family as ideal situation for the young pregnant woman, the film still situates Lara in a domestic sphere that is traditionally associated with motherhood. While Lara decides in favour of full-time mothering, this choice mainly arises out of her desire to act against her mother's examples. Lara's embrace of a non-nuclear family situation, therefore, stems from a wish to break with the traditions of her parent's generation. At the same time, she is not able to fully break away from these traditional ideas of womanhood, as she is solely positioned in the domestic sphere once she is pregnant.

The analysis of the Irish short film, *Jelly Baby*, demonstrates the same tension between the acceptance of non-nuclear family structures and the need to position the young mother within the domestic sphere. Stacey's character transgresses traditional and non-traditional understandings of motherhood. She lives alone with her daughter, Lauren, and the short film mentions neither Stacey's parents, nor Lauren's biological father. The young mother

also does not try to create a substitute nuclear family. The only man Stacey sleeps with is represented as a threat to her daughter's happiness instead of the possibility of fulfilling a nuclear family ideal.⁶⁷ While *Jelly Baby* positions Stacey within a traditional, domestic sphere as a stay-at-home mother, the family structure breaks with the representation of the ideal, nuclear family.

Despite Ireland's long history of stigmatising and institutionalising sexually active young women, which was justified through the teachings of the Catholic Church, the contemporary film focuses on an independent young mother who has the option to live alone with her daughter in a secularised Ireland. At the same time, by placing Stacey in the domestic sphere, the film underlines traditionally perceived responsibilities of motherhood such as self-sacrifice and devotion to the maternal role. As Morales-Ladrón et al. argue: "cinema may act as a discursive space that reflects concerns and anxieties of a society, particularly in times of rapid change" (19). To counteract the threat of the dissolving nuclear family in contemporary Ireland, here the young mother is still reduced to the domestic sphere and is not able to find personal fulfilment outside of motherhood, as described in the previous chapters. I argue that *Jelly Baby*, on one hand, allows its protagonist to break out of a nuclear family ideal, yet, on the other hand, reinforces a traditional understanding of motherhood in the domestic sphere. This ambiguous representation both counteracts Irish anxieties of dissolving family structures and ascribes the young mother agency over her own family life.

The analysis of the Irish short film, *Heartbreak*, further demonstrates that, even though the young mother is able to mother outside of the nuclear family and is not positioned within the domestic sphere, traditional gender roles still apply. At the same time,

⁶⁷ While, in recent decades, a male character often supported the young pregnant woman (such as in films like *The Snapper* (Frears, 1993), in which Sharon is financially and emotionally supported by her father Dessie during and after her pregnancy), in *Jelly Baby* the young mother is able to live on her own without any male support.

Heartbreak promotes the importance of changing these gender roles, while, ambiguously, reinforcing them. In *Heartbreak*, YoungOne's family consists of her mother and, later, her son. While the narrative represents the young single mother somewhat sympathetically in *Heartbreak*, it blames the older single mother (YoungOne's mother) for the hardship of her daughter. The film particularly highlights YoungOne's mother's behaviour of going out at night as a reason for her daughter's troubles, as is suggested by the following extract of the voice-over, which is heard while YoungOne's mother stands staggeringly in the doorstep and YoungOne leaves in disgust (figure 32):⁶⁸

Kirwan Her ma made it home. She'll be early morning lucid. When ma is hazy, she lets YoungOne and friends sit in the box room, listen to tunes, smoking squidgy like cavemen [...]. The ma fuck does not give because she is well out of it. The daddy, the picture, well he has been out of it.

Kirwan's voice-over represents a male author judging the working-class single mother. This patriarchal point of view ultimately blames her behaviour for YoungOne's struggles, as Kirwan's voice-over implies that the inability to provide and care for her daughter ultimately leads to YoungOne's pregnancy. Furthermore, the voice-over in combination with the visual representation of YoungOne's mother in the doorway also suggests anxiety about single motherhood within the working-class family in Ireland and the effect it could have on female children. The absence of a traditional, nuclear family is represented as one of the reasons for YoungOne's hardship and the cause of young motherhood in *Heartbreak*.

⁶⁸ *Heartbreak* 00:00:43 - 00:01:03.



Figure 32 - *Heartbreak*: YoungOne's mother comes home in the morning after spending the night out, holding herself in the doorway, while YoungOne leaves the situation.

In contrast, the short film suggests that fixed gender roles at the same time lead to YoungOne's struggles. Her sexual passiveness, as described above, and the aggressive masculinity *Heartbreak* shows further enhance YoungOne's hardship. The short film suggests that gender roles must be redefined in Irish society. It indicates that while women need to find their own agency in order to be heard, men need to renegotiate their masculinity. The film, therefore, ambiguously condemns non-nuclear family structures, while, at the same time, criticising traditional gender definitions.

In *Heartbreak*, the behaviour of all men is ultimately disrespectful of women and only YoungOne's son holds the possibility of rising above the misogyny of Irish society in the future. Through witnessing his mother's struggles, he holds the key to a "feminine but benign masculinity" which can bring change to the experience of mother- and womanhood in Ireland, as the following narrative indicates:⁶⁹

Kirwan The boy sees this treatment [disrespectful behaviour towards women] in the street and from the state all his life. So, he decides to regulate. But YoungOne now fully grown tries to sate this rage

⁶⁹ *Heartbreak* 00:05:23 - 00:06:19.

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and build this young man, this young boy. He will be the best elements of femininity wrapped in a rebellious feminine but benign masculinity. The man she always hoped for. [...] From the instant that he achieves cognitive reasoning and a maturity, he will be the man to settle up the score and say: 'Here ma, you embody all that is good and are the one that I am fighting for. I'll never catcall. I'll treat and respect and help to create an Ireland that will stand in awe of all mná [women].'

According to the narrative, hope lies in raising future generations to treat women with more respect than previous generations did. The future male citizen has to overcome his male masculinity in order to develop a "feminine but benign masculinity" that allows a respectful treatment of women. It remains unclear what exactly a "feminine but benign masculinity" incorporates, and why this "feminine masculinity" needs to be "benign" at all. Highlighting that the feminine masculinity is in need of being benign indicates a limited acceptance of shifting gender understandings. It brings into question what a feminine masculinity would look like if it is not benign and whether a purely feminine masculinity is excluded from the narrative as it threatens given gender understandings too much. In *Heartbreak*, the understanding of the female struggle by men is vital in order to positively change the experience of woman- and motherhood in Ireland, and this understanding needs to be instigated by women.

I show that *Heartbreak* ambiguously reinforces gender stereotypes by blaming the working-class, single mother for her daughter's pregnancy, while promoting the need for changing gender roles at the same time. In particular, I argue that in all three Irish films discussed in this chapter, it is the female protagonist who rejects the nuclear family ideal. *Jelly Baby*, *Twice Shy* and *Heartbreak* highlight a changing attitude towards patriarchal structures and ideals in Ireland by either excluding the nuclear family ideal in

Jelly Baby, by questioning it in *Twice Shy* or by offering the need for new gender structures in *Heartbreak*. Here, I argue that the young women who mother outside of the nuclear family are still not able to escape traditional gender roles and are often placed within the domestic sphere.

4.3. Fatherhood

4.3.1. The Absent Father: *Vierzehn*, *Achtzehn*, *Am Himmel der Tag*, *Heartbreak* and *Jelly Baby*

I argue that contemporary German and Irish film representations of young motherhood suggest that fatherhood is optional, while the young mothers do not have this element of choice. The German documentaries offer the depiction of a variety of family structures, from the nuclear family to the young single mother, in all of which fatherhood is represented as optional. Also, in the feature films, the young mothers are the main caregivers of their children and are often supported by their own parents in German film. In Irish film, however, neither the young mothers' parents nor a male partner are of importance when it comes to raising their children. I argue that most of the contemporary German and Irish films represent this element of choice of the father as a challenge for the young mothers. Only the pregnant women from a middle-class background are able to choose not to involve the biological fathers.

The fathers in *Vierzehn* are either absent from the beginning or initially try to make nuclear family life work. Most of the girls will end up living in their parental home or at least receiving help from their parents, instead of co-parenting with their children's fathers. When the fathers first hear about their girlfriends' pregnancies, some choose to distance themselves from the situation. Steffi's boyfriend initially stops any contact with her to figure out how he wants to deal with the news and decides later that he wants to

support her; this element of choice is not available for the young mother. Lisa and her boyfriend both initially try to end the pregnancy. They try to induce a miscarriage by kicking and beating Lisa's pregnant stomach. Once her daughter is born, it is Lisa and her parents who care for the child. After the children are born, only Steffi's and Laura's respective boyfriends express an interest in them. When Laura and Steven's relationship breaks up, Laura remains the main carer for their child. Even though Fabienne's boyfriend explains how important it is for him to take care of Valentin since he himself grew up without a father, he does not show much support. The main caring responsibility falls generally to the young mothers from the beginning of their children's lives, and the young fathers are in a position to decide whether or not to assume their paternal responsibilities.

By the end of *Achtzehn*, all biological fathers live apart from their children. While the young mothers have to grow up quickly, this is not the case for the fathers, who are not expected to take the same amount of responsibility towards their children. The following dialogue between Laura, Steven and a state official shows that the father is in a position to decide whether or not he wants to care for his daughter:⁷⁰

Beamtin Weil die Vereinbarungen sie [Stella Luna] zu holen, am Dienstag oder Montag, ich weiß jetzt nicht mehr genau, einfach nicht eingehalten werden.

(**State official** Since the agreement to pick her [Stella Luna] up was simply ignored on Monday or Tuesday, I am not quite sure at the moment.)

Steven Das tut mir leid. Ich war in Coburg, ich hatte meine Lerngruppe. Das Studium muss auch so funktionieren und ich kann nicht während der Zeit dann nach Solberg runterfahren.

⁷⁰ *Achtzehn* 00:49:57 - 00:50:57.

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(I am sorry. I was in Coburg at a study group. College still has to work out and I cannot drive to Solberg during this time.)

[...]

Laura Ich mache auch Abitur nebenbei. Und es ist auch nicht immer leicht mein Kind zu betreuen und jemanden zu finden, vor allem wenn ich krank bin und Kursarbeiten anstehen. Und ich finde es sehr schade, dass ich dann so einen Vater habe, der sich nicht um das Kind kümmert.

(I am also doing my High-School certificate on the side. And it is not always easy to care for my child and to find somebody, especially when I am sick and exams are scheduled. And I think it is a pity that I have a father like this, who does not take care of his child.)

[...]

Steven Ich bin im Regelfall unter der Woche bei meiner Freundin in Coburg.

(Usually, I am with my girlfriend in Coburg during the week.)

Beamtin Das kann ich nicht nachvollziehen, Herr Butz. Also, wenn ich Umgang mit meiner Tochter möchte und es auch unter der Woche gehen würde, dann nehme ich mir eben den einen Tag frei.

(**State official** I cannot understand this, Mr. Butz. So, if I want to have contact with my daughter and it would be possible during the week, then I just have to take that one day off.)

This dialogue demonstrates that it is Laura who takes most of the caring responsibilities. At the same time, the young mother tries to finish school and struggles to always find help when she needs time for either herself or for her school work. The documentary

represents Steven, in contrast, as prioritising his college work over seeing his daughter. This further highlights the mothers' inability to choose whether or not they want to mother, while the fathers are largely absent from their children's lives.

In *Achtzehn*, the biological fathers are either represented as absent, threatening their former girlfriends to fight for custody of their children or make only a temporary appearance. The psychoanalyst Chodorow argues that while mothers are mostly the primary care-giver of their children, fathers are equally able to take over this role. However, the documentaries' representation reflects Chodorow's argument that, in fact, the father rarely functions as the primary parent (Chodorow 1). While in *Vierzehn*, the fathers were often absent, in *Achtzehn* they now especially represent a threat for Laura and Lisa. Both young mothers face the possibility of losing sole custody of their respective children, as the paternal grandmothers believe that they could take better care of the child. While Chodorow highlights the importance of the father's involvement in care-taking responsibilities, the paternal characters in the documentaries most often represent a threat instead of support for the young mothers. By the end of the documentary *Achtzehn*, Laura even goes so far to say that she could not imagine having another child with an actual partner but would prefer a sperm donation.⁷¹ According to Laura, this would mean she would not have to fight with another man for the custody of a child. Artificial insemination unlocks the possibility for Laura of mothering without male influence and without a threat to her custody of her child. Fabienne lives with Memo, who is not Valentin's biological father. Her patchwork family functions well, and Valentin accepts Memo as his new father. The sudden intervention of Valentin's biological father, however, comes as a disruption to the quasi-nuclear family and threatens their happiness. The documentaries often represent the biological fathers as

⁷¹ *Achtzehn* 01:31:15 - 01:31:29.

unreliable and, in some cases, they even constitute a threat. With this, the documentaries suggest that their non-involvement furthers the hardship of young motherhood.

Only the biological father of Steffi's child, Jason, takes care of his son regularly, even though he is still a guest in their lives and makes only a temporary appearance. *Achtzehn* represents this temporality via the depiction of a passing train.⁷² While Jason waits for his father to pick him up later in the day, he and Steffi wait on the rails of a railway station (figure 33). In the scene, Jason expresses his longing for his father and his joy to see him soon. His presence becomes the adventurous exception in Jason's life. According to Steffi, he promises to bend the rules and spoils him in contrast to the structured life at home with his mother who enforces more rules. While the documentary represents mainly the young mother's point of view, the father's point of view is largely excluded and mainly mediated via the mother's perspective. According to the young mother, the temporarily absent father tampers with the rules she has established and has a greater ability of choosing when to father or not.



Figure 33 - *Achtzehn*: Jason talks about the fact that his father arrives later, while watching passing trains.

⁷² *Achtzehn* 00:04:50 - 00:05:41.

Both *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, represent young fatherhood as optional, whereas young mothers are not able to choose whether or not they want to mother. I argue that in the documentaries, the fathers are either absent, a threat or only temporarily available. This absence influences the young mothers' perception of their own ability to mother negatively, as they are forced to take on almost all responsibilities for the children. With this, the documentaries highlight the challenges for the young mothers and do not depict young single motherhood as desirable. This representation is mainly based on interviews with the young mothers, while the fathers are not able to fully express their side of the story.

The analysis of the German fiction film, *Am Himmel der Tag*, further demonstrates how the absent father is represented in contemporary German fiction film. The young man in *Am Himmel der Tag* does not know about Lara's pregnancy and neither the biological father, Christoph, nor a substitute father plays an important role in Lara's life. Only her own father gives her some support for her pregnancy, by defending her in front of her mother and by helping her to renovate her flat for the arrival of the new-born. It is Lara's decision to exclude Christoph from the pregnancy and potential fatherhood. She tells him only partially about her pregnancy after her pregnancy loss. Otherwise, Lara is merely curious about Christoph's interests and hereditary diseases and does not seek a relationship beyond the unintended conception, as the following dialogue between Lara and Christoph shows:

Lara Ist das (Barkeeper) eigentlich das was du machst oder machst du nebenbei noch was anderes?

(**Lara** Is this (being a barman) your main job, or are you doing something else on the side?)

Christoph Ähm, ich studiere, Literaturwissenschaften.

(**Christoph** Uhm, I study, literature.)

[...]

Lara Machst du das eigentlich öfters, so, Sex haben mit Mädchen, die du nichts kennst?

(**Lara** Do you do that often, have sex with girls you don't know?)

Christoph Eigentlich nicht.

(**Christoph** Not really.)

Lara Hast du 'ne Freundin?

(**Lara** Do you have a girlfriend?)

Christoph Vielleicht.

(**Christoph** Maybe.)

Lara Keine Sorge, ich hab' kein Interesse.

(**Lara** No worries, I'm not interested.)

Christoph Danke.

(**Christoph** Thanks.)

Lara Wie heißt'n du eigentlich?

(**Lara** Actually, what's your name?)

Christoph Christoph, du?

(**Christoph** Christoph, yours?)

[...]

Lara Und hast du eigentlich irgendwie so Erbkrankheiten in der Familie?

(**Lara** Actually, do you have any kind of genetic diseases in the family?)

Christoph Wird das 'en Verhör, oder? ... Nein, ich glaub' nicht.

(**Christoph** Is this an interrogation, or what? ... No, I don't think so.)

Lara Cool. Ähm, darf ich?

(**Lara** Cool. Uhm, can I?)

Christoph Klar.

(Christoph Of course.)

[Lara takes a photograph of Christoph.]

Lara Danke für den Drink und für den Sex.

(Lara Thanks for the drink and for the sex.)

[Lara leaves.]⁷³

As this dialogue demonstrates, Lara is neither interested in a relationship with the biological father of her child, nor does she intend to tell him about the pregnancy. While Kaplan describes that the father becomes the new hero in the parenting role during the 1980s and early 1990s (*Motherhood* 200), this is not the case when it comes to young fatherhood in the contemporary German and Irish films discussed in this chapter. Instead, Lara breaks away from the patriarchal necessity of having a man in the house, and the one-parent household remains Lara's accepted family model.

Lara chooses not to tell Christoph about the pregnancy. In contrast to the German documentaries, in which the fathers have the choice whether or not they want to be involved in their children's lives, in *Am Himmel der Tag*, Lara can decide whether or not she wants him to know about the pregnancy. I argue that this element of choice gives her complete agency over the situation and consequently leaves the young father oblivious. Lara is only able to make this choice because she is financially supported by her parents and, therefore, does not necessarily need a partner.

The analysis of the Irish short films show that in *Heartbreak*, the father chooses to leave, and that in *Jelly Baby*, he is not mentioned at all. In *Heartbreak*, the biological father, Sean, is absent from YoungOne's life after impregnating her. The father's absence is not chosen by YoungOne, but imposed by the father's refusal to take responsibility, financially and emotionally. The short film only represents him briefly before YoungOne

⁷³ *Am Himmel der Tag* 00:27:35 - 00:29:11.

conceives their son. After this, he does not appear on screen anymore. As Sean's visual absence after conception and the following narrative extract from the voice-over demonstrate, he consciously chooses not to father his son:

Kirwan She does double take and sees Sean. She feels she likes this one boy because he didn't shout. No. YoungOne is special, young fella said. She always thought her first time would be in a bed. Not a wet patch of grass with the dog barking at the back end of where two housing estates meet. And I think when he said it, he meant it, he truly did. Cause he's not like all the other boys. But he is still just a boy who's pulling out late and now pulling out early.⁷⁴

YoungOne initially likes Sean because he is quiet and does not actively pursue her. The narration suggests that it is generally accepted that boys and men, whether aggressive or not, pull out of a relationship, when consequences arise. In contrast, the short film represents that the girl's only option is to suffer the full consequences of the sexual encounter without the help of a male partner. Here, *Heartbreak* vilifies Sean, while highlighting the hardship that paternal refusal brings for young mothers.

The absent father in *Heartbreak* chooses not to father, while YoungOne is not in the position to make the same decision. This supports Kaplan's findings that "fatherhood is chosen, not demanded, as motherhood is" (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 197). The short film does not represent Sean any longer after the conception of their child, and Kirwan's voice-over blames the young father for leaving. I argue that his absence is especially represented as a cause of hardship for YoungOne, as all caring and financial responsibilities lie on the young mother.

In contrast, the short film, *Jelly Baby*, is the only film discussed in this chapter that does not mention a father figure, whether biological or non-biological. Stacey has

⁷⁴ *Heartbreak* 00:01:25 - 00:01:52.

seemingly raised Lauren on her own, and the only male character in the film constitutes a threat to the mother-daughter pair, as described in Chapter 2. The short film mentions the father's absence in neither a negative nor in a positive context. In this way, the short film rejects traditional family models and allows its protagonist to mother within a single-parent household, excluding the necessity of a male breadwinner. Nevertheless, the absence of the young father in *Jelly Baby* presumably furthers Stacey's financial struggles. As the short film entirely deletes the paternal character from its representation, it is not clear whether or not the father decided to leave his family, or whether or not the young mother left him instead. In *Jelly Baby* all caring responsibilities lie on the mother, while the father is absent.

I argue that most of the young fathers have the option of leaving their families. Only in the German fiction film, *Am Himmel der Tag*, does the young mother decide not to tell the father about the pregnancy. The Irish short film *Jelly Baby* uniquely offers no representation of a paternal character. Most films, but *Am Himmel der Tag*, link the father's absence to the struggles of the young mothers. The contemporary German and Irish films largely exclude young fatherhood from their representation, and mainly highlight the responsibilities that lie on the young mothers instead.

4.3.2. The Substitute Father: *Lucy* and *Twice Shy*

Lucy represents fatherhood as optional, and Maggy is the main carer of her child, supported by her own mother, Eva. The film represents fathers as either partially absent or too irresponsible to take long-term care of their children. The introductory scene shows that Maggy ended her relationship to Lucy's biological father, Mike (Ninjo Borth), as she believes that he failed to take adequate care of Lucy.⁷⁵ The substitute father Gordon, with

⁷⁵ *Lucy* 00:00:03 - 00:01:28.

whom Maggy creates a quasi-nuclear family later in the movie, is at first enthusiastic about living together with his girlfriend and her daughter but quickly realises that his expectations do not match the reality of taking care of a baby. Even though Gordon initially tries to father Lucy, and Mike repeatedly asks about her, offering Maggy a place to stay when she moves out of Gordon's apartment, fatherhood is represented as an option for both young men, and the main caring responsibility remains with either Maggy or Eva.⁷⁶



Figure 34 - Lucy: Lucy and Gordon move in together. In the background hangs a poster that depicts beer bottles and states: "Life is full of difficult decisions".

The poster in Gordon's apartment (figure 34), which pictures various beers and states the slogan "Life is full of difficult decisions" underlines his privilege of having choices as a man. The depiction of the beers connect the meaning of the poster with a traditional masculinity. While the slogan itself mirrors Gordon's ability as substitute father to choose fatherhood, the depiction of the beers, at the same time, introduce a satirical take on the slogan. The connection between choosing fatherhood and choosing a specific brand of

⁷⁶ Maggy, in contrast to the paternal characters, is not in a position to choose motherhood. The only option she has is to temporarily give Lucy to her own mother. While she tries to do so later in the film, to rescue the relationship with Gordon, who does not want to live with a child anymore, she revises this decision in the following scene, not being able to fully detach from her daughter.

beer render the slogan partially invalid, and calls into question whether or not the substitute father makes his decision to stay in a paternal role lightly. By doing so, the film attributes an element of doubt to the representation of the substitute father, indicating that he can choose to leave at any time.



Figure 35 - Lucy: Maggy catches Gordon playing video games and wearing headphones, while Lucy screams in her room.

Lucy depicts taking care of the child as a solely female task, while the film represents the care of the substitute father as inadequate. Lucy's main carers are either Eva, Maggy or the woman in the day-care centre and, therefore, they are all female. Whenever Maggy leaves Gordon alone with Lucy, the child is not properly cared for. The film represents the substitute father as preferring to play video games, wearing headphones that do not allow him to be aware of his surroundings. When Maggy comes back from doing the laundry in her mother's apartment, she hears Lucy screaming in her room. The camera takes Maggy's point of view, seeing Gordon sitting at his desk and ignoring the child (figure 35), before she rushes angrily into the child's room to soothe Lucy.⁷⁷ With this scene, the film judges Gordon's need for personal time, as he ignores the screaming child, and underlines Maggy's disappointment in the partner she trusted with her child. *Lucy*

⁷⁷ *Lucy* 00:50:01 - 00:50:36.

represents female characters as the main carers of the child and the only ones who are able to do so adequately. I argue that the German film *Lucy* depicts the substitute father as a temporary presence who at any time is able to choose whether or not he wants to leave. The film attributes an element of doubt to the substitute father and portrays his lack of caring abilities as an additional struggle for the young mother, Maggy.

In the Irish feature film, *Twice Shy*, the substitute father only presents a potential paternal character, as Maggie decides to have an abortion. Andy offers himself as potential substitute father in the case that Maggie decides to have the child, while the biological father, Brian (Ben Harding), is absent once the child has been conceived. The personal development of the potential substitute father, Andy, plays an important role within the narrative of *Twice Shy*. It is crucial in order to positively change the experience of having an abortion for Maggie. His supportive attitude, however, develops only gradually during the film, as he initially keeps his distance from Maggie, in order not to tell her about his father's depression and suicide attempt. Chodorow argues that "[m]en grow up rejecting their own needs for love, and therefore find it difficult and threatening to meet women's emotional needs. As a result, they collude in maintaining distance from women" (Chodorow 199). Andy keeps his distance from Maggie due to his struggle to deal with his own emotions. Before he is able to offer Maggie his support, he must face his personal conflicts about his father's depression. The reprocessing of his father's difficulties and the fear of losing him leads to Andy's ability to support Maggie in her decision to have an abortion, giving him the strength to volunteer as substitute father, if required. This development suggests a need for Andy to come to terms with his own struggles in order to gain emotional maturity. The film suggests that this emotional maturity can create a more empathetic society when it comes to abortion and young motherhood. Therefore, *Twice Shy* indicates that, while women need to lead the initiative,

change in Irish society is ultimately linked to the actions of the next generation of men, represented by the substitute father, Andy.

Twice Shy represents both fatherhood, biological and substitutional, and motherhood as a choice. As Maggie is part of the middle class, she has the financial ability to go ahead with the abortion in a foreign country, whereas the other young pregnant women in Irish film are not able to do the same, as described in the previous chapter. While Andy perceives a nuclear family situation as ideal outcome, he ultimately does not try to force his opinion on Maggie and gives the young pregnant woman space to make her own decision. In contrast to either the biological father or the potential substitute father, she faces more obstacles by refusing to mother, and feels that she needs to keep her pregnancy, as well as abortion, a secret. In *Twice Shy* both motherhood and fatherhood are optional for the protagonists of the film, due to the financial stability of the middle-class character.

I demonstrate that, in *Twice Shy*, the substitute father is an important character to support the journey of the young pregnant woman. As described above in relation to *Heartbreak*, also in *Twice Shy* men are responsible to change attitudes in Irish society, while women need to initiate this change. Again, the substitute father is able to choose whether or not he wants to be involved in the potential family. I argue that both films, *Lucy* and *Twice Shy*, represent the substitute father as temporary support for the young women, while they ultimately either leave or challenge them. In both films, this restricted support negatively influences the young women's maternal experience and does not represent young single motherhood as desirable.

4.4. Conclusion

Both contemporary German and Irish film position the young women outside of a nuclear family ideal. Some films reinforce this ideal, while questioning it at the same time. The young mothers in the German documentaries especially underline the importance of parental support, before wishing to create a nuclear family with their male partners. While in the German fiction film, *Lucy*, Maggy tries to create a nuclear family, in the Irish fiction film, *Twice Shy*, Maggie, the young pregnant woman refuses to do so. The other German and Irish films do not depict the nuclear family as ideal, yet still reinforce traditional gender roles.

While Kaplan mainly describes the emergence of the nurturing father who desires to care for the child in the 1980s, contemporary German and Irish film represent a different paternal figure in relation to young motherhood. Fatherhood in the family of the young mother can be divided into two categories, the substitute, non-biological father and the absent, biological father. Both are in the position to choose whether they want to father or not, while the young mothers do not always have this choice. The absent father either decides to leave his family or the young pregnant woman does not want the father to be involved in her life, as seen in *Twice Shy* and *Am Himmel der Tag*.

I show that, in the German documentaries, some of the featured young mothers perceive the nuclear family as an ideal, while most girls prefer to live with their parents in order to gain more support with their children. Living in a nuclear family situation with the biological fathers of their children, in contrast, pressures the young women to fulfil both caring and household work. Yet, the young mothers feel a societal pressure to live within heteronormative family and gender ideals, and therefore, most of them initially try to create a nuclear family with their male partners. The documentaries suggest that the biological fathers do not guarantee their support. While the fathers are present in their children's lives at the beginning, most of them are either absent, threaten to fight the

young mothers for custody and/or only appear temporarily in their children's lives. Only one substitute father, Memo, is a constant in Fabienne's and Valentin's lives. In *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, some of the young parents try to create a nuclear family in order to fulfil a societal ideal of parenthood, while most of the biological fathers left their families by the end of *Achtzehn*.

While the German fiction film, *Lucy*, positions the young mother outside a nuclear family ideal, living with her mother at the beginning of the film and moving out of Gordon's apartment at the end of the film, Maggy still perceives the nuclear family as the ideal model. During the time when Maggy and Gordon momentarily create a quasi-nuclear family, they follow a traditional heteronormative gender division with Gordon as the breadwinner of the family and Maggy as main carer. For the young mother, this quasi-nuclear family signifies an important step towards adulthood. Gordon represents a substitute father, who is able to leave the family at any time without consequences. This is also the case for the biological father of Lucy. While mostly women care for Lucy, the film depicts paternal caring abilities as inadequate. In *Lucy*, the young mother tries to create a nuclear family in order to fulfil heteronormative family ideals. These attempts, however, end in Maggy's return to her mother, due to the substitute and biological father's inability to care for the child.

Am Himmel der Tag, in contrast, breaks with the ideal of the nuclear family. The young pregnant woman chooses the absence of the father and plans for a one-parent household. Lara is driven by the mistakes of her parents and represents a counter-image of her own mother, in particular. While her mother focuses on career and is stuck in an unhappy marriage, Lara chooses to quit her studies in order to mother full-time and without a male partner. She is only able to do this due to her position within a somewhat wealthy middle-class family that supports her financially. Therefore, while the young pregnant woman refuses a nuclear family ideal, she still follows a traditional maternal ideal. The film

positions her solely within the domestic sphere, as seen previously in *Lucy*. Uniquely, in *Am Himmel der Tag*, the young pregnant woman decides that the biological father should not be involved. She chooses his absence, while he is not aware of the pregnancy. In contrast to the German documentaries and the German fiction film *Lucy*, Lara does not try to fulfil societal family ideals, yet still is unable to position herself outside of a traditional understanding of motherhood in *Am Himmel der Tag*.

In the Irish feature film *Twice Shy*, Maggie also refuses to create a nuclear family situation. In contrast to the German film, however, Maggie rejects motherhood completely. While *Am Himmel der Tag* positions Lara within the domestic sphere, fulfilling a German ideal of motherhood, Maggie decides to have an abortion, fulfilling a neo-liberal ideal of womanhood that concentrates on work instead of motherhood. This representation of abortion constitutes a novel approach in Irish film and addresses the referendum to repeal the eighth amendment that paved the way in Ireland to legalise abortions. While the paternal figure advocates a nuclear family ideal and is against abortion, the young pregnant woman challenges traditional family expectations. In contrast to the rest of the films discussed in this chapter, *Twice Shy* constitutes the only film in which parenthood is not just optional for the father, but also for the mother. The substitute father's personal development, however, is important in order to enable Maggie's journey in *Twice Shy*. In contrast to the Irish young mothers from a working-class background, Maggie's privileged position from a middle-class family financially allows the young pregnant woman to have an abortion in England. The Irish feature film *Twice Shy* especially frames young motherhood in a novel context in Irish film, highlighting the importance of having access to abortion in order to gain agency and have a choice.

In *Heartbreak*, YoungOne is not financially able to travel to England to have an abortion and is, therefore, forced to deliver her child. In contrast, the biological father is

able to leave his family without consequences. The short film vilifies the paternal character by focusing on YoungOne's hardship and highlights the fact that both quiet and aggressive men do not take on paternal responsibilities. *Heartbreak* communicates an ambivalent take on traditional gender roles and the ideal of the nuclear family. While the film depicts fixed gender roles, such as the passive female and predatory male behaviour, as a reason for YoungOne's struggles, the recurrence of single motherhood over two generations is blamed for YoungOne's pregnancy. On the one hand, the film's message is that traditional gender roles must be overcome by Irish society in order to help women gain agency. On the other hand, the film anchors YoungOne's pregnancy within the narrative of a broken family, in which YoungOne's mother is condemned for going out at night.

While YoungOne in *Heartbreak* lives alone with her son and works, Stacey in *Jelly Baby* lives alone with her daughter and is positioned within the domestic sphere. By living outside of the ideal of a nuclear family and not promoting it as such on the one hand, and by being placed in the domestic sphere on the other hand, Stacey combines traditional and non-traditional aspects of motherhood. This mirrors the representation of young motherhood in the German feature film, *Am Himmel der Tag*. Both films refuse to present the nuclear family as the ideal model for the young women, while at the same time emphasising that full-time maternal care is important. The embeddedness within traditional gender roles to some extent counteracts anxieties of dissolving family structures in both countries. *Jelly Baby* is the only film that does not mention a father. It is not clear whether or not the father chose to be absent. Nevertheless, all responsibilities lie on the young mother. The working-class mother especially struggles with the financial burden of young motherhood, and she does not seem to receive any financial aid from a potential father. While *Jelly Baby* allows its protagonist to break out of a nuclear family ideal, young motherhood is still merely linked to challenges for Stacey.

In this chapter, I analyse young motherhood in relation to the mothers' family situation, and especially the role of the father, in contemporary German and Irish films. While fathers became more important in American mainstream film in the 1980s, the young biological fathers in independent German and Irish film are absent, and substitute non-biological fathers are only temporarily part of the young mothers' lives. Only *Memo*, in the German documentaries, represents an exception to this. The absence of the young father in the European films is consonant with Mollborn's and Lovegrove's finding that teenage fatherhood is underrepresented, even though I define young fatherhood as being 25 years or younger. As they point out, "there are many teenage fathers, and they are largely invisible in public discourse" (3), including representations outside of film. Only *Lucy* offers the depiction of a substitute teenage father, and *Twice Shy* offers a potential substitute father. While the ideal of the nuclear family still persists in both contemporary German and Irish film, they either question it or represent young mothers outside of this ideal. The European films mainly link young motherhood to paternal absence, and especially the German documentaries and the German fiction film, *Lucy*, highlight the inability to sustain a nuclear family life in a somewhat negative context for the young mothers.

Section II:

Ambivalent Mothers

in Contemporary German and Irish Films

5. Ambivalent Motherhood and The Impossible Triangle: Motherhood, Work and Sex

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that contemporary German and Irish films represent ambivalent motherhood, work and sex as incompatible. The films' representation vilifies both the working and the non-working ambivalent mothers and connects sex either with trauma or represent it as emotional currency. With this, I further aid my argument that European film does neither depict non-traditional motherhood, such as maternal ambivalence, as desirable nor as beneficial for the mothers. I bring a contemporary European focus to E. Anne Kaplan's analysis of American mainstream film, in which she defines six maternal discourses that emerged in the 1980s. I further define a category that was not considered before by Kaplan: the representation of ambivalent motherhood. Based on a feminist epistemology, this second section of the thesis on ambivalent motherhood is comprised of a comparative case study of three films per country and six films in total. While Kaplan argues that filmic representations rarely combine motherhood, work and sex in American mainstream film, I demonstrate that contemporary German and Irish films suggest that both work and sex negatively influence the maternal experience.

Elsewhere, Kaplan describes the incompatibility of motherhood, work and sex in American mainstream film as "impossible triangle" (Kaplan, "Sex" 409). She argues that:

If the patriarchal imaginary has to a degree accommodated woman's new-found sexual freedom in recent years, and has accepted woman's needs for work, new anxiety arises from the changed reality that childbirth and child care no longer signify either that woman need stay in the home, or that she be married and sexually monogamous. ("Sex" 413)

While contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional maternal characters, their representation of both work and sex in combination with ambivalent motherhood mirrors these anxieties. I show that ambivalent motherhood is presented as incompatible with both work and unemployment, and that the films frame the sexuality of the ambivalent mother in a negative context.

I supplement the textual analysis of the films with matricentric feminist literature by Shari L. Thurer, Rozsika Parker and Orna Donath. These historical and psychoanalytical approaches enhance the sparse literature on filmic maternal ambivalence in European cinema. While Thurer unravels the myths of motherhood, Parker and Donath analyse ambivalent and regretting motherhood respectively. As I am analysing ambivalent maternal characters who feel regret, and not specifically regretting motherhood, I further supplement the textual analysis with Christina Mundlos' sociological account that shows how regretting motherhood was reframed as ambivalent motherhood in a German context (Heffernan and Stone, n.p.). This interdisciplinary approach demonstrates that contemporary German and Irish films represent ambivalent mothers as struggling with both work and sex.

The chapter consists of two substantive sections focused on work and sex in contemporary German and Irish films. These sections discuss work and sex separately and in detail before the conclusion highlights how the triangle between motherhood, work and sex in the films of both countries can be understood. The section on work shows that ambivalent mothers in the Irish and German films are both blamed for being employed and for being unemployed. While the employed, regretting mother is part of the upper middle class in German film and of the lower middle class in Irish film, the unemployed, ambivalent mother battles with addiction and/or financial support in both countries. "Good" mothering seems incompatible with both work and unemployment in the films. Therefore, I argue that the representation of the ambivalent mother excludes both

employment and unemployment as option to achieve the status of the “good” mother. In the section on sex, I show that while sexuality functions as endorsement and currency in the German films, the representation of the Irish films connect sex to trauma and the loss of a child respectively. The films represent sex as problematic for the ambivalent mothers. This further vilifies them in the German context and serves as an excuse for their ambivalent feelings in the Irish context. Excusing their ambivalence, however, proves highly problematic since it does not acknowledge maternal ambivalence as acceptable emotion. In both contemporary German and Irish film, motherhood in combination with either work or sex, or both, is not desirable and is mainly linked to challenges for the ambivalent mothers.

5.2. Work

5.2.1. The Working, Ambivalent Mother: *Regretting Motherhood*, *Montag kommen die Fenster*, *Snap* and *Mammal*

I argue that motherhood and work are represented as incompatible. While *Regretting Motherhood* neither mentions the mothers’ occupation nor states work explicitly as a reason for their feelings of regret, the documentary still frames a woman’s threefold burden of combining caring-, occupational- and household work as a key struggle.⁷⁸ One of the mothers mentions the perception that other mothers are able to combine work with motherhood effortlessly, while still having time to clean the house and to play with their children.⁷⁹ She perceives this threefold burden as something she should be able to do to

⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the documentary does not supply a marital status within its description of the women, which could help to distinguish whether feelings of regret are felt differently by married and single mothers in connection to their workload.

⁷⁹ *Regretting Motherhood* 00:07:30 - 00:07:48 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

be a “good” mother. This perception mirrors the struggle of many German mothers who are unable to reject certain demands of their maternal role. The sociologist Mundlos argues in an interview with the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*:

Die Mütter [...] haben sehr hohe Anforderungen an sich und übernehmen die gesellschaftlichen Erwartungen eins zu eins. Sie können es nicht mit ihrem Selbstbild vereinbaren, ihre auferlegte Rolle abzulehnen und ihre Mutterschaft nach eigenen Bedürfnissen und Kräften auszurichten. (Simon)

(The mothers [...] are setting themselves very high standards and adopt societal expectations one-to-one. They cannot connect the refusal of the imposed role and the adjustment of motherhood to their own needs and strengths with their self-perception.)

In the documentary, the mother communicates that the societal demand to clean, care and work does not allow for sufficient free time for her or for a space to express her struggle. Society does not acknowledge her feelings of exhaustion. This reinforces an unrealistic and idealistic picture of motherhood and increases emotions such as shame within those women who feel ambivalent about their maternal role.⁸⁰

I argue that even though *Regretting Motherhood* does not explicitly state the mothers' occupations, one of the mothers still communicates motherhood and work as incompatible. Combining motherhood, work and housework especially enhances the mother's maternal ambivalence in the documentary. Grimme and Hoffmann mainly represent this incompatibility via interviews with the ambivalent mothers. Here, the

⁸⁰ The taboo of discussing maternal struggles exists in every social class in Germany (Mundlos 25). In the documentary, the social status of the mothers is not directly mentioned as the women are not visible on screen and their work or living spaces are not clearly distinguished. Grimme and Hoffmann mention in an interview with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that they did indeed interview mothers from several economic backgrounds for the documentary. To secure their anonymity, they did not mention the occupation of the final group of mothers (Mamer). The directors selection process as well as Mundlos' findings show that maternal regret and ambivalence exist regardless of class divisions and challenge the myth of maternal fulfilment.

documentary does not represent maternal ambivalence as desirable and mainly links it to challenges that arise because of societal pressures, such as the threefold burden of mothering, having a career and adequately caring for a household.

In the fiction film, *Montag kommen die Fenster/Windows on Monday* (Köhler, 2006), the ambivalent mother uses her job to escape from her private life. As the analysis shows, Nina (Isabelle Menke) intends to disconnect work and private life, while the film suggests that Nina's work life is potentially threatening her child's wellbeing. In the film, Nina tries to detach her work life from her life at home. She works as a doctor in the nearby hospital, while her husband, Frieder (Hans-Jochen Wagner), stays at home, looking after their daughter, Charlotte (Amber Bongard). While Nina tries to separate her work and maternal life, it will unintentionally intermingle during the film, when Frieder brings Charlotte to the hospital in which Nina works. Nina disapproves of her husband's decision to bring their daughter to a place that is associated with a sense of death and pain. At the same time, Nina's work is usually the only place in which she is able to disconnect from her maternal role. Frieder's attempt to show Charlotte the hospital interrupts this disconnection between work and maternal life.

In the first scene of *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the camera shows Nina's discomfort with having her daughter at work, and the potential threat that work signifies for the child's wellbeing.⁸¹ The scene introduces Charlotte in a doctor's gown, walking around the hospital with Frieder. The camera follows the pair through the corridor in a close-up shot. This slow movement stops with the cut to a slightly wider shot of Frieder and Nina discussing Charlotte's visit to the hospital. The camera starts moving again with the characters, coming to a halt with Nina and then allowing her to step into the room in which Frieder and Charlotte are now playing with the medical utensils (figure 36). As

⁸¹ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:00:11 - 00:02:14 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

soon as Nina fully enters the room, a cut to another scene prevents her and her daughter from interaction in front of the camera. During the scene, the camera visually separates Charlotte and Nina, while Charlotte and her father are constantly forming a visual unit. The fact that Charlotte wears a hospital gown and, later, lies on one of the hospital beds, playing with the medical instruments, creates a vanitas symbol that indicates the fragility of the family and a potential threat to the child's wellbeing. As Nina stays outside of the close bond between father and daughter, the scene indicates the working, ambivalent mother, who chose not to mother full-time, as this threat.



Figure 36 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Nina enters the hospital room in which Charlotte and Frieder play.

In particular, Frieder perceives Nina's work as a threat to her ability to mother, as he believes her to prioritize work over motherhood. While Frieder is a stay-at-home father, he sees Nina's job as a hindrance to her role as a mother, and he pushes her to be emotionally available for Charlotte even during her time at work, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

Nina Kannst doch Charlotte nicht hierherbringen. Was denkst du dir denn dabei?

(You can't bring Charlotte here. What were you thinking?)

Frieder Na, sie wollte dich sehen. Die freut sich auf deinen Urlaub.

Kira J. Collins

(Well, she wanted to see you. She is looking forward to your holidays.)

Nina Ich arbeite noch.

(I am still working.)

Frieder Die wollte sehen wo du arbeitest.

(She wanted to see where you are working.)

Nina Und was sieht sie hier?

(And, what is she seeing here?)

[Nina leaves the room. Frieder sighs.]

In the scene, Frieder tries to redirect Nina's interest from work towards motherhood and does not understand her frustration with the situation. His aversion against Nina's reluctance to care for Charlotte, especially later, when she has time off work, creates a constant point of conflict between the couple. The sociologist Donath argues in an interview about social acceptance and taboos with the German newspaper *TAZ* that the binary understanding of motherhood or work fails to account for women's complex realities and excludes the wish to thrive in neither (Halser). In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina's unhappiness with both her maternal role and her job supports Donath's comment. Here, the representation of the ambivalent mother shows that often women neither want to mother nor want to have a career, while societal understanding situates them within a binary understanding between prioritizing either work or motherhood.

While Nina is neither happy with work nor motherhood, the work space still becomes somewhat of a retreat for her. It allows her to break away from her maternal life for a short while. In fact, it is only during her holiday that she is not able to bear family life in the suburbs anymore and escapes for several days to the woods, searching for solitude. When Nina decides to return to her old life, work functions as an in-between stage that slowly re-introduces her to her everyday life, as the film depicts Nina back at work prior

to returning to her family. The liminal stage of reintegration through the work sphere, therefore, ultimately allows her to return to her maternal life in the suburbs. While she neither enjoys motherhood nor work, the option of leaving the house and her maternal role temporarily makes the work space an important factor for the mother's acceptance of her life within the nuclear family. Here, I argue that, in the German fiction film *Montag kommen die Fenster*, it is important for Nina to detach work and maternal life. While this is essential for the ambivalent mother to accept her life within the nuclear family, Frieder judges her for this need. He blames her for not exclusively focusing on Charlotte. This judgement further highlights my argument that work ultimately negatively influences the maternal character's feelings of ambivalence, as Frieder's blame induces feelings of guilt in Nina.



Figure 37 - *Snap*: Sandra asks Stephen to mind his grandfather, when he comes back from the hospital.

The Irish feature film, *Snap* (Winters, 2010), in contrast, does not represent work as an important part of Sandra's life. Nevertheless, the film indicates Sandra's work commitments as cause of his son's suffering. In *Snap*, Sandra's job as a nurse does not seem too important to her. The film neither portrays Sandra (Aisling O'Sullivan) at her work place nor does she reference her work. Solely her clothes are an indicator of her job as nurse (figure 37). While Sandra works within a caring, medical position, she is not able

to emotionally connect with her son, Stephen (Stephen Moran). Sandra's work functions as a financial necessity for the single-parent household and leads to her decision to leave her son with his grandfather (Pascal Scott). When his grandfather is able to leave the hospital, Sandra is not able to care for him full-time, due to her work commitments. She, therefore, asks Stephen to temporarily move back with him, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

- Sandra** I spoke with the doctor last night ... that your granddad might be able to come home soon.
- Stephen** When? When is he getting out?
- Sandra** Depends on if there is someone there to mind him or not. I told them there was no room here but ...
- Stephen** But? But what?
- Sandra** You like it, don't you? Being back at your granddads.
- [...]
- Stephen** I'm not moving back over there.
- Sandra** I didn't say anything about moving back, not permanently.
- Stephen** I'm not doing it. End of story. He doesn't fucking want me anyway.

This dialogue transpires in the same scene that represents Sandra in her working clothes, linking work and motherhood in an area of tension.⁸² Here, *Snap* introduces the ambivalent mother's work as an enabler of Stephen's suffering.

This representation of work as a threat to the child conforms with Kaplan's description of the fear of changing gender roles and can be understood as a re-negotiation of the domestic sphere during the Irish recession. Clare O'Hagan argues that there is a counter

⁸² *Snap* 00:58:00 - 00:59:50 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

reaction in Irish society against progressive feminist ideas that blames feminists and working mothers for social problems (13ff.). As in Kaplan's description of the working mother, this counter reaction hints at social anxieties surrounding the contemporary liberalisation of the mother's place in the home and her progression towards becoming an active member of the public sphere respectively. In *Snap*, the mother's need for day-care, due to work commitments, opens up the opportunity for the child's mistreatment by his grandfather. Society blames the working mother for her son's concerning behaviour and ultimately sanctions her by forcing her into isolation, instead of the two male perpetrators of the film; Stephen as the kidnapper of the toddler (Adam Duggan) and his grandfather as sexual predator. While *Snap* gives voice to a working, ambivalent mother in Irish film, it, at the same time, implies that the old value of stay-at-home motherhood could have prevented harm to the child and thus averted Stephen's abduction of the toddler. I argue that *Snap* creates a problematic tension between the ambivalent mother's work commitments and her ability to mother. The film communicates her absence as enabling Stephen's suffering and, with this, exposes a fear of changing gender roles in Ireland. Therefore, the film represents work as a factor that can lead to maternal ambivalence, which is not represented as a desirable emotion.

In the Irish feature film, *Mammal* (Daly, 2016), work enables the ambivalent mother's ex-husband, Matt (Michael McElhatton), to contact her. I show that the public work place leaves her vulnerable to his attempt to evoke maternal memories, even though Margaret (Rachel Griffiths) does not want to remember the past. In *Mammal*, Margaret's work does not seem to be an important part of her life and functions as financial necessity to survive rather than the pursuit of a career. Therefore, it is unlikely that a job opportunity caused Margaret to leave her former family. While her former husband's financial ability to take his son on a holiday to Miami suggests that she lived a financially secure life in the past, she settles for a low wage job afterwards. Even though *Mammal* suggests that Margaret's

absence causes harm to her child, as described later in this thesis, the film does not represent her work as a threat to Patrick. Like the women in Donath's argument above, Margaret refuses both motherhood and the option of having a career.

Mammal represents Margaret only briefly at work. In these scenes, the work space becomes a place of connection between her and her former husband instead of a space dedicated to labour.⁸³ Margaret's public work place in a charity shop allows her former husband to repeatedly seek contact with her, reminding Margaret of the life she left behind when her son was still a baby. The first time Margaret is in her shop, her colleague tells her that a man tried to reach her. As the audience will learn later, this man is her former husband, Matt. When he comes by her place of work for a second time, he is able to inform Margaret about their son's missing. Later, when Patrick's death is confirmed, Matt brings his son's clothes into Margaret's shop. It is only later in the film that she is able to refuse her ex-husband's demands of seeking contact, telling her colleague to lie for her by pretending that she is not in the shop. Margaret's place of work ultimately exposes her to Matt's attempts of sparking maternal memories and feelings. Through this representation, *Mammal* connects the work sphere with Margaret's unwillingness to mother Patrick.

The second time Matt comes by the charity shop, the camera shows Margaret's face and hands in a close up, fixing a dress in front of the shop window.⁸⁴ In the background, her former husband crosses the road in order to meet her in the shop. The focus shifts from Margaret to her husband when he approaches her, focusing on him instead of her (figure 38). This focus mirrors their parental role divisions, with him as primary carer, and her as absent mother. In the scene, her face rotates away from the camera, looking at

⁸³ *Mammal* 00:03:13 - 00:04:13, 00:05:46 - 00:06:14, 00:52:27 - 00:53:54, 01:17:13 - 01:17:52 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to Volta.ie specifications).

⁸⁴ *Mammal* 00:05:46 - 00:06:14.

him as he is about to announce that their son is missing. While she has been living alone and detached from her former family for many years, her husband, as a reminder of the past, ultimately forces her back into the maternal role she wished to escape. This leaves her with little agency, as Matt decides the time and place when he wants to confront her with her son's tragedy. He drops Patrick's remaining clothes to the shop, forcing Margaret to deal with the death of her son at work, and has the power to restrict her grief, as he tells her not to come to the funeral. The public work place leaves Margaret vulnerable to her husband's contact and creates tension between work and motherhood, even though Margaret has not mothered Patrick for many years.



Figure 38 – *Mammal*: Matt shows up unannounced at Margaret's work to tell her that their son, Patrick, is missing.

I argue that while work in the German feature film, *Montag kommen die Fenster*, allows the mother to return to and tolerate her life at home, in the Irish film *Mammal*, the work space needs to be reclaimed in order to gain autonomy over her life. In both German and Irish films, family members heavily sanction the ability to detach from family responsibilities through work. As in the Irish film *Snap*, the ambivalent, working mother becomes the scapegoat for everything negative that happens to her child. While these ambivalent mothers are indeed represented in connection with both work and motherhood, the films create a strong tension between the two spheres. They suggest that

working, ambivalent mothers are not able to mother adequately. With this, the films do not represent ambivalent motherhood as desirable.

5.2.2. The Non-Working, Ambivalent Mother: *Madonnen* and *Glassland*

The scapegoating of the mother who feels ambivalence is also the case for unemployed mothers, as I argue below. In particular, the ambivalent mother's affiliation with the working class, frames her unemployment in a negative context for the child. In *Madonnen/Madonnas* (Speth, 2007), Rita (Sandra Hüller) does not work and receives social welfare after being released from a penal institution, in which she served time for stealing.⁸⁵ She represents a contrast to the accepted stay-at-home mother, who is financially supported by a working husband. Thurer argues that society often perceives state-dependent mothers with several children as “parasites” (297). Since Germany has one of the lowest birth rates in Europe and has the nuclear family as its ideal, a mother of five who financially depends on social welfare is less common and thus considered less acceptable, from a societal point of view (Ute). Rita, therefore, represents a challenging protagonist for the audience, who does not try to find work, and who does not have the option to marry a wealthier husband who can support her financially. Rita's unemployment in the context of being a single mother with several children from different partners makes her an outcast.

Rita's mother, Isabella (Susanne Lothar), is the main carer of the children during the times that Rita is either unwilling or unable to mother them herself. In contrast to her daughter, Isabella is a working mother who neither had time to take care of Rita when she was a child nor has she time for her grandchildren latterly. Mirroring the previous

⁸⁵ In the German federate state Hesse, in which the film is set, there are penal institutions to which mothers can bring their children as long as the children are not yet required to attend school (Bundesministerium der Justiz, “§80” and “§142”). These penal institutions are less restrictive than prisons, and some inmates are able to spend regulated times outside of the institution.

analysis on working, ambivalent mothers, Isabella's job becomes the main point of conflict between her and Rita, as well as a problem for the grandchildren. When one of the girls wants to have a birthday party, it is Rita's oldest daughter (Luisa Sappelt) who deals with the parents.⁸⁶ The absence of Isabella is met with discomfort by the father of one of the children attending the birthday party, as the following dialogue shows:

Ein Vater Wo ist denn deine Mutter? ... Ja, ich ... ich weiß ja nicht so recht, ob ich die Kinder hierlassen kann.

(A Father Where is your mother? ... Well, I ... I don't know, whether or not I can leave the children here.)

Funny Meine Großmutter kommt bestimmt gleich nach Hause. Wollen Sie warten?

(My grandmother will be home soon. Do you want to wait?)

Ein Vater Nein, ich kann nicht. Ich hab' noch 'en Termin, weißt du.

(A Father No, I can't. I have a meeting, you know.)

The fact that Isabella is in work and does not supervise the children creates disagreement with the other parents, and a feeling of suspense for the audience. Both mothers, Rita and Isabella, in their own ways signify a threat to their children's wellbeing. While *Madonnen* frames the combination of motherhood and work as problematic for the children, it highlights the social unacceptability of state-dependant, multiple motherhood. Here, I argue that *Madonnen* represents both work and state-dependency as incompatible with motherhood. While the working, ambivalent mother is blamed by society and/or family for "neglecting" her child due to work commitments, the non-working, ambivalent mother is vilified in both Irish and German films.

⁸⁶ *Madonnen* 00:28:20 - 00:29:04 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

In the Irish film, *Glassland* (Barrett, 2015), Jean (Toni Collette) is especially blamed for harming her children. Her inability to work is the reason for the family's financial struggle and the reason for her children's hardship in life. Even though *Glassland* does not explore the interplay between work and motherhood in depth, the representation still underlines my argument that *Glassland* represents maternal poverty in a working-class context as incompatible with "good" mothering. In *Glassland*, Jean is not actively working. This pushes her oldest son, John (Jack Reynor), in the role of the breadwinner. While she has a job in a kitchen, she is not able to fulfil her tasks due to her alcoholism. The financial responsibility lies solely on her son, which involves the payment of the daily bills and her rehabilitation costs of €8,000. The single-parent household in *Glassland*, therefore, is financially dependent on the son. In a neo-liberal economy such as Ireland, work is especially highly valued, while a single mother who is unable to financially support her family contradicts this idea. Jean's inability to pursue her job functions as the reason behind John's financial struggles and his involvement in crime, as further described in Chapter 7. *Glassland* represents the alcoholic, non-working mother who feels regret towards her youngest son, Kit (Harry Nagle), as a threat to her oldest son, John. Her inability to work or mother, due to her alcoholism, ultimately pushes him into crime and a life of worry in *Glassland*.

I argue that both the working and the non-working mother is blamed for harming her child in contemporary German and Irish films. In particular, the non-working, single mother forces her children into an economically unstable situation from which they struggle to escape. In the films, motherhood is neither compatible with work nor with the unemployment of a working-class mother. Whenever one of the films represents both work and motherhood tension arises and maternal ambivalence is framed as an undesirable emotion.

5.3. Sex

While there are clear parallels between the Irish and the German films regarding work, the representation of sexuality in combination with ambivalent motherhood proves to be rather different in the two film cultures. Therefore, I analyse the sexuality of the ambivalent mother first in the German films, highlighting its function as endorsement and currency. Afterwards, I discuss the Irish films, revealing sexuality as linked to trauma. Even though there is a clear difference between the German and Irish films, they still both represent an incompatibility of motherhood and sex. This suggests that Kaplan's impossible triangle still exist in a contemporary European film context. While Kaplan argues that American mainstream film does not represent motherhood in combination with both sex and work, the European films in this chapter highlight the incompatibility of motherhood with either work or sex for the ambivalent mothers.

5.3.1. Sexuality as Endorsement and Currency: *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Madonnen*

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the relation between motherhood and sex changes with Nina's temporary refusal to mother. While the couple have a fulfilled sex life at the start of the film, this changes with Nina's admission to feeling maternal ambivalence. At the start of the film, Nina and Frieder are depicted as having an active and enjoyable sex life, as the couple lie entwined in each other's arms in their bed (figure 39). This first sex scene will be the only scene during which the married couple represent a close physical and emotional connection, as it is the only sex scene before Frieder is confronted with his wife's unhappiness.⁸⁷ The interruption of the scene by Nina's brother (Trystan Pütter)

⁸⁷ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:03:44 - 00:03:58.

indicates from the start that this connection will not last. Nina quickly redirects her focus away from her husband to support her brother, who needs a place to sleep, having been thrown out of his girlfriend's apartment due to his unfaithfulness. In this first sex scene, *Montag kommen die Fenster* introduces a seemingly happy couple, while indicating struggles that will ultimately lead to an unfulfilled sex life, and an unhappy marriage, for both parties. In particular, Nina's feeling of maternal ambivalence triggers their problems in bed and in their marriage.



Figure 39 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Nina and Frieder lie entwined in each other's arms.

In the final scene of *Montag kommen die Fenster*, after Nina returns from her escape in the forest, Nina and Frieder try to be intimate again.⁸⁸ The comfort of the house during the first sex scene is replaced by a mattress in the back of a van, as the couple reconnects after the funeral of the neighbour's boy. Unlike in the first sex scene, both the occasion of a funeral and the performance of the act create an emotional distance between husband and wife, indicating the barrier between the pair that was created through Nina's leaving. The formerly entwined bodies become visually heavy as they do not complement each other's actions, staying awkwardly pinned to the ground (figure 40). After Nina's

⁸⁸ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 01:23:30 - 01:26:45.

unsuccessful attempt to help with Frieder's erection, the couple is left sexually and emotionally frustrated as the film ends. While Nina was able to have a fulfilled sex life when she kept her feelings to herself, she is not able to connect with her husband any longer after acknowledging her ambivalent feelings, presenting sex and ambivalent motherhood as being incompatible.



Figure 40 - Montag kommen die Fenster: Nina and Frieder attempt to have sex in the car.

For Frieder, maternal love “becomes a sign of respectable femininity, and of maternal qualities narrated as the capacity to touch and be touched by others” (Ahmed 124). While Nina feels ambivalent about motherhood and does not want to be pregnant again, Frieder's ex-girlfriend, Maria (Ursula Renecke), is a caring kindergarten teacher who loyally helps him to furnish his new house during Nina's escape in the forest. When Nina returns, Frieder struggles to accept that his wife is back in their lives, wishing for his ex-girlfriend to replace her, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

- Frieder** Ich war bei Maria.
(I was with Maria.)
- Nina** Ich hab' nichts gefragt.
(I didn't ask.)
- Frieder** Ich will mit ihr zusammen sein. [Lange Pause] Ich gehe schlafen.

(I want to be with her. [Long pause] I am going to bed.)

While it is understandable that trust is broken in the couple's relationship, the narrative punishes the ambivalent mother for her choice of leaving her family. Maria as the caring female becomes the object of desire for Frieder. In contrast to Nina, she enjoys children, working in a kindergarten. Furthermore, her name Maria, the German version of Mary, evokes religious connotations of the Virgin Mary and thus serves as a reminder of an idealistic understanding of the "good" mother. Frieder is able to enjoy himself with Maria, while the sexual act with his wife, who acknowledges her maternal ambivalence, becomes impossible for him. I argue that *Montag kommen die Fenster* represents sex and ambivalent motherhood as incompatible. Only the woman who enjoys mothering is sexually desirable for Frieder. The film suggests that, for men, women need to be caring in order to be desired. By doing so, the film, on the one hand, criticises a contemporary, patriarchal understanding of womanhood, and, on the other hand, visually reinforces it, depicting ambivalent motherhood as undesirable.

In the analysis of *Madonnen*, sex becomes a currency and a way to secure male support for the ambivalent mother. While motherhood is an unwanted burden for Rita without a male partner, she repeatedly uses sex and motherhood as a currency to secure a partnership. In *Madonnen*, sex is suggested twice between Rita and her boyfriend Marc (Coleman Swinton). While she is generally shown as a sexually liberal woman who enjoys to flirt with men in the night clubs, her sex life with Marc is passive and the actions clearly driven by him. Before the couple sleeps together for the first time, Marc brings Rita furniture for her new apartment.⁸⁹ After rolling over the new couch together, Rita finally allows Marc to kiss her, even though she is reluctant to do so initially. Marc's heavy body hovers over her, while she clenches her hands, partially protecting herself from the sexual encounter, partially enjoying the closeness to him. Rita is placed on the

⁸⁹ *Madonnen* 00:52:10 - 00:57:08.

lower half of the screen, while Marc is placed higher within the composition, visually dominating the female body. Sex becomes a form of gratitude and payment for Marc's generosity and seems to be the only currency the ex-prisoner is able to offer until she receives state benefits.

Even though Rita starts enjoying herself and laughs loudly while on the couch, a close intimacy does not develop between the couple. They rarely speak to each other and keep a certain physical distance (figure 41). In general, Rita struggles with intimacy, as she never seemed to experience it in her own family. Therefore, she begins to laugh whenever a closeness occurs between her and either Marc or her biological father and his family, such as in the dinner scene when Rita visits her father.⁹⁰ The normality of the shared food makes her uncomfortable and she starts to laugh loudly, irritating the other family members at the table (Pilarczyk). In both scenes, on the couch and at her father's dinner table, Rita is confronted with the possibility of human connection and is offered a kind gesture by the people around her. These relationships, however, are alien to her, which is why she creates her own catharsis through laughter when intimacy arises.



Figure 41 – *Madonnen*: Marc gifts a couch to Rita and wants to show her how comfortable it is. Rita, however, feels uncomfortable with the gift.

⁹⁰ *Madonnen* 00:08:28 - 00:10:15.

The second scene in which Marc and Rita sleep together follows a fight between the couple.⁹¹ Wanting to reconcile with Marc afterwards, Rita drives to his apartment in the barracks. Both sit on the bed, exchanging few words until Marc starts to undress Rita.⁹² The medium shot shows Rita facing the camera, while Marc sits behind her, facing the left side of the frame. While Rita still sits with her back to him, he starts to undress her, pulling her gently towards him and onto the bed (figure 42). Rita slightly resists this gesture but quickly gives in. The scene cuts to a wider shot after they have finished having sex, showing Rita lying naked on Marc's bed. As he is having a shower, she vanishes without saying goodbye. While sex is used as a form of payment in the first scene, it becomes a form of reconciliation in the second. Both times, sex is a form of currency to either thank the man who provided her with furniture or to save their relationship. The fact that the scene cuts to a close-up of Rita crying at the bus stop especially underlines the pressure she feels to use her body in order to secure Marc's attention and help.⁹³



Figure 42 – *Madonnen*: Marc undresses Rita and pushes her towards him to lie on the bed.

⁹¹ Marc's decision to allow one of his friends to cut the hair of Rita's son leads to a fight between the couple. Rita feels overlooked in her parental decisions, making clear that Marc has to run all decisions about the children by her. Being angry, she throws Marc and his friend out of her apartment.

⁹² *Madonnen* 01:34:03 - 01:36:27.

⁹³ *Madonnen* 01:36:28 - 01:37:13.

Sociologist and Gender Studies scholar Martina Klett-Davies interviewed 70 lone mothers living on social welfare in the UK and Germany. In her book, she defines a welfare dependant lone mother who has several children with different partners as “serial mother” (128). According to Klett-Davies’ findings, the serial mother tries to stabilise a relationship through pregnancies, giving her the feeling of being in control and enhancing her self-worth within the relationship. While Vanessa May criticises Klett-Davies for using the individualisation theory as framework for her study, which only allows for a small sample size and “directs attention away from a critical examination of socioeconomic background” (May 52), in *Madonnen* Rita seems to seek exactly this stability through her pregnancies with various men. Motherhood becomes the result of the sexual exchange and the necessity to please men in order for Rita to protect her own short-term wellbeing. She repeatedly tries to create a stable family situation. This is especially indicated when she attempts to create a family with her boyfriend Marc and all of her children. Even though she is not pregnant with Marc’s child, the relationship suggests the structure of her former relationships and her struggle to create stability. By the end of the film, she is not successful in securing a long-term partnership, and motherhood becomes an unwanted burden. Motherhood for Rita ultimately occurs outside of an active desire for it and is based on a sexual exchange that functions as a tool to secure a male partner, mirroring Klett-Davies’ argument about the serial mother.

I argue that in the German films the male characters endorse female characters by finding them sexually attractive. While the caring female is especially attractive to the male character in *Montag kommen die Fenster*, he does not desire the woman who expresses maternal ambivalence. Furthermore, sexuality becomes a currency for the ambivalent mother from a working-class background. Through sex, Rita reconciles with her male partner and shows her gratitude for his financial support in *Madonnen*. In both

German films, the ambivalent mother is unable to have a positive sex life. This supports my argument that the films represent ambivalent motherhood as undesirable.

5.3.2. Sexuality and Trauma: *Snap* and *Mammal*

In *Snap*, Sandra tries to gain control over her experience of being sexually assaulted by her own father in the past. While she suppresses this memory most of the time, it comes to the surface in certain gestures and behaviours, during which she somewhat re-enacts the past that she tries to forget. This is especially visible when Sandra is supposed to re-record her formerly documented statements for the documentary.⁹⁴ One of the filmmakers shows Sandra and her friend the footage on television to re-record the material. The footage is edited and shows a repeated shot of Sandra rubbing her hands between her legs in slow-motion, while talking about her son and father. She is shocked by her own words and the way the filmmakers edited her gestures, further sexualising her appearance and unknowingly hinting to her trauma. Sandra's inability to accept that she actually made certain statements in front of the camera and the realisation that it is impossible for her to create her own truth in this way makes her question the idea of setting the record straight via this approach. The fact that the documentary team consists of two men further situates Sandra in a patriarchal power structure she wishes to escape, as they have the final control over her voice. Despite Sandra's attempt to suppress her trauma and to gain agency by telling her side of the story, she is pushed back into an object position in which she is at the mercy of the male gaze (Leahy).⁹⁵

Also, Sandra's sexual act with an older man represents her wish to gain control over her traumatic past. She is once shown to have sex, when she sleeps with the older man

⁹⁴ *Snap* 00:54:11 - 00:57:07.

⁹⁵ The camera played an important role within the sexual abuse, as her father filmed and stored his abusive behaviour on tape.

whom she picks up at a fast food restaurant.⁹⁶ In the scene, Sandra tries to maintain a control she did not have during the assault by her father. This time, Sandra tries to be in charge of the sexual encounter, demanding that the older man fully undress, that he leave the light on and that he approach her in a specific manner (figure 43). For a brief moment, Sandra embraces the man, but quickly feels disgusted by the physical closeness and throws him out of the apartment. After the sexual encounter, she is left dissatisfied, as she is not able to gain closure by re-enacting her suppressed past. Even though, in the scene, sex enables Sandra to gain temporary agency over the older man, she is ultimately unable to gain agency over her own memories and life.



Figure 43 – *Snap*: Sandra orders the older man to leave the light on, while he tries to cover his naked body in front of her.

Even though *Snap* represents sex in combination with motherhood, which is unlike Kaplan's description in American mainstream film, motherhood and sexuality do not exist harmoniously but collide. In *Snap*, the sexual assault by her own father subjects the ambivalent mother to negative associations regarding sex. This mirrors Rosa González-Casademont's argument that sexuality is not usually represented in Irish film, unless it has negative connotations (264). These negative connotations in Irish film include

⁹⁶ *Snap* 00:41:42 - 00:44:14, 00:44:46 - 00:45:35.

“trauma, perversion, paedophilia, and social and political tension”, according to Fintan Walsh (16). In particular, a strong influence of the Catholic Church historically suppressed sexuality in Ireland, and its teachings shaped a negative association with the sexual act. While the continuously emerging scandals of sexual abuse by Catholic priests are subject to many recent debates, *Snap* particularly represents a story of sexual abuse within the family. This sexual abuse within the family is the source of Stephen’s idea of kidnapping a toddler, as he uses the child to re-enact his own trauma, and, therefore, the source of Sandra’s hardship. Stephen uses the child to partially re-enact non-sexual memories with his grandfather in the house, while watching old video tapes of the sexual assault in front of the toddler. In *Snap*, it is not the mother’s house that is the “cradle of evil,” as Sandra ironically calls it, but sexuality, which is the source of Sandra’s and Stephen’s trauma.

I argue that in *Snap*, the sexual abuse of the grandfather triggers Sandra’s and Stephen’s hardship. In particular, Sandra’s attempt of gaining control over her abusive past ends in disappointment both times. She is unable to gain satisfaction by controlling the old man she sleeps with, and she realises that she ultimately has no control over the filmmaking process of the documentary. All sexual references in the film, are a reminder of the sexual assault by her father that ultimately lead to her difficult relationship with her son. Sex and motherhood is, therefore, incompatible in *Snap* and sexuality enhances Sandra’s ambivalent feelings towards motherhood.

While *Snap* connects sexuality with sexual assault within the family, also *Mammal* implies an incestuous context. In *Mammal*, sexuality represents a way for Margaret to deal with her past, and to negotiate the loss of her child. In the film, Margaret sleeps once with the much younger Joe (Barry Keoghan).⁹⁷ Even though the pair is not actually mother and son, the character constellation positions Margaret as Joe’s substitute mother.

⁹⁷ *Mammal* 01:11:06 - 01:15:43.

She cares for the much younger boy, lends a room to him in her home and dresses him in her son's clothes. Before Margaret and Joe sleep with each other, Margaret tries to lose consciousness in the bathtub. By doing so, she intends to erase her feelings about her biological son's death and her ambivalent feelings regarding her maternal absence during his life. Joe introduced Margaret to this technique, as he practiced it many times himself in order to deal with his own difficulties in life. When Joe finds her in the bathtub, he comes to help her to faint. After regaining consciousness, the pair comforts each other by having sex in the bathtub, giving in to a sexual desire that has developed throughout the film. Here, sexuality serves as a valve for the mother's ambivalent feelings about her absence and a possibility of temporarily reconnecting with her lost son. *Mammal*, therefore, links sexuality to Margaret's somewhat traumatic experience of her son's death and offers her a way to negotiate her maternal ambivalence.

Mixing maternal feelings with sexuality is generally a taboo in Western society. As the psychoanalyst Parker contends regarding a sexuality between mother and child:

[T]he uncertainty and unease mothers feel at the presence of sexuality between themselves and their children are not only due to potential perversity, but also to the cultural split maintained between the mother and the sexually desiring woman.

Maternity is understood to be the end-product, *not* the site of sexuality. (292)

The Irish film *Mammal* challenges this taboo by allowing its protagonist to combine both spheres in a relatively safe space that hints at incest but ultimately cannot be qualified as such. While incest is rarely portrayed on screen in Irish film (González-Casademont 271), in *Mammal* the quasi-incest is shown in close-up (figure 44). The scene is reminiscent of former oedipal conflicts in Irish cinema such as in Neil Jordan's *The Miracle* (1991) in which a son sleeps with his mother in order to overcome her absence when he was a small boy. In *Mammal*, in contrast, the focus lies on Margaret instead of on Joe or Patrick. Here, it is the mother who tries to overcome her ambivalent feelings towards her son's death,

while the closeness between her and Joe will later be punished by her ex-husband. Therefore, the Irish film offers the audience an oedipal conflict with a spin that focuses on the ambivalence of the maternal character, instead of the child, combining maternal feelings and sexuality.



Figure 44 – *Mammal*: Margaret and Joe have sex in the bathtub.

The Irish film theorist Conn Holohan argues that contemporary Irish cinema represents young women as sexually liberal characters, but it is seldom the mother who is represented in this way (Holohan, *Cinema 75*). *Mammal*, in contrast, defines the maternal character as sexually liberal. The sex between Margaret and Joe challenges both the idea of the abstinent mother and that of the sexually liberal woman. On the one hand, it somewhat breaks with the taboo of incest, as described above. On the other hand, it negatively reverses the idea of liberal sex to a scenario that might have gone too far, questioning the power structures between the significantly older Margaret and the young boy. By doing so, the film embeds the representation of the sexually active, ambivalent mother within a challenging context for the audience.

I argue that the Irish films do link the sexuality of the ambivalent mother to trauma. While *Snap* links sex to Sandra's sexually abusive past, *Mammal* connects sex with the death of Margaret's son. Here, *Mammal* offers an alternative version of the oedipal triangle, as the film focuses on the mother, instead of the child. In both films, sex enhances

the mothers' feeling of ambivalence, and this ambivalence is negatively perceived by society and family. This representation aids my argument that ambivalent motherhood is undesirable in contemporary Irish films and that they represent motherhood and sex as incompatible.

5.4. Conclusion

I argue that while contemporary German and Irish films occasionally represent motherhood with both work and sex, this combination negatively influences the women's maternal experiences. In all films, motherhood is ultimately presented as being incompatible with work and sex. This shows that Kaplan's finding of the "impossible triangle" with regard to mainstream American film is equally valid for the European film context. While *Montag kommen die Fenster*, *Snap* and *Mammal* represent the mother in relation to both work and sex, the combination of the three aspects creates tension for the ambivalent mothers. Both *Regretting Motherhood* and *Madonnen* only combine two of the three aspects; motherhood and work in *Regretting Motherhood*, and motherhood and sex in *Madonnen*. The Irish film, *Glassland*, constitutes the only film that does not position the ambivalent mother in relation to either work or sex.

In the German fiction film, *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina is unhappy with work, motherhood and her marriage. While she initially tries to hide her discontent in front of her husband, she ultimately breaks out of her everyday life by temporarily leaving her family. Frieder emotionally punishes her for being a working mother and for temporarily rejecting her settled life. In Frieder's opinion, Nina's work threatens their child's wellbeing, while Nina needs her work place to be able to detach from her family life. In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina's work sphere ultimately becomes an escape for her and stands in direct competition to her ability to mother. While Frieder was sexually

attracted to Nina before she openly admitted her unhappiness, this changes with her temporary refusal to come back home. For him, only the caring female is sexually attractive, while the ambivalent mother is not able to enjoy sex in *Montag kommen die Fenster*. With his film, Köhler criticises the narrow understanding of “good” motherhood in German society and makes the incompatibility of motherhood with both work and sex visible.

The Irish film *Snap* also combines motherhood, work and sex in a problematic triangle, illustrating the struggle of society with working mothers. Work for Sandra is a financial necessity and one of the reasons why she supposedly failed in her maternal role. Due to her work commitments Sandra was forced to give her child into the care of her father who sexually abused her son. Work represents a threat to the child, while stay-at-home motherhood could have protected Stephen. In *Snap*, sexuality becomes the “cradle of evil” and, in combination with work, is the cause of the mother’s hardship. While Irish film historically represents sex in a negative context, *Snap* connects sex to Sandra’s and Stephen’s traumatic past over which the ambivalent mother unsuccessfully tries to gain control. The ambivalent mother is unable to escape a patriarchal power structure and is unable to fully gain agency over her traumatic, sexually abusive past in *Snap*.

In the Irish film *Mammal*, motherhood, work and sex are also incompatible with each other. Margaret’s work in a public space allows her ex-husband to contact her personally. Through the work space, Matt reminds Margaret of her now lost son, which evokes confusing maternal feelings for her. The public place ultimately becomes a vulnerable space, in which she cannot hide from her former life as a mother. Also, *Mammal* links sexuality to a traumatic experience for Margaret, the death of her son. In order to negotiate her ambivalent feelings towards her son’s death and her absence, she sleeps with the much younger, Joe. This quasi-incest challenges the audience on the one hand, and represents

an altered version of an oedipal conflict, on the other. Here, the oedipal conflict focuses on the ambivalent mother instead of the child.

The German film *Madonnen*, represents ambivalent motherhood in combination with sex, while Rita is unemployed. She lives on social welfare and has five children with several partners. This situation contrasts the German ideal of the financially stable nuclear family with a husband as breadwinner and makes Rita a social outcast. The representation of the ambivalent mother in both *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Madonnen* suggests that her employment status does not hugely influence the regret a mother feels towards her role but that it is merely an additional factor that can cause social anxiety and stress for the ambivalent mother from a working-class background. While sexuality functions as a form of currency to secure a male partner, Rita only desires motherhood in conjunction with this security. In general, intimacy is awkward for the ambivalent mother, and Rita struggles to emotionally connect with other people.

While the German documentary, *Regretting Motherhood*, does not mention sex, the mothers in the documentary express their struggles with being responsible for family, household and work. The threefold burden represents an idealistic picture of motherhood by society and reinforces an unrealistic expectation on mothers. According to one of the mothers interviewed in the documentary, her impression that other mothers seem to combine motherhood with work easily, increases her own feelings of insufficiency. Therefore, the documentary suggests that an open discussion regarding the struggles to combine motherhood with work is essential in order to empower ambivalent mothers.

In the Irish film *Glassland*, Jean does not combine ambivalent motherhood with either work or sex. She equally represents a threat to her child, as the other ambivalent mothers in the German and Irish films do. Her inability to work, due to her alcoholism, is the cause of her son's financial struggles. While I only briefly analyse *Glassland* in this chapter,

the film will be of more importance in the following chapters. There, it offers a valuable insight into maternal ambivalence in contemporary Irish film.

This chapter demonstrates the relation of ambivalent motherhood to work and sex in contemporary German and Irish film. In the filmic representations of both countries, the combination of these three aspects is problematic yet represented within three of the six films discussed. While the Irish films express national struggles, such as paedophilia, sexual abuse and alcoholism, through the representation of the ambivalent mother, the German films highlight the vilification of the mother who wishes to escape the ideal of the nuclear family with the husband as breadwinner. In both the German and Irish films, the maternal characters understand their positioning as mother and express an active wish to escape this role, while family and society punish this desire. The contemporary German and Irish films do not represent the combination of motherhood, work and sex as desirable and mainly link it to challenges for the ambivalent mothers.

6. Ambivalent Motherhood: Challenging Maternal Ideology

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that ambivalent motherhood in contemporary German and Irish films challenges two maternal ideologies: natural and sacrosanct motherhood. By doing so, the films do not represent maternal ambivalence as desirable and mainly link it to challenges for the mothers. Here, I further define how European films represent ambivalent motherhood, rethinking E. Ann Kaplan's maternal definition on American mainstream media that did not include a description of the ambivalent mother. The ambivalent mother adds a contemporary European category to Kaplan's findings.

Matricentric feminist literature by Orna Donath and Shari L. Thurer aid the textual analysis of the films, enhancing the sparse literature on ambivalent motherhood in European film.⁹⁸ Due to the fact that I analyse the motivations of the maternal character in regards to her inner drives and to her individual circumstances within her cultural setting, I combine psychoanalytical and sociological texts. While Donath focuses on regretting motherhood, Thurer illustrates the myth of motherhood in a historical context. Further, matricentric feminist literature by O'Hagan allows a more country-specific insight into ambivalent motherhood for Ireland. This chapter demonstrates that in all of the films discussed, mothers challenge maternal ideologies, such as the idea of maternal love as natural female emotion and the idealised image of sacrosanct, altruistic motherhood.

I argue that the ambivalent mother challenges maternal ideologies, such as natural and sacrosanct motherhood. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two parts: one dealing with

⁹⁸ As further described in the introduction of this thesis, it is important to note that in the German context the lines between ambivalence and regret are blurred and not as defined as in Donath's publication.

natural imagery and the other with religious imagery, insofar as they relate to the ambivalent mother. In the first part of the chapter, I argue that the contemporary German and Irish films both challenge and confirm the myth of maternal love as natural instinct. In particular, the ambivalent mother represents a contrast to the natural imagery, such as landscapes, the forest, a connection between water and the womb and the reference to primal instincts. In the second part of this chapter, I demonstrate that three of the films depict the ambivalent mothers as anti-Madonnas who oppose societal ideals of motherhood. In consequence to their refusal to follow societal norms, the ambivalent mothers are framed as “bad” mothers in both cases. I argue that European film represents ambivalent motherhood as undesirable and mainly illustrates their challenges with maternal ideologies.

6.2. Mother Nature

6.2.1. Landscapes: *Regretting Motherhood*

By admitting their feelings of regret, the mothers in the German documentary *Regretting Motherhood* actively challenge the myth of unconditional maternal fulfilment that is widely perceived as being natural. I argue that the documentary challenges this myth through the mothers' testimonies and through the use of tranquil landscape scenes that stand in opposition to the mothers' accounts. This opposition highlights the mothers' struggle and communicates that maternal ambivalence is not part of the ideal image of motherhood that circulates in German society.

Due to the mothers' wish to remain anonymous, Grimme and Hoffmann had to substitute the visual component of the documentary with footage other than the portrayal of the mothers. In line with Corner's description, this substitute footage remains “subordinate to verbal discourses, acting in support of their [...] arguments, which they

[the verbal discourses] can frequently only partially ‘confirm’” (29). The voice-overs of the mothers are supplemented by the depiction of landscapes such as trees, mountains, and the ocean (figure 45). These tranquil scenes contrast with voice-overs that express inner turmoil and a rather urban way of life, in which people live in high-ceiling apartments. The depiction of landscapes offer the interpretation of motherhood as something that is naturally given, mirroring the idea of Mother Nature. On one hand, this strengthens the contrast to the mothers heard in the documentary that partially refuse to adapt to this myth, which frames maternal ambivalence as being opposed to natural motherhood. On the other hand, the documentary offers a re-interpretation of the concept of Mother Nature, opening up the possibility of including maternal ambivalence as something natural and inherently acceptable. Therefore, the substitute footage of landscapes both challenges and confirms maternal myths.



Figure 45 - Regretting Motherhood: The documentary presents an image of a tranquil landscape, while the mothers talk about their feelings of regret towards motherhood.

While this representation has the potential to challenge the concept of maternal fulfilment, the following substitute footage can ultimately lead to an inability for the audience to identify with the ambivalent mothers. A scene of children running through a puddle, which reflects the sky and trees, in slow motion (figure 46) is followed by the

portrayal of a burning and slowly melting children's bicycle (figure 47).⁹⁹ The distant sound of laughter and footsteps of the children communicates a nostalgic emotion about them, while the burning bicycle signifies a radical break with the idea of happiness in conjunction with children. This representation has the potential to create discomfort within the audience. This, in combination with an interviewee who is invisible to the audience and only communicates her story via voice-over, might potentially hinder a non-judgemental perception of the ambivalent mothers' standpoint. This problematic (non-) representation of ambivalent mothers who feel regret mirrors the difficult situation they encounter. They are being denied a non-judgemental space by society in which to express their feelings and in which to create a sense of identification with ambivalent mothers who challenge maternal ideals for the audience.



Figure 46 - *Regretting Motherhood*: During the credits, the camera lingers on a puddle through which children run and then disappear into the distance.

⁹⁹ *Regretting Motherhood* 00:02:25 - 00:06:52.



Figure 47 - *Regretting Motherhood*: A child's bicycle that is slowly melting is a radical break to the image of loving motherhood.

At the beginning of the documentary, the older woman especially highlights this lack of non-judgemental space to share feelings of maternal ambivalence.¹⁰⁰ By expressing that mothers' feelings of regret are not of interest, she demonstrates the emphasis on the wellbeing of children instead of on the mothers' needs in German society, as the following interview shows:

Ältere Frau Ich weiß nicht ob sie [Mütter, die ihre Mutterschaft bereuen] lügen. Ich kenn den Großteil, ... ich kenn' überhaupt sehr wenig Damen, mit denen ich über solche Dinge überhaupt sprechen würde, weil es ist uninteressant.

Older Woman (I don't know whether mothers who regret their motherhood are lying. I generally don't know many ladies with whom I would talk about such things, because it is uninteresting.)

Her argument that people would not talk about maternal regret because these feelings

¹⁰⁰ While most mothers remain anonymous, one older woman agreed to be pictured in the documentary. This is due to the fact that she does not have feelings of regret herself but rather expresses her take on the subject. *Regretting Motherhood* 00:00:00 – 00:01:16.

would be of no interest tells a story of loneliness and isolation for German women who do not feel positively towards maternity. It denies regretting and ambivalent mothers a space of exchange and indicates how the mothers' mental challenges are put aside in order to assure the child's wellbeing. This further underlines the need for a non-judgemental space, in which the concept of motherhood as being natural and a pure joy is challenged. The reluctance to be portrayed on screen especially highlights the invisible suffering of these mothers, who evidently do not feel able to voice their experiences in public. As they want to detach their identity from their public display of maternal ambivalence, the documentary slightly removes the reality of the social actors by representing landscapes instead. This underlines the sharp contrast between the natural image of Mother Nature and the (apparently unnatural) experience of maternal ambivalent. This provocative and ambivalent substitute footage, such as a burning children's bicycle and landscape images that are open for a range of interpretations, has the potential to hinder the audience's ability to identify with the ambivalent mothers in the documentary. The mothers' wish for more individual space is communicated in secret and the threat of being blamed by society for challenging the myth of unconditional maternal fulfilment is too high to reveal one's identity on screen. While the documentary is conscious of the ambivalent mothers' maternal struggle and actively promotes their side of the story, the connection to the image of Mother Nature both challenges and reinforces maternal ideologies in *Regretting Motherhood*.

6.2.2. The Forest: Montag kommen die Fenster

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Köhler questions the norms regarding motherhood through Nina's escape to the forest. During an interview with the journal *Revolver* he says:

Meine Filme sind der Versuch, bestimmte Normen in Frage zu stellen. Dass das, was man als selbstverständlich ansieht, z.B. dass eine Mutter ihr Kind abholt bei den Großeltern und nicht einfach abhaut, ohne etwas zu sagen, dass das eben nicht selbstverständlich ist. Also irgendeine Form von Verunsicherung muss ein Film hinterlassen. (Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth 66f.)

(My movies are the attempt to question specific norms. That what we perceive as self-evident, for example that a mother picks up her child from the grandparents and doesn't just leave without saying anything, that that is simply not self-evident. So, a film must leave some kind of uncertainty.)

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, this point of uncertainty is offered by Nina's attempt to leave her family, which questions norms that historically developed out of a strong idealisation of motherhood. By searching for independence in the forest, the maternal character rebels against the idea of the self-sacrificial, caring mother in a middle-class society and challenges the myth of unconditional maternal fulfilment.

The film's setting in Kassel, a city that is strongly associated with the famous Grimm brothers and their fairy tales, has a particular resonance when it comes to understanding the way the forest is represented in the film (Kilb). Notably, it suggests that Nina's decision to head into the forest is a bad decision.¹⁰¹ In this narrative tradition, the forest represents a rather dangerous place in which the protagonist has to defy evil once leaving the main path. But just as in *Little Red Riding Hood*, in *Montag kommen die Fenster* Nina leaves the main path of selfless motherhood by disappearing into the woods and leaving her family behind. The narrative implies that Nina's decision to go astray is misguided and blames her for her decision to go against societal norms. Within the logic of the reminiscent fairy tale, the mother should have listened to society, staying with her family

¹⁰¹ The Brothers Grimm lived over 30 years in Kassel. Here, they brought together the fairy tales, for which they are still famous.

and not trying to break out of her daily routine. It further implies that if Nina would just follow societal restriction, she would be able to reconstruct her maternal identity without any problems. The forest becomes an ambivalent space in *Montag kommen die Fenster* that, on one hand, offers Nina the opportunity to escape from her life and experience a judgement-free environment. On the other hand, the mother's decision to venture into the forest is labelled as a bad decision within German's cultural memory of the famous Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the forest offers Nina a possibility for breaking out of the societal norms mentioned by Köhler, challenging German maternal ideals. As Mareike Hermann writes about Berlin School films in general, the forest can be read as a German *ur-Heimat* that is reminiscent of the past and hints towards the future:

It is as if the sometimes idyllic, sometimes abandoned villages, thick forests, and fertile fields in regions such as Brandenburg, Thüringen, or Mecklenburg represent a kind of frontier whose mythical landscapes, between wilderness, disrepair, and transformation, emanate ghostlike specters of the past and as yet uncharted visions of the future. In their films, images of seemingly primal landscapes, which evoke ideas of an *ur-Heimat*, coexist with images of hypermodernity, which precludes any feelings of belonging or lifelong attachment. (Herrmann 161)

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the forest represents an *ur-Heimat* of cultural memory and hints towards an uncertain future. The representation of the forest connects *Montag kommen die Fenster*'s narrative to a cultural memory of Grimm's fairy tales, in which the forest is a place of adventure and, at the same time, of danger. While the forest is reminiscent of this cultural memory, the representation gives space for a future that does not guarantee altruistic maternal care any longer and breaks with current societal norms. By retreating into the forest instead of picking up her child, Nina defies the pre-set notion

of woman as mother. The film's representation of Nina exemplifies this threat to female stereotypes when Nina arrives at her parents' cabin and picks up a chainsaw (figure 48). The dark lighting of the scene, the aggressive tool and the allusion to dangerous adventures in the forest all highlight the fact that Nina's behaviour challenges the myth of maternal fulfilment and womanhood.¹⁰²



Figure 48 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Nina looks at a chainsaw in her parent's cabin in the woods.

Her venture into the forest leads Nina to a hotel in which she is able to leave societal norms and maternal responsibilities behind. The rather surreal, dream-like sequence allows her to explore the hotel through back rooms like an unseen guest (figure 49), indicating her longing for a life outside of everyday duties.¹⁰³ Nina does not mix with the rest of the guests but roams the back corridors of the hotel in the forest, stealing food and observing the other residents from the outside of the windows (figure 50). Norms also do not apply to any other of the guests in the hotel. While Nina observes a celebration for a former tennis star, the party guests swim either in their business suits or underwear across the pool. The non-normative behaviour of Nina and the guests introduces the hotel as their secure, private place to act out their individual desires in a non-judgemental

¹⁰² *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:21:02 - 00:22:00.

¹⁰³ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:31:37 - 00:53:51.

environment, away from societal norms. Here, Nina is able to leave societal pressure behind and is able not to identify as mother.



Figure 49 - Montag kommen die Fenster: Nina roams the hotel corridors usually hidden from guests.



Figure 50 - Montag kommen die Fenster: Nina watches the other hotel guests from outside the windows, standing on the hotel roof.

The new house and garden further reflect Nina's detached state as mother. The dormant, wintery state of Nina's new environment, as well as a house that still looks partially under construction and requires a lot of work, visually reflect her emotional state about motherhood (figure 51). Nina unhappily lingers in rooms, lacking motivation to either engage with her family or with the renovation of the house. It is only when Frieder

enters the scene or when Charlotte tries to wake her mother up, that Nina awakes from her dormant state, attempting to create the illusion of being interested in the house renovations and in motherhood. As Thurer argues, in her psychology practice she never came across a mother who did not have shameful secrets about her feelings or behaviour towards her children (xi). Nina initially tries to hide her discomfort with her maternal role until she breaks out of the nuclear family ideal and leaves for the forest. She is not able either to connect to her daughter or to fully engage in her husband's endeavour to renovate a house in the suburbs. The dormant, winterly state of her environment mirrors the mother's suppressed feelings of regret towards motherhood.



Figure 51 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: The family's unfinished house.

I argue that in *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina challenges societal norms of motherhood by temporarily leaving her family. While the forest offers Nina a space to explore her desire to spend time without husband and daughter, this setting frames her choice as a “bad” decision at the same time. The cultural memory of fairy tales by the Grimm Brothers, that the setting of the forest evokes, suggests that she follows the wrong path by leaving behind her family and the societal restrictions that come with motherhood. The dormant, winterly state of her new surroundings of the house that is in need of renovation further mirrors Nina's detached state as mother. While Köhler is critical of the

general belief that mothers do not want to leave their families, this image further implies that Nina only needs to improve herself in order to reconstruct her maternal identity. Therefore, *Montag kommen die Fenster* ultimately suggests that it is the mother who needs to change her behaviour, instead of society. This underlines my argument that ambivalent motherhood is not represented as desirable and mainly linked to challenges for Nina.

6.2.3. Water and Mammals: *Mammal*

In the Irish film *Mammal*, Margaret is not able to break free from a maternal representation. She is repeatedly pushed back into mothering either animals or other children and never fully succeeds in breaking away from a maternal identity. She is especially pushed back into negotiating her maternal identity as the film's motif of water creates a strong symbolic connection between her and her son. Both the forest as an *ur-Heimat* in *Montag kommen die Fenster* and water in the Irish film *Mammal* evoke connotations of femininity and a return to the womb. However, while *Montag kommen die Fenster* re-negotiates motherhood as being natural, *Mammal* reinforces this idea.

In *Mammal*, water connects Margaret with both her biological and her substitute son. The representation of water is a symbol of motherhood and is associated with the birth process that involves amniotic fluid. Water especially offers Margaret a space to negotiate her maternal ambivalence and to experience an alternative form of motherhood. *Mammal*'s introductory scene establishes two points of connection between Margaret and her son; water and her caesarean scar.¹⁰⁴ In the scene, Margaret swims in the local pool, having a shower afterwards. A close-up of her caesarean scar under the shower (figure 52) frames the woman as mother and does not show any other personality traits but her

¹⁰⁴ *Mammal* 00:01:05 - 00:02:22.

ability to swim. The image of her caesarean scar establishes the possibility of an ambivalent relationship to her child. The non-bodily birth could have been scheduled in order to emotionally and physically detach from the birth experience, or it could stem from a traumatic birthing experience that ended in an emergency procedure. Either way, it opens up the possibility of tension between mother and son, which is verified during the film. In *Mammal*, Margaret is not able to escape the bond to her child and is repeatedly reminded of him, especially in conjunction with the representation of water.



Figure 52 - *Mammal*: Margaret's caesarean scar is depicted in a close-up while Margaret is having her shower.

Margaret's favourite activity, swimming, especially establishes a connection between her and her son. Margaret's ability as an experienced swimmer to hold her breath for several minutes under water is thematically juxtaposed to her son's accidental drowning in a canal. This juxtaposition suggests that Margaret's absence indirectly led to her son's death, as she was not able to teach her son the same skill. Her visit to the beach with Joe especially reminds the audience of this connection. She holds her breath under water, and the close up of her floating body that appears blueish mirrors her son's dead body visually (figure 53).¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the water connects Patrick's death with his origin in

¹⁰⁵ *Mammal* 00:49:06 - 00:49:47.

Sandra's womb. Water builds a relation between Margaret and Patrick as well as between motherhood and death, both offering an opportunity for Sandra to negotiate her maternal feelings and blaming the absent mother for her son's inability to survive.



Figure 53 - *Mammal*: Margaret holds her breath under water, floating in the ocean.

This triangle between motherhood, water and death further positions Joe as a connection between Margaret and Patrick, as he takes over the role of substitute child to some extent. When Margaret first finds Joe wounded in her backyard, she tends to his injuries and offers him a glass of water.¹⁰⁶ Joe refuses Margaret's offer of care at this moment and leaves the house without saying goodbye. The next time Joe and Margaret meet is in the public pool. Here Margaret teaches Joe how to swim.¹⁰⁷ While she missed the opportunity to give this lesson to her own son, she now makes up for this supposed failure. At the same time, the close relation between water and death also destines Margaret and Joe's relationship for failure. As described in the previous chapter, Margaret tries to negotiate her maternal ambivalence by sleeping with Joe in a bathtub.¹⁰⁸ This quasi-oedipal act, in conjunction with the other water scenes, represents a visual return to

¹⁰⁶ *Mammal* 00:11:10 - 00:13:16.

¹⁰⁷ *Mammal* 00:36:59 - 00:40:15.

¹⁰⁸ *Mammal* 01:11:06 - 01:15:43.

the mother's womb as an attempt to experience the lost relationship to her deceased biological son, Patrick.

While *Mammal* highlights Margaret's maternity through the symbolism of water, the film's title further refers back to a primal idea of the caring mother. This reference to the animal kingdom ascribes the female protagonist maternal instincts that she is not able to escape. Margaret's refusal to mother her biological son, Patrick, is a deliberate escape from societal norms concerning motherhood, but, because the film ascribes Margaret maternal instincts, she is depicted as mothering another child or, at another point in the film, taking care of kittens. Through the character of Margaret, the film creates tension between the behaviour that is expected of mothers and the concept of an individuality outside of motherhood. The sociologist Orna Donath argues that women are expected to enjoy motherhood and that society struggles to accept the existence of maternal regret. As Donath contends:

In mainstream and media discourse, this stance of regretting the transition from being a nonmother, and the wish to undo motherhood, tends to be seen as an abject maternal experience and an object of disbelief. [...] [B]y wishing to undo the maternal experience, they [regretful mothers] are opposing the very essentialist presumption of a fixed female identity that, come what may, naturally befits mothering, or progressively adapts to it and evaluates it as a worthwhile experience. ("Regretting Motherhood" 344f.)

The notion of a woman refusing motherhood and leaving her family is not part of the norm and is therefore met with incomprehension by Margaret's ex-husband. While Margaret challenges the myth of maternal fulfilment, she is repeatedly pushed back into a maternal representation by the film. Even though Margaret refuses to mother Patrick, she progressively starts to regret her maternal absence and mothers other animals and Joe instead, submitting to her implied maternal instincts.

Margaret's attempt to challenge the concept of woman as altruistic mother leads to her failure in *Mammal*. The film repeatedly connects Margaret with a maternal symbolism, such as water or her effort to care for stray kittens. Also, the way in which she carries her groceries is reminiscent of a mother carrying a toddler, holding them closely to her chest (figure 54). Finally, while she refuses to mother her own child, she acts as surrogate mother for Joe. These attempts to mother, which are supposedly part of her maternal instincts as a female mammal, end in failure each time. The stray kittens do not allow Margaret to pet them but scratch her. Later in the film, when a baby is attacked in the street by a cat, Margaret is held responsible, and the surrogate relationship between her and the adolescent Joe will turn into a sexual relationship that is frowned upon by her former husband. Even though each maternal representation turns out to have negative connotations, *Mammal* does not allow the female character to embrace a fully independent identity outside of motherhood. This underlines the expectation in regards to women to nurture and care for others, although Margaret might not be the right person for this task. The ambivalent mother is repeatedly pushed back into a maternal representation, even though she wishes to escape motherhood.



Figure 54 - *Mammal*: Margaret carries her groceries. After they fall out of the plastic bag, she has to wrap them in her jacket.

When the cat attacks the neighbour's child in the streets, *Mammal* especially exemplifies the extent in which it is Margaret who is blamed for the inability to care.¹⁰⁹ In the scene, Margaret walks down the street and encounters a temporarily abandoned pram with a child in it. The child's mother went for a short car ride around the block with Joe, leaving her child on the footpath unattended. After realising that a cat – the animal that is already connected to Margaret's inadequacy to mother – scratched the baby, she hurries towards the pram. Margaret struggles to unstrap the buckle to take the child into her arms. When she finally has the boy in her arms, she is clearly distressed by the baby's screaming (figure 55). The shots cut rapidly between different close ups and the editing picks up speed in comparison to the rest of the movie, highlighting her uneasiness with the situation. When Joe and the boy's mother come back from their ride, the mother screams at Margaret, asking her what she did to her baby. Even though Margaret submitted to her implied maternal instincts and tried to help the child, despite the stress that the interaction causes her, the neighbour judges Margaret for the inability to calm her child.



Figure 55 - *Mammal*: Margaret is distressed, holding a crying baby.

¹⁰⁹ *Mammal* 01:09:11 - 01:11:05.

The Irish film, *Mammal*, punishes Margaret for her refusal to mother by repositioning her repeatedly within a maternal representation. Each time she tries to mother animals or another boy instead of her biological son, her attempts fail. While this narrative shows the need of society's imaginary for a woman who refuses motherhood to return to a maternal identity and instinct, *Mammal* further portrays the need to punish these ambivalent mothers. The film highlights the challenge of maternal ambivalence for Margaret and, by doing so, aids to my argument that Irish films do not represent ambivalent motherhood as desirable. I argue that her character challenges the myth of maternal fulfilment and demonstrates how difficult it is for her to be in a maternal role. Margaret only has the option of re-connecting with her son symbolically through the motif of water and another boy and is never fully able to disconnect from her former maternal identity. Since *Mammal* closely links the nature image of water to Patrick's death, Margaret's attempt to re-negotiate her maternal identity is set to fail. Even though *Mammal* does not represent stereotypical motherhood and offers a space for the representation of maternal ambivalence, the film does not allow its protagonist to break away from her maternal identity fully.

6.3. The Ambivalent Mother as Anti-Madonna: *Madonnen*, *Glassland* and *Snap*

I argue that the ambivalent mothers in the German and Irish films all challenge the myth of maternal fulfilment. By doing so, they break with societal norms. The films frame them as "bad" mothers who refuse to fulfil their assigned roles. This sets them up for failure and also frames them in a way that makes it more likely that the audience will judge them negatively for their reluctance to mother. Three films especially create a dichotomy between the idealistic understanding of the Madonna with Child and the protagonists who represent an anti-Madonna, highlighting the societal residues of formerly prominent

Catholic teachings. I argue that German and Irish films represent ambivalent motherhood as deviant from societal norms, as not desirable and mainly link ambivalence to challenges, such as the blame they receive from family and society.

Ambivalent mothers challenge common female stereotypes that evolved in German and Irish society. One of the most defining elements in creating a maternal myth in the West is the idealisation of motherhood by Christianity. The Madonna is a significant icon of sacrosanct motherhood in Western society, and the depiction of the Virgin Mary as a selfless and caring mother, who is devoted to her admired son, created high expectations on mothers for centuries. Even though religious practice is in retreat nowadays, these expectations are still deeply embedded within the cultural understanding of the role of the mother. The films especially question the idealisation of woman as mother by contrasting their protagonists with the social expectations that emerged from Christian influences. Contrasting the ambivalent mother with the ideal of the Madonna and Child especially sets them up for failure and ultimately frames them as potentially “bad” mothers, which does not necessarily allow a non-judgmental reception for the audience. The ideal of sacrosanct motherhood plays an important role in establishing the dichotomy between the good, Madonna-like mother and the struggling ambivalent mother, who feels regret in both German and Irish films.

The representation of the German film *Madonnen* is highly influenced by Catholic symbolism and frames Rita in opposition to this as an anti-Madonna. The German film speaks to this idealisation through its title and its depiction of Rita as a character who symbolises an alternative to the idealised Madonna and Child. Speth’s intention was to create a tension between *Madonnen*’s protagonist, Rita, and the representation of the Madonna and Child, as she argues in an interview with the *Internationales Forum des Jungen Films (International Panel of Young Film)*:

Kira J. Collins

Der Titel des Films ist provokativ gemeint. Rita ist ja eine sehr andere Art von Mutter als sie durch die „Madonna mit Kind“ symbolisiert wird. Ich bin katholisch aufgewachsen, der Kirchenbesuch war mehrmals die Woche Pflicht. Und dort hatte ich immer diese Staue [sic!] der Mutter Gottes mit Kind auf dem Arm vor Augen. Sozusagen den Inbegriff der Mutter. Dazu wollte ich die Figur der Rita in ein Spannungsverhältnis setzen. (Peripherfilm.de)

(The title of the film is meant provocatively. Rita is a different kind of mother than the one symbolised by the Madonna and Child. I grew up Catholic, Church attendance was mandatory several times a week. And there, I always had this statue of the Mother of God with the child on her arm in front of my eyes. In a way, the epitome of the mother. I wanted to create a tension between this and the character of Rita.)

Speth herself was born in Bavaria, a predominantly Catholic state, and was exposed to Catholic traditions by her family.¹¹⁰ This exposure introduced her to the idealised representation of motherhood from a young age and allowed her to reflect on this ideal in *Madonnen*, challenging the myth of unconditional maternal fulfilment.

In contrast to the luminous depiction of the Madonna and Child in which the holy mother is often crowned by a bright halo (figure 56), the introductory scene of *Madonnen* is shot in low-key lighting (figure 57).¹¹¹ While it is raining heavily outside, Rita calls her mother from a telephone booth, trying to get the address of her biological father (Olivier Gourmet). Unlike the Madonna and Child, Rita does not embody self-sacrifice within this scene. Her eyes do not rest serenely on her son, J.T. (Jermaine Sanders, Devante Jackson), whom she carries in a baby carrier in front of her. On the contrary, she barely seems to

¹¹⁰ Even though Germany was historically largely Protestant, nowadays one third of Germans are Catholic, while one third are Protestant, and the rest are part of another religion or no religion (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 41).

¹¹¹ *Madonnen* 00:00:02 - 00:01:18.

notice her child, and instead screams frustratedly at her mother, beating the telephone handset violently on the phone box. Only when her child starts crying does Rita take a second to comfort him, sinking to a seated position on the ground. With Rita, Speth establishes the maternal character as a visual contrast to the common portrayal of the Madonna from the beginning of the film, creating doubt about Rita's abilities to mother and on the existence of the ideal mother, who represents an exaggerated standard for women.



Figure 56 - Madonna del Granduca – Raffael



Figure 57 - Madonnen: Rita sits with her son in a telephone booth, trying to get her father's address from her mother, while holding her son J.T.

Further, *Madonnen*'s portrayal of Rita is reminiscent of the *Madonna Lactans* – or the nursing Madonna. When Rita finally finds her father in a suburb of Brussels, she decides to stay for a while. Nursing her son J.T. in the living room, her blue bath robe resembles the blue mantle the Virgin Mary is often depicted wearing (figure 58).¹¹² Unlike in the first scene, Rita's face is now well lit, even though her child still remains in the shadow. By highlighting only the mother, the film clearly shows its ambition to redirect the narrative towards a matricentric focus. While this scene is much closer to the traditional Catholic depiction than the previous scene of Rita in the telephone box, it refuses to create the deep connection of the Madonna and Child which is usually mediated through serene eye contact (figure 59). Rita offers this emotional bond only temporarily. Whereas the Madonna “made humility and submissiveness look good” (Thurer 83), Rita evokes ambivalent feelings via her cheeky and rebellious attitude towards life, boldly making space for her own inclinations and desires. By doing so, Rita contrasts with the representation of the *Madonna Lactans* and further challenges the myth of maternal fulfilment by appearing as anti-Madonna, who does not have a deep connection with her son.



Figure 58 - *Madonnen*: Rita breastfeeds her son J.T.

¹¹² *Madonnen* 00:14:17 - 00:16:08.



Figure 59 - Madonna and Child - Guido Reni



Figure 60 - *Madonnen*: Rita breastfeeds her adolescent half-brother.

While the nursing Madonna is iconographically associated with the gift of life through the caring act, Rita will be sanctioned for nursing not only her child, but also her adolescent half-brother within this scene. This depiction of Rita's brother sucking on her breast (figure 60) does not just indicate an incestuous connection between the two, but also thematically touches on the myth of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*. St. Bernard Clairvaux was a French abbot, who founded a monastery in the 12th century. Different stories exist about the Catholic myth and its depiction varies. One of the stories says that the Madonna healed St. Bernard's eye infection by nursing him (Looney). Therefore, in

this Catholic understanding, healing abilities are attributed to the mother's milk. Rita, by contrast, does not embody these healing powers and is not able to cure her half-brother's broken leg (Martin Goossens). Here, breastfeeding rather signifies an incestuous sexual act that is taboo and positions Rita as anti-Madonna and "whore". She is sent out of the house as a consequence for breastfeeding him and consigned to prison by her father for her past offenses back in Germany. As the behaviour between Rita and her brother will be sanctioned immediately, it is far from the selfless and life-giving depiction of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*. Rita's position as anti-Madonna challenges the myth of motherhood but also sets Rita up for failure in *Madonnen*.

The film, *Madonnen*, frames Rita as anti-Madonna who challenges the myth of maternal serenity and happiness. *Madonnen* questions the ideal of sacrosanct motherhood on the one hand and sets Rita up for failure on the other hand. I argue that she stands in a direct tension to the iconographic image of the Madonna and Child and does not fulfil the myth of unconditional maternal fulfilment by refusing to mother her children at the beginning and by the end of the film. This potentially creates doubt in the audience that Rita is able to mother, and ultimately frames her as "bad" mother. She is unable to connect with her children, and her attempt to breastfeed her adolescent half-brother leads to her removal from her father's house. While *Madonnen* criticises the idealistic picture of the Madonna with Child, the film creates a challenging protagonist for the audience and does not represent maternal ambivalence as a positive emotion.

While the ideal of sacrosanct motherhood explicitly influences the representation of the ambivalent mother in the German film *Madonnen*, in the Irish films, *Glassland* and *Snap*, it does so more subtly. In general, Catholicism plays an important role within Irish cinema. Typically, the Irish environment of the characters is defined by an active practice of religion and a mise-en-scène full of Catholic symbolism. *Glassland* and *Snap* show merely a residue of this commonly crucial iconography by contrasting the Madonna with

the ambivalent mothers. None of the characters openly practices religion or seeks help within the institution of the Church. However, as O'Hagan argues, "the influence of Catholicism on normative constructions of motherhood in Ireland is nevertheless considerable" (7). The Catholic ideal of motherhood seems to persist especially in *Glassland* and *Snap*.

Glassland visually introduces Jean in conjunction with her struggle as an alcoholic and in opposition to the ideal of the Madonna.¹¹³ The first time Jean appears on screen, she is lying in her own vomit beside an empty glass of wine and a Virgin Mary figurine (figure 61). This contrasting imagery of the Catholic ideal of motherhood signified by the figurine and Jean's reality as an alcoholic positions her as an anti-Madonna. Both her alcoholism and her maternal ambivalence stem from her husband's refusal to stay with her. Maternal ambivalence, therefore, stems from a trauma, instead of being a natural part of motherhood in *Glassland*. The division between ideal and reality situates the ambivalent mother within an idealised understanding of motherhood that demonises women outside of this caring, altruistic ideal.



Figure 61 - *Glassland*: Jean lies in her vomit, facing a Virgin Mary figurine.

¹¹³ *Glassland* 00:07:47 - 00:08:35 (all of the following time codes of this film correspond to VLC player specifications).

When Jean comes back from the hospital where her addiction had put her, the idealisation of motherhood, symbolised by the Madonna figurine, especially creates a tension between the ideal mother and Jean, who feels ambivalence.¹¹⁴ In the scene, Jean is lying in bed in a diagonal angle filling two thirds of the screen (figure 62). In the right upper corner of the frame, slightly hovering over her, is the statue of Mary. Unlike in the shot before, the figurine is now facing Jean, while Jean faces away from the figurine. The depiction creates a strong contrast between the ideal Madonna and the alcoholic, crying mother of the film. Facing away from the Madonna, Jean is a symbol of resistance against the traditional Catholic ideal that prevailed for so long within the perception of the Irish family. While the Madonna typically is meant to give consolation, she is awarded a rather ambiguous role within this imagery, representing not just consolation and forgiveness, but also judgement and an impossible ideal of motherhood that Jean is not able to fulfil. The image of the Madonna becomes a symbol of societal pressure in *Glassland* and a reminder of Jean's personal failure to mother as well as to tackle her addiction.¹¹⁵



Figure 62 - *Glassland*: Jean is embarrassed that she needed to be hospitalised due to her alcoholism. Here, she tries not to face John or the Virgin Mary figurine beside her bed.

¹¹⁴ *Glassland* 00:13:12 - 00:13:36.

¹¹⁵ In 1989, the film *Hush-a-bye Baby* by Margo Harkin also represented the Madonna as a symbol of societal pressures.

While *Glassland* usually represents Jean from John's perspective, the camera also allows the audience to identify with her feelings of regret. On one hand, the film is told from the perspective of John, who suffers because of his mother's addiction. A static camera that offers the audience occasional reverse shots to John's tense countenance when Jean explains her motivation to drink and to refuse motherhood (figure 63) emphasises the difficulty for John to understand his mother.¹¹⁶ While Jean clearly differs from the warm-hearted ideal of motherhood, the audience, on the other hand, is still invited to identify at least moderately with Jean through a medium to close-up shot (figure 64) and her honest declaration. As the director of the film said in an interview, his vision was "to allow the audience to very much be part of the whole process. Very much to be there in the room with these people and to be with them on all elements of it" (Rossi). By mainly focusing on John's perspective, Barrett frames Jean as anti-Madonna who is opposed to the Catholic ideal of motherhood yet invites the audience temporarily to identify with her refusal to mother Kit.



Figure 63 - *Glassland*: John is sceptical of his mother's explanation of why she refuses to mother Kit.

¹¹⁶ *Glassland* 00:39:02 - 00:45:58.



Figure 64 - *Glassland*: The camera stays close to Jean during her explanation of why she refuses to mother her son Kit.

I argue that *Glassland* mainly introduces Jean from John's perspective. This perspective positions her within a tension to lingering Catholic understandings of motherhood symbolised by the Virgin Mary. She challenges the myth that every mother bonds with all of her children and gains little understanding for this statement from her son, John. In *Glassland*, a traumatic experience leads to both Jean's alcoholism and her feelings of ambivalence, pathologizing her maternal struggle. The Virgin Mary figurine in her bedroom contrasts her to the idealised picture of the "good" mother, in turn framing Jean as "bad" mother. Even though the film offers a brief moment during which Jean is able to explain her feelings and offers, therefore, an opportunity for the audience to empathise with her, *Glassland* is mainly told out of John's perspective and ultimately demonises Jean's behaviour, not representing ambivalent motherhood as desirable.

In contrast to *Madonnen* and *Glassland*, the Irish film, *Snap*, represents a more subtle alignment of Sandra with the Virgin Mary. The film does not offer the representation of an explicit Catholic iconography, as there are no figurines of the Virgin Mary and Sandra does not go to Church. Instead, Sandra's dichotic understanding of being either a mother or a nun positions her as an anti-Madonna. This interpretation of female identity

highlights the residue of Catholic teachings in contemporary Irish society. In *Snap*, Sandra's maternal identity circles around a Catholic understanding of womanhood. Her traumatic past and her own self-reflection especially frame her as an anti-Madonna.

Filming the documentary in *Snap*, Sandra voices her regret at becoming a mother instead of a nun.¹¹⁷ In this monologue, she demonstrates that her identity circles around the Catholic ideals of womanhood – motherhood and being a nun.

Sandra I wasn't cut out to be a mother. Nothing personal, just... . You know what I wanted to be when I was a kid? A nun. You could see me, couldn't you? Swanning around in the bin-bag dress. Big fuck off cross guarding my tits. ... Scrub that about the ... just say chest. Big cross guarding my chest. Can you do that? Or just say, I wanted to be a bride of Christ. Sister Immaculata. That's me.

Sandra expresses her childhood wish rather self-mockingly. While the camera zooms in on her eyes, she contemplates what she has just said before revising her words from "tits" to "chest" in order to sound more adapted to the audience's expectations. Sandra's wish to be a nun instead of a mother represents the Catholic binary roles of spiritual versus biological motherhood for women. An individuality outside of either spiritual or biological motherhood is not respected and does not seem to cross Sandra's mind in *Snap*. While she challenges the myth that every woman wants to be a mother, she positions herself within this binary understanding and is not able to break out of society's patriarchal structure, which was partially formed by religious practices and assigns women a fixed female personality.

Sandra's abusive past renders her wish to be a nun unattainable and simultaneously complicates her role as a mother. Her wish to be a nun seems less of a fulfilment of her individual desires than a shelter from her sexually abusive past. The cross that guards her

¹¹⁷ *Snap* 00:09:40 - 00:10:49.

chest stands symbolically for the possibility of defending herself against her abuser, while the close-up on her eyes tell the audience that she believes that she is incapable of this defence (figure 65). Sandra's position in a sexually abusive family makes it impossible to attribute to her the chaste individuality that would have come with being a nun, rendering this imagined scenario unreachable. In contrast to the image of the nun, Sandra is put in the position of anti-Madonna, as she neither shares a close connection to her son nor considers motherhood as her vocation as woman.



Figure 65 - *Snap*: Sandra contemplates her comment that she wants to be a nun.

Snap portrays Sandra within the realms of traditional Irish female roles, but at the same time, frames her as anti-Madonna who challenges maternal ideals. Sandra's self-justifying attempt to rewrite her family's public perception by means of a documentary and her belligerent personality embody the idea of the feisty Irish woman – epitomised by such figures as Mary Kate Danaher (Maureen O'Hara) in the movie *The Quiet Man* (Ford, 1952).

In this way, *Snap* can be found to flesh out the strong female characters of Irish cinema, with an intimation that Sandra's defensive aggression results from a past trauma. Her shades of the stereotypical feisty Irish colleen also suggest cinema's

ambivalent relationship to such characters, fetishizing ‘the strong female while simultaneously working to undermine her (Barton, 2006: 145).’ (Leahy)

Sandra represents a strong Irish female character who continuously tries to make herself heard. Her aggression is not an accepted maternal trait and, instead, stems from her past trauma. This trauma is also the cause of her ambivalent feelings. At the same time, her side of the story is undermined by representing her as an anti-Madonna and, therefore, a potentially “bad” mother who is blamed for the wrongdoings of her son.

I argue that in *Snap*, maternal ambivalence is not an accepted emotion, challenges the myth of maternal fulfilment, and frames Sandra as an anti-Madonna. Sandra’s understanding of womanhood circles around motherhood and being a nun. While her personality and sexually abusive past challenges both of these fixed female identities, the film frames her as an anti-Madonna who especially challenges the myth of unconditional maternal love and is, therefore, blamed for her son’s mistakes. Sandra challenges the myth that every mother enjoys caring for her son and the idea that all women want to become mothers. As in *Glassland*, this maternal ambivalence is based on a prior traumatic experience in *Snap*. Both Irish films, therefore, pathologize ambivalent motherhood. In particular, aggression seems to be an abject maternal emotion that demonises Sandra. While *Snap* critically analyses society’s reaction to the ambivalent mother, the film’s protagonist is not able to escape the binary understanding of woman as either biological or religious mother figure.

6.4. Conclusion

This comparative case study demonstrates that contemporary German and Irish films represent ambivalent mothers alongside natural and sacrosanct maternal ideologies and, by doing so, challenge the myth of maternal fulfilment. At the same time, some of the

films frame the ambivalent mother as potentially “bad” mother. I show that in *Regretting Motherhood*, *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Mammal* natural imagery underlines the myth of maternal fulfilment. The ambivalent mothers in the documentary and the German and Irish fiction films challenge this myth. While the German documentary and fiction film are especially critical of this myth, the Irish film, *Mammal*, repeatedly pushes Margaret back into a maternal representation. In *Regretting Motherhood*, landscapes both confirm and challenge maternal myths. In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina is able to leave her family and escape to the forest on one hand, yet, on the other hand, this decision is framed as being a bad choice within the cultural memory of the audience. In *Mammal*, Margaret is expected to have a maternal instinct and is visually connected with her son by water. At the same time, the film allows the ambivalent mother to be unable to mother. In all three films, the ambivalent mothers are not able to escape motherhood and are set to fail in their endeavour to break away from maternal responsibilities. They are either denied a space to exchange their feelings, labelled as having made bad decisions or are blamed for their inability to care and for their children’s misbehaviour.

The German film, *Madonnen*, and the Irish films, *Glassland* and *Snap*, represent the ambivalent mothers as anti-Madonnas. While the films are somewhat critical of condemning ambivalent motherhood, they also do not frame it as desirable. Even though *Madonnen* questions an idealised picture of sacrosanct motherhood, Rita’s representation frames her as potentially “bad” mother who is not able to take adequate care of her children. Both Irish films, *Glassland* and *Snap*, imply that maternal ambivalence stems from trauma and is not a naturally occurring experience. While *Glassland*’s representation of Jean largely impedes the audience’s identification with the ambivalent mother, *Snap* progressively grows the audience’s understanding of her behaviour. Nevertheless, Sandra’s ambivalent feelings are merely acceptable due to her traumatic, sexually abusive past. Even though the contemporary German and Irish films represent

ambivalent motherhood and the protagonists challenge the myth of maternal fulfilment, they neither depict maternal ambivalence as desirable nor as a natural emotion.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that contemporary German and Irish films contrast the ambivalent mothers with both natural and religious imagery. They challenge the myth of maternal fulfilment and, therefore, societal norms. In particular, the representation of the ambivalent mothers as anti-Madonnas suggests that they are potentially “bad” mothers. This often hinders the audience from being able to identify with their maternal ambivalence. While contemporary German and Irish films do not represent stereotypical maternal characters and raise awareness of ambivalent motherhood, they still do not depict maternal ambivalence as desirable and contrast the protagonists with concepts of “good” motherhood.

7. The Family of Ambivalent Mothers

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that in the German films *Regretting Motherhood*, *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Madonnen*, as well as in the Irish films *Snap*, *Glassland* and *Mammal*, the mothers' family situation and, in particular, the role of the father within the home, are connected with their experience of maternal ambivalence. The ambivalent mothers either try to escape a nuclear family ideal, try to escape a dysfunctional family situation or desire a male partner in order to feel able to mother. Their dissatisfaction with their current family situation heightens their feelings of ambivalence towards their maternal roles. In particular, the ambivalent mother's relationship with the caring but judging father, the absent father and/or the abusive father further shape her perception of herself. This contributes to my overall argument that contemporary German and Irish films represent ambivalent motherhood as undesirable and mainly link it to challenges presented by a disapproving society.

I study the ambivalent mothers' experiences in connection with their family situation based on E. Ann Kaplan's definition of maternal discourses. While Kaplan highlights six categories of mothers in American mainstream film, she also outlines representations of the nurturing and the abusive father. In contrast to the role of the mother, Kaplan describes that fathers can choose to parent (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 197). While the father embraces the role as sole carer in case of the mother's absence, fatherhood does not become his sole identity. As described previously, in particular, comedies represent these new paternal characters that actively wish to be involved in raising their children. While they are sceptical of their new role at the start of the film, they grow fond of the child by the end. The analysis of contemporary German and Irish films further develops Kaplan's

original American categorisation of mainstream film and brings a European focus to the representation of non-traditional motherhood and, in this chapter especially, fatherhood.

This chapter focuses on the influence of the family situation on the ambivalent mother's experience. Feminist literature by Rozsika Parker and Orna Donath supplements the textual analysis of the German and Irish films. Parker argues that relations within the home play an important part in the experience of motherhood. According to her, the father's role does indeed influence the mother's perception of herself. Furthermore, Parker explains that some mothers are reminded of their own childhood by interacting with their children. Spending time with their children can constitute a struggle for those who do not want to re-live a trauma (Parker 209). Donath questions the motivation behind motherhood and how complex societal demands influence the maternal experience. She highlights, in particular, that such promises as not to be alone in the future are powerful motivators for women who start a family, even though some of them are not sure whether or not they want to be mothers. Furthermore, literature by Christina Mundlos, who highlights an unrealistic maternal ideal in Germany, and by Clare O'Hagan, who explores the pull between traditional and non-traditional maternal tendencies in Irish society, aids understanding of the German and Irish context of maternal ambivalence respectively.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first considers the family situation of ambivalent mothers and the second deals with fatherhood. While some of the ambivalent mothers in contemporary German and Irish films try to escape a nuclear family ideal, Sandra in *Snap*, tries to escape a dysfunctional family situation. Furthermore, some of the ambivalent mothers desire a partner in order to feel able to mother. In all cases, the ambivalent mothers are unsatisfied with their current family situation and face challenges presented by a disapproving society. In the second section of this chapter, I further scrutinise fatherhood in relation to the ambivalent mother and show that all fathers influence the mothers' perceptions of themselves. While German and Irish film depicts

either a caring father or an absent father, Irish film offers the additional representation of the abusive father in *Snap*. While the fathers in *Montag kommen die Fenster*, *Madonnen* and *Mammal* care for their children, their representation deviates from Kaplan's description of the nurturing father. This chapter examines how the filmic text communicates the influence of the family situation on the experience of maternal ambivalence. I argue that contemporary German and Irish films represent ambivalent mothers as being unsatisfied with their family lives and that the films explore a connection between the role of the father within the home and the mother's perception of her own ability to mother.

7.2. Family Structure

7.2.1. Trying to Escape the Family

The first part of this chapter explores the family structure of ambivalent mothers in contemporary German and Irish films. While some ambivalent mothers try to escape a nuclear family ideal, others try to escape a dysfunctional family, and still others desire to have a male partner. The films suggest that especially family and friends judge the ambivalent mothers against traditional role expectations. Ultimately, it is impossible for the mothers to escape their families. In *Regretting Motherhood*, the ambivalent mothers are not able to openly state their emotions, and are, therefore, unable to actively create change in their personal lives. In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina returns to her family by the end of the film. *Mammal* repeatedly pushes Margaret back into a maternal representation, and in *Snap*, Sandra is only partially able to understand her traumatic past, which does not fully enable her to escape her dysfunctional family. I argue that contemporary German and Irish films represent the ambivalent mothers as being unsatisfied with their overall family lives, which, in turn, is connected with their maternal

experiences. Here, the films represent maternal ambivalence, that is fuelled by their unsatisfactory family situation, as undesirable.

7.2.1.1. Trying to Escape the Nuclear Family Ideal: *Regretting Motherhood*.

Montag kommen die Fenster and Mammal

In *Regretting Motherhood*, the interviewees describe how their positioning within a nuclear family that partially follows traditional gender roles leads to the threefold burden for the mothers of taking care of the child(ren), cleaning the house and going to work outside the home. While fathers are rarely sanctioned by society for focusing solely on their careers, a mother is still perceived as being responsible for childcare and the house work in addition to her paid work.¹¹⁸ One of the mothers contends:

Mutter [...] dass ich immer der Meinung bin, alle Mamas können das so toll, alle Mamas sind so, die machen, die haben ‘nen Job, dann nachmittags sind sie Mutter, dann haben sie noch top Altbauwohnungen hier, immer schön aufgeräumt und diesen Eindruck habe ich wirklich. Dann sind sie alle noch schlank und schön und, ja. Und die Frage war ja, ob ich das Gefühl hab‘ andere können das besser. Das Gefühl habe ich immer wieder, aber vielleicht mach‘ ich’s einfach auch besser, als dass ich mich immer darstelle.

(Mother [...] that I always believe that all mothers do it all so well, all mothers are so, they do, they all have a job, then in the afternoon they are mothers, then they also have great apartments, always tidy, and I really have that impression. Then they are also all thin

¹¹⁸ *Regretting Motherhood* 00:07:30 - 00:07:48.

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and beautiful and, yes. And the question was whether I have the feeling that others are doing it better. I have that feeling again and again, but maybe I am doing it better than how I present it to myself.)

The mother's statement demonstrates her impressions of the outward signs of what passes for ideal motherhood in Germany, being caring, having a part-time job, a clean apartment and being thin and beautiful. While she feels that mothers are judged against these factors and feel inadequate if they cannot live up to them, fathers do not receive the same scrutiny. This, in combination with the fact that most mothers work part-time and the fact that the German tax system favours a one-income household, indicates that gender roles are still divided between the maternal carer and the paternal worker in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, "Vollzeit").

In addition to these rather traditional gender divisions, the mother discusses a shift in German society that reduces the parent's authority and favours their children's needs. While previous generations raised their children in a rather strict and authoritarian manner, nowadays children are able to voice their wishes and needs more than ever before, according to one of the mothers:

Mutter Ich glaub', das ist auch ganz anders wie früher. Früher hab'n sich die Eltern einfach, ... da hat man nicht so versucht immer herauszufinden: Kind, wer bist du, wie bist du, was tut dir gut, Kind? Das war früher noch nicht so. Und vielleicht ist es auch zu viel. Vielleicht wäre der Mittelweg der richtige. Nämlich von dem sehr autoritären, wie ich noch erzogen worden bin, zu jetzt, wo eigentlich die Mutter, habe ich oft das Gefühl, die Mütter stehen unten und die Kinder stehen drüber. Die Kinder sagen wie das läuft

und so ist das ja bei mir auch. In vielerlei Hinsicht, ich pass' mich an.¹¹⁹

(Mother I think, it is completely different to how it used to be. Previously, the parents simply didn't, they didn't try to figure out: Child, who are you, how are you, what is good for you, child? It wasn't like that back then. And maybe this is too much. Maybe the middle ground would be the right way to go. So, from the very authoritarian, the way I was still raised, to now, where the mothers, I feel, the mothers are subordinate to the children. The children decide how things will go and that's how it is in my family too. In many respects, I fit in with their needs.)

This permanent pressure to adapt to the child's needs increases the mother's feeling of inferiority within the nuclear family. The additional pressure of being denigrated as *Rabenmutter* for not performing the maternal tasks that are ascribed to women, such as taking care of the household, make this even worse. The mother's suggestion that a middle ground is needed between an authoritarian and a liberal approach critiques the way in which contemporary children are being raised. It is especially negative for those mothers who also seek a life outside of motherhood and the nuclear family and it increases the feelings of regret for the ambivalent mother in the documentary.

In *Regretting Motherhood*, the women have insisted on anonymity, which underlines the criticism they would face for expressing regret about motherhood within a society and a culture in which the maternal role is highly idealised. The documentary's strategy of showing footage of landscape imagery (figure 66) or of a burning child's bicycle (figure 67), instead of showing the ambivalent mothers, keeps the visual track subordinate to the mothers' verbal account that the documentary communicates via interview, yet still

¹¹⁹ *Regretting Motherhood* 00:10:00 - 00:10:38.

supports their arguments visually. Both kinds of footage question the conventional understanding of woman as mother and carer. The landscape footage in conjunction with the mothers' claims that they do not enjoy motherhood, calls into question the assumption of motherhood as natural instinct, yet also somewhat reinforces it, as described in the previous chapter. The burning bicycle further attacks the image of the happy family and provocatively threatens the existence of the child. In particular, the supporting image of the burning bicycle has the potential to further deconstruct the idealisation of the mother as carer and can presumably function to disrupt the audience's pre-conceived notion of the nuclear family as ideal situation.



Figure 66 - Regretting Motherhood: Landscape.



Figure 67 - Regretting Motherhood: Burning children's bicycle.

The depiction of the burning bicycle symbolises a disruption of the ideal of altruistic, self-fulfilled mothers, while the voice-over, at the same time, brings into question the German ideal of a nuclear family model. One of the mothers mentions that she always dreamed of a family consisting of mother, father, two children, house and an animal.¹²⁰ Even though she currently seems to live within this framework, she is not happy. While she acknowledges that she never reflected upon this ideal and what it would mean specifically for her own life, she hopes that the time of having small children will quickly be over and is hopeful of feeling less regret when the children are adults themselves. This expectation stems from the thought that she does not want to be alone when she is older. According to the sociologist Donath, many mothers are unaware that the promises of not being alone once you are old if you have children often differ from reality, submitting to motherhood, as something that is simply part of their lives without reflecting upon the individual consequences the maternal role brings. In an interview with the German newspaper *TAZ*, Donath argues that this thought process is how society

drängt [...] Frauen in die Mutterrolle, indem sie ihnen für den Fall, dass sie Kinder bekommen, vieles verspricht. Zum Beispiel: „Du wirst im Alter nicht alleine sein.“ Oder: „Du wirst eine glückliche Familie haben.“ (Halser)

(pressures women into the maternal role, by promising a lot in the case of having children. For example: “You won’t be alone when you are old.” Or: “You will have a happy family.”)

This conditioning by society also makes it difficult for the mother in the documentary to admit the nuclear family may not be the right choice for her.

The analysis of the fiction films further explores the family structure of ambivalent mothers in contemporary German and Irish films. In particular, the fiction films in this chapter play on the social fear of the audience that mothers can actually refuse to fulfil

¹²⁰ *Regretting Motherhood* 00:12:14 - 00:12:43.

the role of the caring parent. In the German film *Montag kommen die Fenster*, such a narrative is effective due to a deeply rooted fear in German society of changing gender norms and a crumbling, yet still very much intact, patriarchal social structure. Film reviews repeatedly label Nina as *Rabenmutter* (e.g. Rosefeldt), indicating the rejection of a woman who is reluctant to mother. The maternal representation of Nina breaks with what the sociologist Christina Mundlos calls an unrealistically cheerful picture of the mother in German society (31), and allows the film to voice the feelings of a mother who questions her position within the family and as a mother. While this perspective is usually ignored in German mainstream film and television, *Montag kommen die Fenster* does not really represent a radical departure from tradition, since it does not allow the maternal character to fully escape the nuclear family ideal and reinstates Nina within the nuclear family by the end of the film. I argue that even though the film breaks ground in addressing contemporary social fears, *Montag kommen die Fenster* falls back into a traditional family structure and does not represent a mother's decision to leave her family, as well as her ambivalent feelings towards motherhood, as a valid option.

Montag kommen die Fenster questions the idea that all mothers bond with their children. Nina struggles to connect with her child and gains little joy from spending time with her daughter. The film especially contrasts the mother-child relationship with the father-child connection. In one scene at the beginning of the film, a distant camera observes Frieder and Charlotte in her room, attaching a curtain to her high sleeper (figure 68).¹²¹ Both are on the right side of the mise-en-scène, each occupying one part of the high sleeper, communicating with each other. The scene shows how Frieder tries to involve his daughter in daily tasks, valuing her presence. The following scene, on the other hand, portrays the opposite in connection with Nina as she is sleeping in the

¹²¹ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:08:08 - 00:09:06.

foreground of the frame, while Charlotte is playing in the background (figure 69).¹²² Despite the attempt to gain her mother's attention by pulling her hair, there is no communication between mother and child. Instead, Nina mirrors her child's behaviour by pulling Charlotte's hair, making the child scream and then leave the room. Just like the camera, the mother observes the scene calmly and without obvious emotional conflict regarding the harshness of their interaction. The film represents the ambivalent mother as emotionally and visually detached from her child, offering affection only occasionally, and not building the same close visual unit as Charlotte and Frieder share.



Figure 68 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Frieder and Charlotte build a visual unity.



Figure 69 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Nina and Charlotte do not build a visual unity.

¹²² *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:09:07 - 00:09:46.

In an interview, Köhler argues that Nina's ambition to leave her family is set to fail due to the double standard in the way parents are judged in Germany. While fathers are able to leave their families without social sanctions, this is not the case for mothers. In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Köhler seeks to expose this double standard, as he states in an interview with the journal *Revolver*:

[...] das passiert in jedem zweiten Nachkriegsroman, dass ein Mann seine Familie verlässt. Sozial wird es nach wie vor viel stärker sanktioniert, wenn eine Frau dasselbe macht. Das hat mich interessiert als Beschreibung einer neuen Form von Familie, in der das klassische Rollenverhältnis nicht mehr gilt. (Köhler in: Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth 46)

([...] it happens in every second post-war novel that a man leaves his family. There is still a greater social sanction when a woman does the same. This interested me as a description of a new form of family in which the classic division of roles is lifted.)

While in *Montag kommen die Fenster* this classic role division is questioned in terms of the breadwinner of the family (Nina) and in the fact that it is the mother who wants to leave her family, the film still represents a return to the classic nuclear family structure by the end. Nina is ultimately not able to escape this structure and has no alternative to her family and motherhood.

Köhler notes that the mother's ambition to leave her family is viewed more negatively than the father's infidelity. I argue that Nina's search for individuality outside of motherhood depicts a taboo that has been broken and constitutes the story's point of conflict, while the father's affair simply serves as a side narrative which becomes subsidiary and is somehow justified by the mother's behaviour against social norms. Frieder's extramarital affair is validated in the narrative through the fact that Nina rejects her role as wife and mother, giving him the moral high ground to search for another, more

maternal partner. Through this, Köhler exposes the double standard mothers face in Germany. He observes:

Ich finde, in dem man nicht beschreibt, liegt auch etwas Politisches: in dem, was die Kleinfamilie nicht sieht oder was sie ausblendet, um so leben zu können, wie sie lebt. [...] Da ist die Kritik an sozial-liberaler Doppelmoral leicht erkennbar.

(Köhler in: Rauscher and Wackerbarth 64)

(I think, there is also something political in not describing: in what the nuclear family does not see or ignores to be able to live the life they do. [...] In this case, the critique of a social-liberal double standard is easily recognisable.)

According to *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the nuclear family needs to overlook certain disruptive factors such as male infidelity and a mother's wish not to mother in order to persist. I argue that even though *Montag kommen die Fenster* portrays a mother who feels ambivalent about motherhood and her position within the nuclear family, it is ultimately impossible for Nina to permanently break out of both this ideal and the alignment of womanhood with motherhood, representing maternal ambivalence as a challenge for Nina.

Both the German film *Montag kommen die Fenster* and the Irish film *Mammal* depict social fears about the mother's leaving the nuclear family. In both films, the mother is punished for her attempt to leave and pulled back into mothering by her (ex-)husband. While for Nina, it is ultimately impossible to break out of her life in the suburbs, Margaret at least escapes her former family in *Mammal*. Outside of the nuclear family, she appears unable to succeed as mother. Even though both Nina and Margaret wish to live a non-traditional life away from their families, they are continuously judged by their (former) husband against a traditional ideal of womanhood that requires motherhood and expects caring abilities.

In 2008, Ireland went into recession after a decade of unprecedented economic growth known as the Celtic Tiger. Films set within the city during the Celtic Tiger era offered alternative representations outside of the nuclear family, such as lesbian motherhood in *Goldfish Memory* (Gill, 2003), and attributed female protagonists a liberal sexuality. However, during the recession, films responded to emerging anxieties over these more liberal lifestyles. Rosa González-Casademont has argued that the year 2008 “revealed not only the dire economic impact of the crash but also the repercussions of having discarded old certainties and cultural codes in the rushed process of modernization” (González-Casademont 276). Although *Mammal* was released in 2016, a year in which the Irish economy had recovered and gained new strength, it arguably questions the more liberal lifestyle that was accepted in the prior decade by connecting the mother’s absence with her son’s death.

Mammal presents the social anxiety about the mother leaving her family and a double standard regarding the social sanctions that mothers and fathers face. Margaret’s refusal to mother her son leads to the most tragic outcome, his death. While it is not directly mentioned that her absence caused his death, the film implies that her failure to give her son swimming lessons ultimately led to his death (figure 70). Her ability as an excellent swimmer and diver (figure 71) contrasts strongly with her son’s death by drowning in a canal. On the other hand, the father is never linked to his son’s disappearance or death. This double standard of blaming the absent mother mirrors Clare O’Hagan’s argument that in Ireland “fatherhood is not reported to carry the same public scrutiny and sanction as motherhood does” (88). According to her, the concept of *new familialism* gained popularity in recent years in Ireland and suggests that a mother is the only person who can fulfil a child’s needs (O’Hagan 16). By implying that Margaret is the only person who could have rescued Patrick from a tragic death – by teaching him how to swim and hold one’s breath for a long time – *Mammal* partially supports this concept. I argue that

Mammal expresses anxieties about the consequences of breaking the nuclear family and forces the mother who seeks individuality outside of motherhood back into a solely maternal representation, mothering Joe, the kittens or being repeatedly framed with children on screen. Therefore, *Mammal* represents ambivalent motherhood as undesirable and does not allow Margaret to fully disassociate from her role as mother.



Figure 70 - Mammal: Margaret holds her breath for a long time in the ocean. The dark lighting under water of her motionless body recalls her son's death by drowning in the canal.

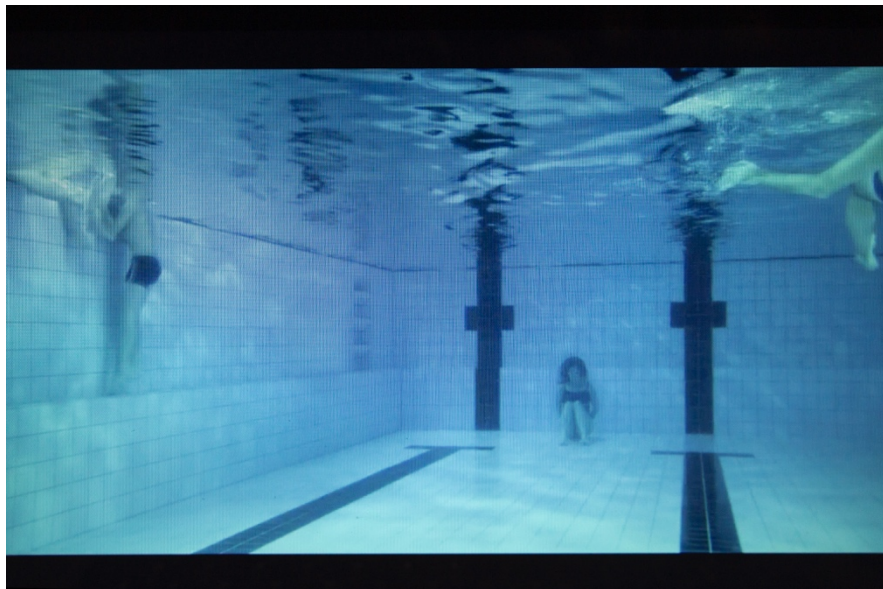


Figure 71 - Mammal: Margaret is able to sit for long periods at the bottom of the pool, holding her breath for a long time.

In all three films, *Regretting Motherhood*, *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Mammal*, the ambivalent mothers try to escape a nuclear family. They are unsatisfied with their family lives and express their feelings of ambivalence, which is met with a lack of understanding by family members. In particular, *Mammal* punishes Margaret for leaving her family. This lack of understanding and punishment highlights the challenges of ambivalent mothers and does not represent ambivalent motherhood as desirable.

7.2.1.2. Trying to Escape the Dysfunctional Family: *Snap*

In the Irish film, *Snap*, Sandra had been forced into motherhood by her father. She never wished to be part of a family but wanted to be a nun instead. The film's motif of hands that do not want to be touched or touch another person symbolises a disconnection between mother and son, but also between grandfather and son and grandfather and mother. In particular, the cut from several hands that belong to the family members to Sandra's hand and then to her troubled face (figures 72-74) introduces a rift within the family from the start of the film. The gesture of the hands, mostly shown in close-ups, reveals the suppressed problematic past to the audience even before the abuse by the grandfather on daughter and grandson is revealed. In order to survive, Sandra has to suppress her trauma and keep herself distant from her son. The fact that Sandra is not capable of touching her son, without feeling repulsed, questions the ideal of unconditional maternal love in *Snap* (figure 75). This behaviour stands outside of the popular societal ideal of an altruistic, caring mother which is why Sandra is blamed for her son's misbehaviour. In *Snap*, the motif of hands both introduces a dysfunctional family and symbolises Sandra's maternal ambivalence.



Figure 72 - Snap: Past footage initially introduces the family as a close unit.



Figure 73 - Snap: After showing an old family tape, Snap cuts into the present moment, showing Sandra's fidgeting hand in a close up.



Figure 74 - *Snap*: After showing Sandra's hand, the editing cuts to Sandra's worried face.



Figure 75 - *Snap*: Sandra pushes Stephen away from her after he tried to lean on her shoulder.

In *Snap*, Sandra's inability to connect with her son is closely linked with her traumatic past and the film's motif of an imbalance between appearance and perception. *Snap*'s cinematographer Kate McCullough skilfully blends different filmic techniques into a formal experiment of fragmented pieces that involve old family videos by the grandfather, new video footage by Stephen, photographs, a recording of a documentary and of course the actual feature film itself. Pauses, flashbacks and fast-forwards are a constant reminder for the audience that reality is constructed and up for interpretation. Sandra's ability to

detach herself from her own past and inability to recognise herself in pictures or camera recordings underline her suppressed experiences. Because she suppresses her memory, she was able to give her son to her abusive father, not recognising the possibility that he could also abuse a male child. This suppression of everything that is connected to her abusive past leads to her emotional and physical rejection of her son and her regret at being a mother in general. This connection between trauma and ambivalence, again, somewhat pathologizes Sandra's maternal ambivalence. Sandra's avoidance of Stephen and her inability to recognise herself in pictures and recordings serve Sandra in order to suppress her sexually abusive past and prevent her from having to deal with her memories.

In *Snap*, Sandra's ideal lies in non-motherhood, while the sexual abuse perpetrated by her father takes away the woman's agency over her own body, forcing her into motherhood. As Donath argues regarding a woman's agency in the decision to mother, it is important to correct the idea that mothers always have a choice whether they want to mother, and to focus on issues of "'will,' 'desire,' 'orientation' and 'consent'" towards motherhood ("Choosing Motherhood" 201). Sandra clearly expresses her will *not* to mother during an interview for the documentary that she shoots in order to set the record straight.¹²³ In the interview she states:

Sandra I wasn't cut out to be a mother. Nothing personal, just... You know what I wanted to be when I was a kid? A nun.

Sandra cannot act on her wish to live a childless, single life, as she was forced to have sex with her own father without consent and involuntarily became pregnant twice. She believes that motherhood is not her vocation, and her deepest regret is that she actually kept her child in the first place. While she gave her daughter up for adoption, she decided to keep her son, regretting her decision later.

¹²³ *Snap* 00:09:40 - 00:10:49.

After Sandra was forced to mother, society only blames her for Stephen's behaviour and, in consequence, her misjudgement in giving Stephen into his (grand)father's care. This blame by Irish society reinforces Sandra's decision to stay within the sphere of the home instead of allowing her to break out of the forced role of motherhood. This blame-related confinement to the private sphere is a reminder for the audience of the treatment of many non-traditional mothers in Irish history. According to James M. Smith, single motherhood was made the focal issue of sexual misconduct in Ireland. Single mothers were blamed for sexual activities and some were contained within religious institutions, such as the Magdalene Laundries, while others were concealed from the public eye until they delivered their child (Smith 221). In *Snap*, Sandra is effectively blamed for her father's misconduct, and her confinement to the apartment is a reminder of Ireland's containment culture and the practices of institutionalisation. Within the domestic sphere, in-between spaces of the house, such as the balcony and hallway, become a way to express her frustration over this confinement and over the societal pressure to perform a role she does not want to fulfil.¹²⁴ In order to resist this maternal blame, Sandra aggressively throws unwanted items, such as burned hate mail (figure 76) or alcohol, which threatens her abstinence as an alcoholic (figure 77) into these liminal spaces that represent her transgression as an ambivalent mother in Irish society.

¹²⁴ *Snap* 00:12:28 - 00:15:14.



Figure 76 - *Snap*: Sandra throws hate mail from her balcony.



Figure 77 - *Snap*: Sandra pours alcohol down the stairs of the apartment block.

While in *Regretting Motherhood*, *Montag kommen die Fenster* and *Mammal* the ambivalent mothers try to escape a nuclear family ideal, in *Snap*, Sandra tries to escape a dysfunctional family. I argue that in *Snap*, maternal ambivalence is neither desirable nor a natural part of motherhood but instead a manifestation of Sandra's traumatic experience within the family. In general, Sandra has little autonomy over her own life and body in *Snap*. Her family situation forced her into motherhood, and she is largely confined to her

apartment due to the societal harassment that she experiences. She is unable to connect with her son, which, in turn, enables her to suppress her traumatic past.

7.2.2. Desiring a Male Partner: *Madonnen* and *Glassland*

In *Madonnen*, Rita desires a family that is comprised of her, her children and a man. As described previously, she refuses to mother without male support. As all her children are of a different skin colour, the film implies that Rita tried to create a family with around five previous partners. The narrative indicates that Rita was left by many men – mostly American soldiers – who did not care for her or their children after being called back to America. While she receives money for her apartment from one of her former partners, no other previous partner is ever mentioned. Despite this, Rita constantly searches for a strong partner in her life with whom she can create a stable family. In *Madonnen*, men signify former and potential future disappointment, yet some form of temporary financial or material security. The absence of a male partner, in turn, restricts Rita in her willingness to mother. Here, I argue that Rita's family situation represents a challenge to her and influences her feelings of ambivalence.

Rita's need for a male partner in order to feel capable to mother mirrors the pressure imposed on women in Germany by traditional societal expectations and is visualised in *Madonnen* by means of a rather static camera. After being released from prison, Rita rents a flat in one of Frankfurt's high-rise buildings. In one scene, the camera rests on Rita and the letting agent (figure 78); the agent asks Rita if she is married to the man she brought along to the viewing, who is most likely one of the children's biological fathers.¹²⁵ By telling her that she is indeed married to the man and by withholding the fact that she has children, it is obvious to the audience that Rita feels obliged to lie to the letting agent, as

¹²⁵ *Madonnen* 00:46:18 - 00:47:23.

she seems scared to be stigmatised as a single mother with five children. The letting agent nods approvingly to her response, which makes it doubtful that Rita would have been able to rent the apartment without this lie. The static camera, as well as the reaction of the letting agent, show the rigidities of the traditional idea of a nuclear family as an ideal life choice. The scene implies that a woman is supposed to be married and should not have as many as five children to be able to be accepted by a letting agency. Mothering many children without a male partner, therefore, comes with restrictions for Rita, as the film raises questions about the acceptability of motherhood outside the traditional family structure.¹²⁶



Figure 78 - *Madonnen*: Nina pretends to the letting agent to be married in order to be able to rent a flat.

In the Irish film *Glassland*, Jean also refuses to mother one of her children after her husband leaves her. However, the ambivalent mother copes slightly differently with the absence of her partner, as Jean continuously living with her youngest son, John. Initially

¹²⁶ Rita also feels the need to lie to a state official about her maternal status and only registers three children instead of five. While Rita would not encounter any restrictions to the benefits she receives by telling the truth, she still tries to hide the fact that she just served a prison sentence, making up a story about a husband she supposedly divorced in America. The narrative underlines the expectations and constraints that come with motherhood, and womanhood in general, in Germany. (Previously) Married parents with a maximum of three children are portrayed as socially acceptable, while single mothers with five children must hide their circumstances.

waiting for her husband's return, she ultimately turns to alcohol to cope with her loss. Jean uses John as substitute breadwinner of the family and relies heavily on him. Particularly in the way that the film focuses on John rather than on Jean, *Glassland* frames Jean as a potentially "bad" mother and does not represent ambivalent motherhood as desirable.

In *Glassland*, single motherhood without a male partner is presented as the cause of Jean's alcoholism and her inability to mother. The film suggests that the father's refusal to stay with the family triggers Jean's refusal to mother her disabled child Kit, while she relies financially and emotionally on her youngest son, John, instead. In this way, Jean forces John into the position of the family's male breadwinner, partially replacing her lost husband. Even though *Glassland* allows Jean to deliver a speech that clarifies her ambivalent emotions towards motherhood, the film still focuses more on the difficulties that Jean causes her son John.¹²⁷ As Donath explains in the context of whether or not women are able to choose motherhood, "[f]or at least a century, motherhood has been institutionalized as a duty and as a role whose main focus is the drama of the child, while mothers serve as mere objects whose function is to serve others" ("Choosing Motherhood" 207). In *Glassland*, Jean is not able to fulfil this role as carer due to her alcoholism. By focusing on the child instead of the mother, the film portrays Jean as a "bad" mother who causes her son's financial and emotional hardship. Since the film suggests that her reluctance to mother Kit is connected to her husband's absence, *Glassland* connects the break-up of her nuclear family with her feelings of maternal ambivalence, and further suggests that this break-up is ultimately harmful for the children.

Instead of representing Jean's struggle as single, alcoholic mother from her point of view, *Glassland* highlights John's perspective on the failures of his mother. From his point of view, the film closely links Jean's inability to keep the house clean to the idea of

¹²⁷ *Glassland* 00:39:02 - 00:45:58.

the “bad” mother who is a burden to her son. While the household is in constant need of cleaning (figure 79), it is only after Jean leaves to seek help at a rehabilitation clinic that John is able to wash the dishes and the bathroom, bring out the bins, and mop the floor.¹²⁸ During these tasks, the inside of the house is sparsely lit (figure 80), communicating John’s struggle to combine work and domestic duties while implying that he should not *have to* take care of the household. With this, the film supports a rather traditional division of labour, in which the mother is expected to take care of the household and be supportive of her son, instead of the other way around. In combination with John’s voice-over at the beginning and the end of the film, which states that “it was a difficult night,” working in the taxi and taking care of his mother, the film highlights the child’s struggle with a mother who refuses to mother without the presence of her husband. In *Glassland*, single motherhood leads to ambivalence and is not depicted as desirable.



Figure 79 - *Glassland*: John tries to find a spoon and dilutes the remains of the milk with water in order to have breakfast.

¹²⁸ *Glassland* 01:11:57 - 01:12:45.



Figure 80 - *Glassland*: John cleans the bathtub.

Both Rita and Jean desire a male partner in order to mother. Both refuse to mother after their partners leave. In particular, Jean is unable to detach the feeling of abandonment by her husband from her relationship with Kit. She constructs her happiness around the ideal of a nuclear family and does not consider an identity as single mother as acceptable for herself. Here, I argue that in *Madonnen* and *Glassland*, the role of the male breadwinner offers financial and emotional stability for the ambivalent mothers. Without this stability, however, they deem themselves unable to care for three or more children. Both Rita and Jean are unsatisfied with their family lives, and in both films their maternal experiences are closely connected with their desire for a partner.

7.3. Fatherhood

As indicated above, the German and Irish films represent maternal ambivalence within the context of gendered relations in the home. I further argue that the role of the fathers also plays a part in the mother's perception of herself and her ability to mother. Whether the German and Irish films represent the father figure as caring (but judging), absent or

abusive, fathers inevitably increase the negative feelings towards motherhood for those women who feel maternal ambivalence and/or regret. These feelings of ambivalence depict a challenge for the mothers and the films do not represent it as desirable, since in particular the paternal characters judge the mothers for their feelings of ambivalence. Only the German documentary *Regretting Motherhood* excludes fatherhood from its representation, as the women interviewed do not mention how their partners or husbands are involved in the task of raising the child(ren) and their marital status is not disclosed.

7.3.1. The caring father: *Montag kommen die Fenster, Mammal and Madonnen*

Even though this thesis applies a matricentric lens, I will give a short introduction to the concept of post-feminist fatherhood to underline my argument regarding the marginalisation and vilification of the maternal characters in contemporary German and Irish films. In 2002, Mary Douglas Vavrus argued that late 1990s television news creates a new image of stay-at-home fatherhood. The stay-at-home fathers, or “Mr. Moms” as Vavrus calls them, promote paternal care and nurture as a masculine trait (352). This contrasts with the traditional understanding of the father as breadwinner who is not involved in domestic tasks. At the same time, television sitcoms, such as *The Cosby Show* (Leeson, 1984-1992), begin to represent paternal characters who are more involved in raising their children. In 2014, Hannah Hamad further analysed the interplay between fatherhood and post-feminism in American genre films, calling the representation of the caring father who nevertheless still occupies the dominant social position as “post-feminist fatherhood” (1). In these post-feminist narratives, often lone fathers raise their children and the mothers are absent. This mirrors Kaplan’s account of the absent mother and the nurturing father, as described above. According to Hamad, the representation of post-feminist fatherhood marginalises the mother as she becomes obsolete. The fathers,

on the other hand, succeed in organising the household and form a bond with their children. Therefore, they are ultimately able to fulfil the representation of the ideal mother.

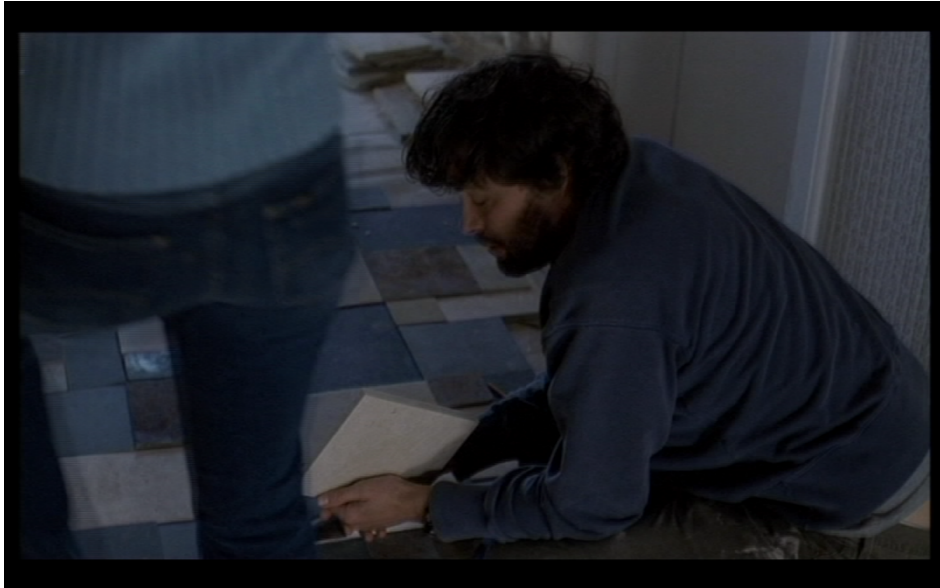


Figure 81 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Frieder tries to build the perfect tile mosaic for the floor of the hallway. Nina is not interested in his endeavour and leaves the scene.

In the German film *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Frieder is a stay-at-home father who disapproves of his wife's reluctance to mother, while Nina, his wife, is the breadwinner of the household. He is a caring father towards his daughter and wishes that his wife would also engage more with Charlotte. For Nina, his dismissal of her wish to spend time by herself without her daughter, ultimately adds to her negative feelings towards motherhood. Even though Frieder does not fall into the traditional paternal role, he is eager to enforce an ideal nuclear family model in the suburbs. His focus on creating this ideal living situation means that he refuses to acknowledge Nina's discomfort with suburban life and her resistance to having another child. His position as the active builder of their lives in the suburbs is visually represented in his attempt to create the perfect tile-mosaic on the floor of the hallway (figure 81). He continually rearranges the tiles, asking his wife for her opinion and then ignoring her disinterest.¹²⁹ On the one hand, Frieder

¹²⁹ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:05:40 - 00:07:09.

defies the traditional role division as main carer of the child. On the other, he reinforces a nuclear family situation in the suburbs, in which Nina feels overwhelmed as a mother. Just as he arranges the tiles until they create the perfect mosaic, so too he requires Nina to take her place in the mosaic of the family that he has designed.

The following dialogue between Frieder and Nina demonstrates that he does not approve of Nina sending Charlotte to stay with her grandparents. Instead, he would have preferred that Nina minds the child herself.

Frieder Wo is'n eigentlich Charlotte?

(And where is Charlotte?)

Nina Deine Eltern waren hier.

(Your parents were here.)

Frieder Du hast endlich mal Urlaub und gibst gleich das Kind weg?

(You're finally on vacation and you send her away?)

Nina Sie wollte zu Trotski.

(She wanted to see Trotski [her grandparent's dog].)

During this conversation, the couple is standing in the austere hallway of the house.¹³⁰ The walls frame the narrow room, in which the camera portrays Nina blurred in the foreground, facing away from the audience, and Frieder in the background, in focus and facing the camera (figure 82). This composition gives Frieder the moral authority, identifying his view as superior to Nina's behaviour, who stands blurred in the foreground. In the scene, Frieder emotionally punishes Nina for her inability to enjoy motherhood. Here, the film supports Parker's argument about actual maternal ambivalence that the father's inability to accept his wife's ambivalent feelings influences her perception of motherhood (Parker 14). In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina's reluctance to mother is met with disapproval and she has no safe space to communicate

¹³⁰ *Montag kommen die Fenster* 00:13:53 - 00:14:02.

her ambivalent feelings. This, in turn, heightens her negative feelings towards her family situation and motherhood, and strengthen her wish to escape.



Figure 82 - *Montag kommen die Fenster*: Frieder judges Nina for sending their daughter to stay with his parents instead of wanting to spend time with the child.

Frieder as *caring father* differs from Kaplan's description of the *nurturing father* in mainstream American media, in that the latter is forced into a caring role by his wife's absence. Frieder actively decides to be Charlotte's main carer and, as described in Chapter 5, takes pride in his decision. Frieder is not forced to parent alone or in a group with other men, as in Kaplan's description of the nurturing father, but takes over the main caring responsibilities within the nuclear family. I argue that in *Montag kommen die Fenster*, Nina's reluctance to mother and her trial to break out of the family address current social anxieties about voluntary childlessness and increasing neo-liberal ideals, such as individualism, which do not have the mother as carer at their fore, in a similar manner to the American mainstream comedies of the 1980s. Here, the film communicates a societal fear of ambivalent motherhood that is perceived as an undesirable trait in a woman, in particular by Frieder.

The paternal character in the Irish film, *Mammal*, plays a similar role within the narrative as the father in *Montag kommen die Fenster* does. He is also the main carer of

his child instead of Margaret, and also blames the mother for refusing to prioritise her child above her own needs. Here too, the film connects this blame of maternal refusal to a social anxiety about changing gender roles, and the mother is ultimately unable to escape the demand of the father to be more emotionally involved.

Mammal shows the caring father blaming the absent mother for refusing to care for her son. Matt was not able to choose full-time fatherhood but was forced into the role of sole carer through Margaret's absence; in this way, he matches Kaplan's description of the nurturing father. While he and Margaret had not been in contact for a long time, Matt seeks her out when their son goes missing, and blames her for leaving the family, as the following dialogue demonstrates:¹³¹

Matt I wasn't sure if you were still around.

Margaret Has something happened?

Matt Yeah, something has happened. ... Look, I didn't want to come, but they said it was worth checking with you, just in case. ... He's [their son Patrick] been gone for two weeks. The Gardai said they'd done everything they can. ... I told them you left when he was a baby then. He wouldn't come looking for you. We never talked about you. He never even asked about you. ... Wasn't so bad, was it?

Margaret I never asked you to understand.

Matt No, of course. ... So, you haven't seen him then?

Margaret No, I haven't seen him.

Matt Would you know him if you had?

Margaret I haven't seen him.

¹³¹ *Mammal* 00:06:15 - 00:08:23.

The caring father judges the mother who refuses to embrace motherhood, while she does not expect him to understand her drive to seek an individual life beyond the family. Their conversation frames her refusal to mother as a deviant behaviour, quite different from the traditional expectation of motherhood and the idealistic belief that every mother wants to be the carer of her child. While *Mammal* represents a non-traditional mother in Margaret who refuses to mother her son, underlining an ideological shift in contemporary Irish society to urban modernity (Holohan, *Cinema* 34), the caring father still judges her against a traditional ideal of motherhood, which dictates that all women should prioritise their child's needs.

While Margaret does not want to be reminded of the past, Matt repeatedly appears at her workplace, the pub or the swimming pool. He forces her to engage with her son's disappearance, and later his death. The caring father in *Mammal* tries to push Margaret into grieving for her lost chance to reconnect with her son in order to ease his own sorrow. By seeking closeness to Margaret, he tries to hold on to his lost son. Asking Margaret to join him in his hotel for a drink, the pair lie in his bed, and Matt holds Margaret's belly (figure 83).¹³² In this scene, Matt reduces Margaret's body to its maternal abilities, as vessel that once held Patrick, visually returning to Patrick's origin in his mother's womb. Their gesture of holding each other's hands and Margaret's belly, in conjunction with the scene's dark lighting highlight, their shared loss. The caring father repeatedly forces the absent mother to remember her son and demands that she feels the same loss that he experiences. The father in *Mammal* does want Margaret to care more about the death of her son, whom she left when he was still a baby and with whom she has had no contact since. For him, Margaret's refusal to do so is not an acceptable emotion.

¹³² *Mammal* 00:41:52 - 00:42:42.



Figure 83 - *Mammal*: Lying on a hotel bed, Margaret and Matt hold her belly to remember Patrick.

Furthermore, Matt tries to confine the maternal feelings he demands of Margaret to a nuclear family structure, and he does not accept motherhood outside of this unit. The fact that Margaret now cares for another boy who is the same age as Patrick is unacceptable to Matt. He threatens and physically abuses the rival child in order to keep him away from Margaret. While Matt wants to force Margaret to have maternal feelings towards her own biological son, he considers these feelings unwelcome when they relate to a non-biological alternate son. Matt tries to control Margaret's maternal feelings and to define the appropriate circumstances for motherhood.

While Matt may not be the reason for Margaret's initial feelings of maternal ambivalence, his presence reminds her of a past she does wish to forget. Furthermore, it reminds her of the fact that her ambivalence is often met with incomprehension and blame by others. I argue that this communicates a fixed societal understanding of woman as mother. Internalising this perception ultimately prompts the mother to re-negotiate her maternal feelings in *Mammal*. These re-negotiations further lead to feelings of ambivalence for Margaret and amplify them in the present moment. This aids my argument that contemporary Irish film represents maternal ambivalence mainly as a challenge and does not represent it as a desirable emotion.

In contrast to the other caring fathers in German and Irish film, in the German film *Madonnen*, Marc does not have a constant presence in the mother's life. While Marc supports Rita as much as he can, he decides to leave the family at some point in order to return to America. The resulting absence of a paternal character locates the father in *Madonnen* between the definition of the caring and the absent father. Rita's willingness to mother depends on his availability. After he decides to leave, Rita too decides to return to her independent, single life without children.

Madonnen strongly links Rita's willingness to mother to the presence of the paternal character. While the biological fathers of her children are not in the picture any more, her current boyfriend Marc constitutes a caring substitute father for her children. As soon as Rita is in a relationship with Marc, she takes her children back from her mother. Marc takes on the role of carer for the children and also provides furniture and food for Rita. Her relationship with Marc provides her with stability and is crucial in allowing Rita to create a family with all of her five children. This family idyll is disrupted when Marc announces that he will go back to America; unwilling to mother her children outside of this context, Rita brings the children back to her own mother Isabella. For Rita, motherhood is only desirable with a male partner. In *Madonnen*, Rita doubts herself and refuses to mother in the absence of a caring father who supports her, while she feels enabled by his presence to bring her children home.

Marc functions as a mediator between the ambivalent mother and her children and is essential for the family. He does not directly judge Rita for her inability to connect with her children and repeatedly tries to encourage her to share her emotions, as the following dialogue shows:

Marc Do you realise we don't even talk?

Rita What do you mean? Of course, we talk.

Marc Yes, I mean, you never speak about yourself, nor do you speak about the children.

Rita ‘Cause there is nothing to tell. The past doesn’t matter to me. It’s got nothing to do with you anyway.

Marc You don’t even know me. You never ask anything.

Rita What do you want?¹³³

Throughout his relationship with Rita, Marc tries to connect with her emotionally and is willing to help her care for the children. He picks them up from school, brings pizza in the evenings and tries to play with them, despite their language barrier, since Marc does not speak German. In contrast to Rita, Marc is not afraid to have physical contact with the children, engaging them in play (figure 84). When he teaches the children baseball, their outfits build a visual unit, while Rita initially stays outside of this unit.¹³⁴ In the scene, Marc acts as a mediator between Rita and the children, encouraging her to join in their play. When she refuses to join in, Marc puts a baseball hat on her head and pulls her into the game (figure 85). This dynamic between substitute father and mother in the film supports the idea of a paternal figure as essential for a functioning family, as Marc paves the way for Rita to connect with her children.

¹³³ *Madonnen* 01:15:35 - 01:16:13.

¹³⁴ *Madonnen* 01:38:43 - 01:40:44.



Figure 84 - *Madonnen*: Marc plays with Nina's children, while she stands outside of their team game.



Figure 85 - *Madonnen*: Marc motivates Nina to join their team.

Also, Marc differs from Kaplan's description of the nurturing father. The substitute caring father in *Madonnen* is able to choose fatherhood and to leave the family when he wants to. In contrast, Kaplan's nurturing father is forced into his role. I argue that with Marc's absence, the family crumbles, and Rita feels overwhelmed by the task of mothering five children on her own. Marc does not offer long-term parental support, and in his absence Rita doubts herself as a mother. This self-doubt leads to feelings of regret over taking her children back and to her renewed refusal to mother. Here, the film

represents Rita's feelings of ambivalence as a challenge to Rita and closely links them to the paternal presence.

7.3.2. The Absent Father: *Glassland*

In *Glassland*, Jean blames her disabled son, Kit, for the absence of her husband and is, therefore, unwilling to mother Kit.¹³⁵ The father left the family when their third son was born. Due to the child's disability, he was not willing to stay with the family and left the mother with all responsibilities. Feeling overwhelmed with mothering three children on her own, Jean refuses to mother the boy and gives him into a care home, as she explains to her middle son, John:

Jean Then I had me third child, Kit. Well, I called it a child, but it wasn't really. I remember when it came out. When it came out, I remember, I could see the look on your dad's face, John. I remember the doctor looking over to the nurse, shaking his head, and I knew it. I knew it, he was gone. Your dad left the hospital that day, and he never came back, never saw him again. Never. I waited, long enough that people began to feel sorry for me, until I felt sorry for myself. I could not look that child in the eye from then on, ever. When they brought him over to me, I refused to hold him. No, I didn't want him. He was nothing to me. Only something that came out of me and ripped my life apart.

This monologue demonstrates the parents' prejudice against the disabled child and underlines the father's freedom to leave the family, while the mother is initially forced into the role as sole carer. To deal with the loss of her husband, Jean turns to alcohol,

¹³⁵ *Glassland* 00:39:02 - 00:45:58.

which further leads to her inability to mother her two remaining children. In *Glassland*, Jean feels unable to raise three children, of which one is disabled, without a partner.

I argue that both the role of the caring father and the role of the absent father influence the mother's perception of her own ability to mother. In both *Madonnen* and *Glassland*, the father's absence leads to enhanced feelings of ambivalence. At the same time, the films represent these feelings as a challenge to the mothers and their families, as the ambivalent mothers are no longer willing to mother without the support of a partner. While Rita completely refuses motherhood after Marc returns to America and chooses a single life, Jean uses her youngest son, John, as substitute head of the family. By doing this, Jean recreates a patriarchal family situation with a man as breadwinner. In *Madonnen*, Rita is able to give her children back to her own mother. In *Glassland*, Jean gives Kit into a care home, as she blames him for her husband's absence. Both ambivalent mothers feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities that come with single motherhood.

7.3.3. The Abusive Father: *Snap*

In *Snap*, Sandra's father, who is called Granddad in the film, is likely also Stephen's father.¹³⁶ Sandra was forced to be a mother in consequence of his sexual abuse. Granddad's sexual abuse of her and her son is closely connected to Sandra's maternal conflict, as she never wanted to be a mother in the first place. Being forced into

¹³⁶ The fragmentary presentation of different footage makes it rather complicated for the audience to interpret the actual family situation. One scene (00:34:40 - 00:35:56) that is marked as footage from the past shows Sandra crying in bed and pulling a blanket over her head, while declaring that she will not keep her newborn daughter. In the background, Sandra's father stands holding a baby girl and suggesting that she gives her the name Miriam Angela, after her mother. We must assume that this baby is Sandra's first child which she gave up. It is possible that her father is also the biological parent of her daughter as he suggests that "we did alright, didn't we, the pair of us?" – implying, on one hand, that he was able to raise Sandra as a single parent, so she will be able to raise her child on her own with his help, and on the other, that the two of them did alright in creating the child together.

motherhood heightens her already negative feelings towards her maternity in *Snap*. Alternatively, it is possible that a random man Sandra picked up for a one-night-stand, just like the man from the fast food shop, is Stephen's father. Nevertheless, Granddad remains the only paternal figure present in Stephen's life and I, therefore, analyse him as characterising an abusive father figure for Stephen.

Even though his actual time on screen is limited and he is characterised as being physically weak due to his hospitalisation (figure 86), Granddad's influence on Sandra and Stephen through the induced trauma is crucial to understanding their behaviour. His physical weakness in combination with the powerful residual influence on Sandra and on Stephen mirrors a subsiding patriarchal legacy that, nevertheless, still influences the present moment in *Snap*. As Leahy explains, *Snap* "engages the familiar tropes of Irish dysfunctional families, child abuse and the malign pervasiveness of the past through our present life" (Leahy). This pervasiveness manifests itself in Sandra's current struggle to remember the past and to connect with her son, as well as in Stephen's re-enactment of Granddad's abuse with the kidnapped toddler, Adam. When Stephen tells the neighbour that Adam's name is also Stephen, *Snap* suggests that Granddad's abuse will continue into future generations.



Figure 86 - *Snap*: Granddad lies in hospital.

In accordance with Kaplan's categorisation of the absent mother, Sandra passes on the caring responsibility for Stephen to her father. Sandra's emotional and partially physical absence as mother as well as her father's behaviour, however, differs from Kaplan's findings. According to Kaplan, the father is willing to nurture the child in absence of a maternal character in American mainstream film. In contrast, Sandra's refusal to mother does not lead to her father taking on the role of a nurturing father to Stephen. Instead the paternal figure exploits the child by sexually molesting him. A further complication is that, unlike in American film, Sandra never regrets her maternal absence as she suppresses the knowledge of her own sexual assault and the idea that her father could do the same with her male child. In contrast to American mainstream comedies, in *Snap* the narrative is situated within a dark psychological drama that explores the trauma of sexual assault inflicted by family members.

While the first part of this chapter analyses the family situation of ambivalent mothers, the second section argues that maternal ambivalence can be understood in connection with gendered relations in the home. In particular, the father's role influences the mother's understanding of her own situation. In the contemporary German and Irish films, the mothers feelings of ambivalence are connected to caring, absent and abusive fathers. While some of the ambivalent mothers experience judgment for their refusal to mother, others feel unable to mother without the support of their partner. In all instances, the ambivalent mothers perceive their family lives as challenging and unsatisfying.

7.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I show that the family situation and, in particular, the gendered relations within the home, influence the experience of the ambivalent mother. The contemporary German and Irish films do not depict maternal ambivalence as desirable for the women

and their feelings are linked to such challenges as receiving blame from family and society. While Kaplan mainly describes the nurturing father, who takes care of the child once the mother leaves the family, the caring father, the absent father and the abusive father in the German and Irish films differ from this description.

In the documentary *Regretting Motherhood*, fathers are not interviewed and are not discussed by the mothers. However, the mothers express their struggles with traditional gender ideals in Germany that have a negative impact upon their maternal experience. These traditional gender roles suggest that most of the work within the household, as well as the task of caring for children, lies with the mothers, while fathers do not experience the same pressure. The mothers in the documentary insist on anonymity, as society punishes those mothers who express negative feelings towards motherhood in public. In particular, the assumption that a good mother should put her child's needs above her own needs is connected with maternal ambivalence and feelings of regret.

In *Montag kommen die Fenster*, the characters of the caring father and the temporarily absent mother express social anxieties about the possibility that some women do not want to be mothers. At the same time, *Montag kommen die Fenster* succeeds in breaking with the idealised representation of motherhood and indeed depicts a mother who struggles with work, motherhood and her family situation. While the father wants to form a nuclear family in the suburbs, Nina is uncomfortable with this setting. When Nina refuses to mother, Frieder judges her, and he has an affair as soon as his wife temporarily leaves the family. The fact that Frieder is able to have an affair without consequences, while Nina's refusal ends in blame, highlights the double standard against which fathers and mothers are judged in German society and underlines the existing idea that womanhood equals motherhood. Nina struggles, in particular, with Frieder's judgment. This personal struggle ultimately heightens Nina's ambivalent feelings towards motherhood.

Madonnen portrays the fact that German mothers are expected to have a male partner in order to achieve certain social milestones, such as securing an apartment. Rita adapts this societal ideal of the male as breadwinner and relies on men financially and in order to mother. In the film, biological fathers are absent and Marc acts temporarily as substitute father for Rita's five children. She only feels able to mother while she is in a relationship with Marc, and she gives her children back to her mother once Marc leaves for America. While Marc is present in Rita's life, he acts as mediator between her and her children and gives Rita confidence in her abilities as a mother. Without him, Rita doubts herself and regrets that she took all her children back.

While *Mammal*, addresses the ideological shift within Irish society that moves towards an urban modernity and in which women are able to refuse motherhood, it especially communicates the anxiety that emerged about changing gender roles in the post-Celtic Tiger era. *Mammal* does not allow Margaret to fully break out of her role as mother and she is repeatedly pushed back into the maternal role that she is trying to escape. Matt, in particular, tries to evoke maternal feelings in Margaret in order to share his grief with somebody over their son's death. Margaret is not allowed to disconnect from motherhood and by implying (through the connection to water between mother and son) that her absence is the cause of her son's death, she is ultimately punished for instead trying to mother outside of the nuclear family. The caring father judges her against a traditional ideal of motherhood and does not accept her refusal to mother her biological son. This repeatedly pushes her back into maternity and, in turn, influences her ambivalent feelings.

In *Snap*, Sandra tries to escape her dysfunctional family. The motif of hands and her inability to connect with her son represent their troubled relationship and serves Sandra to suppress her traumatic past. While Sandra never wanted to be a mother, her father forced her into this role through the sexual abuse. The film further suggests that his influence will continue into future generations. The single mother is blamed by society

for her son's behaviour and is confined to the domestic space in order to partially escape this judgement. In *Snap*, the mother who feels ambivalence is a reminder of the historical mistreatment of women and the Irish practice of removing single mothers from the public eye. Even though Sandra never wanted to be a mother and had nothing to do with the kidnapping of a child that is central to the film's narrative, she is the only one blamed for her son's actions and suffers the consequences accordingly.

In *Glassland*, Jean feels no longer capable of taking care of her children without her husband and she turns to alcohol in order to feel less alone as a single mother. The film portrays Jean as the "bad" mother who refuses to care for her disabled child Kit and is unable to care for John due to her alcoholism. She blames Kit for the fact that her husband left the family. As in *Madonnen*, maternal ambivalence in *Glassland* is closely linked to the absence of a strong male figure. Both Rita and Jean are not willing to mother as soon as the male breadwinner leaves the family. In *Glassland*, John takes over the role of breadwinner and tries to take care of his mother financially, as well as making sure that she receives medical help. As the film is narrated from his perspective, the struggle of the son is to the fore, and this has the effect of vilifying the mother's struggle to accept her disabled son and to take care of the household.

In this chapter, I show that while European films do represent mothers who feel ambivalence, this ambivalence is presented as undesirable, and the mothers often face challenges, such as a judging partner and a disapproving society. While Parker describes ambivalence as an important feeling for mothers, in that it enables them to reflect on their maternal behaviour, the German and Irish films link ambivalence to the representation of unhappy women, who are often punished for their choices. The ambivalent mothers are constantly judged against the ideal of nuclear family life, which they are either unable or unwilling to fulfil. In particular, their relationships with their partners influence their

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maternal experience. The ambivalent mother either tries to escape their family situation, or she does not feel able to mother without a partner.

8. Conclusion

With this thesis, I offer the first in-depth analysis of the representation of young and ambivalent motherhood in contemporary German and Irish films. This thesis demonstrates that contemporary German and Irish films represent non-traditional motherhood, in particular young and ambivalent motherhood, as undesirable and mainly link their maternal experience to challenges presented by a disapproving society. The films either fail to portray the sex and working lives of young and of ambivalent mothers outright or when they do portray these aspects of the mothers' lives, they show how they struggle to combine them. While the young mothers face stigmatisation and a society that expects them to fail as mothers, the films represent the ambivalent mothers in opposition to an idealised motherhood, involving concepts of both sacrosanct and natural motherhood. Furthermore, all of the young and ambivalent mothers struggle with their family situation. In particular, the films portray the role of the fathers as influential on the women's perception of themselves and their interpretation of whether or not they are able to mother. While film studies analyses are frequently confined to a national context, this thesis offers a cross-cultural comparison that may be applicable to additional European film contexts in the future.

This thesis builds on Kaplan's definition of maternal discourses in American media that evolved in the 1980s and 1990s. My analysis of young and ambivalent motherhood in contemporary German and Irish films provides two new categories in addition to Kaplan's findings. With this thesis, I contribute to the understanding of contemporary maternal representations and uniquely focus on non-traditional motherhood in a German and Irish film context. While the types of motherhood that I analyse differ from Kaplan's categories, there are also some similarities. Similar to Kaplan's description, the "impossible triangle" between motherhood, work and sex persists for young and

ambivalent mothers in contemporary Irish and German films. While in the context of ambivalent motherhood the films sometimes represent the mothers in connection to both, this combination creates a great tension with their maternal experience. Furthermore, aspects of Kaplan's definition of the working mother, the absent mother and the mother-who-refuses to mother can be found in the representation of young and ambivalent mothers, even though they still do not completely fit these categories. The contemporary German and Irish films also express a fear about changing gender roles. In contrast to Kaplan's absent mother, in particular, the ambivalent mothers do not regret their absence, except Margaret in *Mammal* to some extent. Kaplan's description of the nurturing father does not apply to the family of either young or ambivalent mothers. While my description of the caring father comes closest to Kaplan's definition of the nurturing father, the caring father strongly blames the ambivalent mother for her reluctance to care for her child.

In this thesis, I show that contemporary German films represent young motherhood in feature films and documentaries. In the documentaries *Vierzehn* and *Achtzehn*, the young mothers struggle with both work and sex, even though achieving a balance between maternal tasks and work is essential for them to be accepted by society. The documentaries represent young mothers as socially isolated from their peers, as they have few opportunities to meet people. In particular, the societal belief that the young mothers will fail to be "good" mothers produces feelings of shame, guilt and inadequacy. While most girls prefer to live with their parents, some of them still feel pressured to fulfil a heteronormative nuclear family ideal. In the fiction film *Lucy*, motherhood is also depicted as a separate concept from both work and sex. Instead of work, the ability to live as a nuclear family is important to be accepted by society. Living in a quasi-nuclear family situation, however, ultimately isolates the young mother, whom the audience expects to be a potentially "bad" mother. While Maggy takes care of Lucy full-time, the substitute father is able to leave the family. Both the documentaries and the fiction film represent

parental care as inadequate and temporary. In the fiction film *Am Himmel der Tag*, both work and sex are strictly separated from motherhood. Lara is not able to share her maternal feelings with anybody and isolates herself. She negotiates her maternity in liminal spaces that indicate her transition from non-motherhood to motherhood, and vice versa. In particular, her mother expects her to fail, which is why Lara is motivated to continue with her pregnancy and prove her mother wrong. Lara is the only German protagonist who wants to be a single mother, as well as the only one who chooses not to tell the baby's father about her pregnancy.

Unlike the German case, young motherhood in contemporary Irish films is portrayed in feature and short films. In *Twice Shy*, and in contrast to the German film *Am Himmel der Tag*, the young pregnant woman decides against motherhood and in favour of her studies. The films also represent motherhood as incompatible with either work or sex. In the film, both young motherhood and abortion are associated with stigma and feelings of shame. While the substitute father advocates a nuclear family situation, this concept does not appeal to Maggie. Instead, she challenges traditional expectations of women. In *Heartbreak*, young motherhood leads to an interest in work and education. However, motherhood and sex are still presented as incompatible, and the short film, therefore, confirms Kaplan's "impossible triangle." While *Heartbreak* criticises Ireland's patriarchal power structure, which restricts women's autonomy over their own bodies, the film does not grant absolute agency to the young mother either. The film thus expresses an ambivalent stance on traditional gender roles as it both confirms and criticises them. *Jelly Baby* reserves both work and sexuality for the independent woman without children. In contrast, the young mother is rather isolated in the domestic sphere and only forms a strong unit with her daughter. In particular, state officials stigmatise the young mother and expect her to fail to adequately mother the child. Similar to the German film *Am Himmel der Tag*, also *Jelly Baby* portrays a young mother who does not seek a

nuclear family, yet at the same time the short film frames her in terms of the traditional concept of stay-at-home motherhood. *Jelly Baby* is the only film that does not mention a father-figure.

Similar to the German case of young motherhood, contemporary German films portray ambivalent mothers in both documentaries and feature films. The documentary *Regretting Motherhood* does not explicitly mention sex, and the ambivalent mothers explain that combining work with motherhood represents a struggle for them. The documentary connects the ambivalent mothers to the ideal of Mother Nature, and the mothers both challenge and conform to maternal ideologies. While society seems to punish maternal ambivalence, these mothers describe traditional gender ideals as having a negative influence on their maternal experience. In the fictional film *Montag kommen die Fenster*, spouse and father Frieder emotionally punishes the ambivalent mother for being a working mother. In particular, her temporary escape to the forest leads to sexual difficulties between the couple. Therefore, motherhood is presented as being incompatible with both work and sex, even as the film suggests that work enables the ambivalent mother to endure her motherhood. Like all ambivalent mothers in the German and Irish films, Nina challenges societal norms, in her particular case, by temporarily leaving her family. The setting of the forest frames her decision to leave as “bad” choice, and the film ultimately implies that Nina needs to work on herself to be a “good” mother. *Montag kommen die Fenster* exposes the double standard by which both genders are judged in Germany. While the caring father is able to have an affair without consequences, he does not accept the ambivalent mother’s temporary escape from the family. *Madonnen* represents motherhood in combination with sex, but not with work. Sexuality is presented here as a currency for the mother on social welfare. The film represents Rita as anti-Madonna, a representation that questions the ideal of sacrosanct motherhood. This single, ambivalent mother of five children evidently feels unable to

mother without a male partner and gives her children back to her mother as soon as her boyfriend leaves for America. In *Madonnen*, the substitute father functions as mediator between Rita and her children and ultimately enables her to mother.

In contrast to the German case, contemporary Irish films portray ambivalent motherhood mainly in feature films. While *Snap* combines motherhood with both work and sex, the two aspects negatively influence Sandra's maternal experience. In particular, the film suggests that her father's sexual abuse of her is one of the reasons for Sandra's maternal ambivalence, thus pathologizing her feelings of ambivalence. She is framed as an anti-Madonna and cannot escape the binary understanding of woman as religious or biological mother. Sandra tries to escape her dysfunctional family, suppressing her traumatic past. As society blames her for her son's wrongdoings, Sandra is confined to the domestic sphere in *Snap*. In *Glassland*, the ambivalent mother does not have access to sex or to work. As the film is mostly told from John's perspective, Jean is vilified and framed as anti-Madonna. The film depicts Jean as the "bad" mother, who puts all burdens on her son, who in turn must take on the role of breadwinner for the family. Without her husband, Jean feels unable to mother and she turns to alcohol; thus, here too, feelings of maternal ambivalence are pathologized. *Mammal* represents motherhood in combination with both work and sex. However, both aspects constitute a struggle for Margaret, as they remind her of her dead son. The film punishes Margaret her inability to mother and repeatedly frames her within a context where maternal instinct is assumed to be natural. In particular, Margaret's ex-husband Matt does not accept her (sexual) relationship to a substitute son, given her abandonment of her biological son. The caring father blames the ambivalent mother for being absent, while her attempts to mother other children and animals instead are also punished in *Mammal*.

These films show that contemporary German and Irish films indeed reflect on both young and ambivalent motherhood. It can be seen as a positive step in terms of the

representation of non-traditional motherhood that these films succeed in representing the mothers' struggles and the stigma they face from society. On the other hand, this analysis has shown that the films often fall back into a narrative that does not constitute an alternative, more positive representation of either young or ambivalent motherhood. Some of the films even frame them as "bad" mothers. Contemporary German and Irish films, therefore, represent both young and ambivalent mothers as the *Other*, and do not normalise these alternative maternal forms. While society gains insight into these non-traditional maternal representations, there still seems to be a lingering patriarchal understanding of ideal motherhood and womanhood that strongly influences all of the contemporary German and Irish films discussed here.

In contrast to Kaplan's work on American mainstream media, the German and Irish films discussed in this thesis are smaller productions and cater to a smaller, national audience. Unlike the films Kaplan discusses, the filmmakers who portray both young and ambivalent motherhood are mostly still at an early stage of their careers and, therefore, often work with smaller budgets. These financially more independent productions are able to critically reflect on contemporary society in a way that mainstream cinema is often not and, thus, allows to examine cases of non-traditional motherhood. I show that the filmmakers in both German and Irish films critically engage with a secularised society that, nevertheless, still contains residues of former religious teachings; in particular, the idealisation of the mother. In contrast to Ireland, Germany's population size, in particular, offers a big enough niche audience to have a filmic movement, such as the Berlin School, that reflects on non-traditional motherhood. At the same time, Ireland's practice of producing Anglophone films allows them to potentially attract other Anglophone audiences in such countries as Britain or the US, widening their potential reach.

In this thesis, I offer an understanding of non-traditional maternal representations in contemporary German and Irish films. Due to space and time, I was only able to analyse

two aspects of non-traditional motherhood, namely young and ambivalent motherhood. While these findings can possibly be applied to other European films outside of Germany and Ireland, it will be up to further research to determine the full extent of this application. Furthermore, this thesis only analyses non-traditional maternal representations in documentary, feature and short films. Further research needs to determine the relevance of these findings for specific genres, such as horror film. In addition to the analysis of maternal representations, understanding the filmmakers' intentions and the audience's reception of these representations is also essential to fully understand the impact that these representations have on society.

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