

32A





## SYNOPSIS

Set in Raheny, Dublin, in the summer of 1979, **32A** is the story of Maeve Brennan, a girl on the cusp of her teenage years. We meet her when she has just acquired her first bra. Not quite the keys to the kingdom but a clear metaphor for growing up. Typically for a girl her age, and for her friends Ruth, Orla and Claire, Maeve's life is a round of school, household duties and hanging out. The girls are obsessed with bra sizes and every female who crosses their path is "sized up". When Maeve has an encounter with the local heartthrob Brian Power, it catapults her into a crucial moral decision: whether to abandon Ruth to her terrifying first meeting with an absent father or to go to the local dance, The Grove, with Brian.

Maeve's decision has a fateful outcome as she is first vilified and then ejected from her group of friends. Her mother goes into hospital for a few days for "women's problems" and Maeve returns to her previous Cinderella-like existence as she struggles to become a substitute mother to her siblings. And just when things couldn't get worse, Brian Power officially breaks it off with her...

**32A** is the debut directing feature from filmmaker Marian Quinn. It features wonderful performances and poignant events concerning a girl's growing up.

### CAST

Maeve Brennan	<i>Ailish McCarthy</i>
Ruth Murray	<i>Sophie Jo Wasson</i>
Orla Kennedy	<i>Orla Long</i>
Claire Fox	<i>Riona Smith</i>
Brian Power	<i>Shane McDauid</i>
Frank Brennan	<i>Aidan Quinn</i>
Jean Brennan	<i>Orla Brady</i>
Dessie Brennan	<i>Jack Kavanagh</i>
Donal Brennan	<i>Liam Weir</i>
Sinead Brennan	<i>Meadhbh Ni Dhálaigh</i>
Ruth's Father	<i>Jared Harris</i>
Alice Murray	<i>Marian Quinn</i>
Joe Fox	<i>Patrick Fitzgerald</i>
Vera Kennedy	<i>Anne O'Neill</i>
Sister Una	<i>Kate O'Toole</i>

### CREDITS

Written and directed by	<i>Marian Quinn</i>
Producer	<i>Tommy Weir</i>
Co-producer	<i>Roshanak Behesht Nedjad</i>
Executive Producer	<i>James Flynn</i>
Line Producer	<i>Adrian Devane</i>
Director of Photography	<i>PJ Dillon</i>
Production Designer	<i>Paki Smith</i>
Composer	<i>Gerry Leonard</i>
Costume Designer	<i>Driscoll Calder</i>
Sound Designer	<i>Lars Ginzler</i>
Editor	<i>Rune Schweitzer</i>
Script Consultant	<i>Judy Lunny</i>
Casting Directors	<i>Louise Kiely / Orla Fitzgerald</i>

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# INTRODUCTION

*"I first met Marian when we were participants in the 1999 Moonstone Screenwriters' Lab<sup>1</sup>. It was there that I read **32A** for the first time. There was something about the economy of her writing, the sense of a moral landscape and her wry humour that made me think of Jane Austen, and I loved the script. However, this "little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush..."<sup>2</sup> was set not in Austen's Hampshire in the 18th century but in Dublin's Northside in 1979. Over many readings of the script, and many years, I've never lost that sense of enjoyment about Maeve and her friends, and it's a joy to at last see them on screen."* **Judy Lunny**

## Writer – Judy Lunny

A graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, Judy Lunny worked for many years in the music business in Dublin for composers Shaun Davey and Bill Whelan, and then for Windmill Lane & Ringsend Road Recording Studios. She also worked for a time as Personal Assistant to the director Neil Jordan and as Trainee Script Supervisor on *Some Mother's Son* and *The Boxer*. Since 1993 she has worked as a script consultant, and as a writer she was a participant in the 1999 Moonstone Screenwriters' Lab with her script *Orange Blossom*, based on the story of her great-uncle, actor Barry Fitzgerald. In March 2003 her script *Lena in Lent* won the Tiernan MacBride International Scriptwriting

Award. She wrote Episode 4 of the first series of *The Clinic*, an RTÉ/Parallel Films co-production. She continues to develop her own scripts and acted as Script Consultant on *32A* which won Best First Feature at the 2007 Galway Film Fleadh. She was recently asked to do a 'polish' on a Lone Scherfig/Anders Thomas Jensen script for Zentropa Films.

<sup>1</sup> Moonstone Screenwriters' Lab was set up in 1997 as a European resource for writers and filmmakers in collaboration with the Sundance Institute, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the discovery and development of independent artists and audiences.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen's letter to her sister Cassandra.





# THE WORLD OF 32A

32A is set in Dublin in 1979.

## THE CITY IN 1979

Dublin in 1979 was a very different place to the capital city in 2008. There was no DART, no Luas. The city centre was less crowded and the shops were a mix of old department stores, such as Brown Thomas, Switzers and Arnotts, and a few boutiques. The area known as Temple Bar was largely owned by CIÉ and apart from the Project Arts Centre, a few pubs and artists' studios, there wasn't much else there. Aside from the legendary Bewley's Cafés (now Café BarDeli) there were virtually no coffee houses. The city's docks were a busy, working area with container ships and without a single apartment building. The notion of establishing an International Financial Services Centre in this area would have been laughed at.

## A MAN'S WORLD

Although feminism and women's rights were beginning to have some influence on Ireland, it was still a society where anything intimately to do with "girls' things" was considered alien and embarrassing to men and boys. It was unusual to see a man pushing a pram let alone helping his daughter to buy a bra. The Civil Service forced women to "retire" when they got married, presuming that they would start a family and not be able to work. Of the handful of women who went into male-dominated politics, few could imagine that within eleven years

Ireland would have its first female President, Mary Robinson.

## POLITICS AND VIOLENCE

As the Troubles in the North gained momentum, political events were to take a sinister turn in August 1979 with the blowing up of Lord Mountbatten and his wife in Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo, by the IRA. One of Mountbatten's grandsons, 14-year-old Nicholas, and a local teenager, Paul Maxwell, 15, also lost their lives. In a close and often acrimonious battle, Charles Haughey beat George Colley to become the new leader of Fianna Fáil and on December 11th, 1979, he succeeded Jack Lynch as Taoiseach. Emigration was building slowly to reach unprecedented heights in the 1980s. There was little immigration into the country making Ireland a largely monocultural society.

## THE CHURCH

Ireland was still 95% Roman Catholic with most people regularly attending Mass. The three-day visit of Pope John Paul was a highpoint for Catholics and was considered a moment of enormous prestige and excitement. When he said "Young People of Ireland, I love you" at the special Youth Mass in Galway, the whole country basked in this charismatic man's affection.

## THE NORTHSIDE

In 32A, Dublin's Northside, where most of the action takes place, is portrayed as a leafy, suburban backwater. It seems

untouched by larger political or world events. The sun is always shining there. Dollymount Strand – where youthful Northsiders learned to drive – is just down the road.

## THE PARK AND THE GROVE

The Northside hang-out areas are the park and The Grove. These places are strictly off-limits to Maeve and her young friends, but to the teenagers they represent freedom. It's no coincidence that these two places are where Brian Power brings Maeve. The park and The Grove both have an aura of danger to the girls. "A girl got raped in there" they tell Maeve to try to warn her off going there with Brian. The park and The Grove are depicted as places where you can smoke cannabis, drink and be free of parental control.

## HOME & SCHOOL

In contrast to these places of freedom, home is the place where you get caught. Maeve's brother Dessie's 'lump of hash' is found in his pocket at home. Maeve is left to clear up the dishes after the ensuing row. Parents are people you suffer and fib to and – very occasionally – make a connection with. Another place in which freedom is denied is school, dominated by the neurotic Sister Una and only enlivened by sporadic visits from a flasher. The girls cycle to the Bull Wall and plan their futures: two children and a house in Sutton for Ruth, 'a nuclear family,' as Claire scornfully says.

## MUSIC

Dublin in the late 1970s had a vibrant music scene with bands such as The Radiators from Space, The Boomtown Rats, The Virgin Prunes and U2, a young Northside band who were beginning to attract attention. The **32A** soundtrack reflects popular music of the period, particularly the type of music that would have been played in The Grove. The record given to Maeve by her friends at the end is Joe Jackson's 1979 album, *Look Sharp*, which contained the hit single *Is She Really Going Out With Him?* a tongue-in-cheek nod to her fleeting relationship with Brian Power.

## EXPLORATIONS:

1. What do you think of the Dublin that is portrayed in the film? Would you like to live there? Why/not? What do you think are the major differences between Dublin of 1979 and Dublin today? Are there similarities?
2. Do you think the girls' world as portrayed in the film is believable?
3. Choose three of the headings above and write a description of your own town today along similar lines e.g. church, politics, 'hang-out' areas etc. Are there any headings which are not relevant today in your opinion?







## THE CHARACTERS

In **32A** the main characters are the four girls, Maeve, Ruth, Orla and Claire. The girls are at an age where they are starting to move away from their parents, and their friends become more important to them.

**Maeve Brennan** is a twelve-year-old girl about to turn thirteen. She lives with her father and mother, brothers Dessie and Donal, and younger sister Sinéad, in Raheny on the northside of Dublin. Her life is a round of school, chores, her family and her three friends, Ruth, Orla and Claire. She and Ruth establish a particularly close bond when Ruth confides to her that her absent father used to beat up her mother. Maeve's parents, Frank and Jean Brennan, are portrayed as fairly typical of the time: loving but strict. We see this particularly when Frank reacts to the information delivered to him in the local shop, that Maeve had been 'out of it' at The Grove. He subsequently punishes her with the job of clearing the garage. When the emotional temperature in the house gets too high Frank retreats behind his Evening Press newspaper.

**Ruth Murray** lives with her mother, a glamorous woman who goes out a lot and leaves Ruth alone. Because of the abusive relationship she had with her ex-husband, Ruth's father, she is antagonistic towards any mention of him, cutting his face out of old photographs. Ruth conceals the fact that she's met him, and the two

fight when she intercepts a letter from him to Ruth. As the most sophisticated of the girls, Ruth is both shocked and miffed when Brian Power takes an interest in Maeve and not her.

**Orla Kennedy** comes from a more middle-class family and doesn't realise that the strange-shaped object delivered to their house is a bidet, or "arsewasher". She reproaches her mother for not telling her.

**Claire Fox** is the budding feminist of the group, declaring she'll never get married. She is the last of the group to get a bra. She reads zoologist Desmond Morris' book *The Naked Ape* and espouses his theories about mankind's similarity to apes without particularly understanding them.

The four girls are all very different. Maeve as the protagonist holds centre stage, and at times takes on a Cinderella-like existence, clearing the table, minding her siblings, collecting Dessie from a party, listening to her parents as they bicker downstairs. Her only "kiss" has been a chance moment when she touched the tongue of her dog. In a crucial scene where Ruth tries to teach Maeve how to kiss a boy, the reactions are emblematic of the girls' personalities. Ruth knows how it's done, Maeve is the naïve follower, Orla is the one who knows the theory but not the practice, and Claire – the "feminist" – is embarrassed and glad of the opportunity to get away from it.

**Brian Power** is the boy all the girls fancy. We don't learn much about him, but to the girls, he's as much a fantasy figure as real. We know he's sixteen, that his mother is dead and that he has siblings. We learn early on that he broke it off with his girlfriend Lisa in The Grove and got off with Jill Feeney. This doesn't augur well for young Maeve.

### POINT OF VIEW

**32A** is told from an exclusively female point of view. We only see Brian Power through the eyes of Maeve and the other girls. We never see his family or his life. Instead, we are being shown the world of **32A** through the prism of the young girls' experience.

### EXPLORATIONS

1. Compare the characters at the beginning and end of the film. In what ways are they different? The same? Explain your answer.
2. Given the girls' differences how do you think their friendship survives?
3. How would you tell this story from Brian Power's point of view? How are the boys in the film portrayed?

# THEMES

*“There are many minute and momentous transitions punctuating the journey between childhood and adulthood. This period – in particular, the teen years – contains dramatic shifts in external expectations and personal desires. It is a time when mature aspirations and responsibilities loom close; and when the urge for autonomy is pressing, but dependence on, or subordination to, adults is still the order of the day.” Sojin Kim*

Sojin Kim, Guest Curator and Producer, *Rites of Passage* – [www.kcet.org](http://www.kcet.org)

Other examples of coming of age films from a girl's point of view include:

*Show me Love* (Lukas Moodysson, 1998)  
*Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003)  
*Waterlillies* (Céline Sciamma, 2007)  
*Juno* (Jason Reitman, 2007)  
*Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (Gurinder Chadha, 2008)

## COMING-OF-AGE

Coming-of-age is an ever-popular film genre (*genre* = type) and is a central theme of **32A**. As the main character, Maeve experiences certain events which bring about dramatic shifts in her expectation and desire, as mentioned above.

American anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901-1978) was probably the first to popularise the concept of “coming-of-age” with the publication in 1928 of her seminal study *Coming-of-Age in Samoa*. The notion of a precious time between childhood and adulthood fitted in with post-war American society which, by the 1950s, was enjoying unprecedented economic and political power. Coming-of-age is also interpreted as a rite of passage, a concept that has cultural and religious overtones. Most religions celebrate the coming of puberty with distinctive rituals, of which the Jewish Bar Mitzvah and the Christian Confirmation are examples. In films, the 1949 adaptation of Louisa May Alcott’s autobiographical coming-of-age book *Little Women* told the story of four sisters adapting to life without their father, but reinforced stereotypes of female behaviour, with “Joe” – who takes over the parental role – being treated humorously as a tomboy. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) is credited as the first “teenage” movie and featured that iconic young American actor James Dean. Coming-of-age stories for girls were rarer,

and it wasn’t until feminism influenced a new generation that women began to look at telling their own stories in film, for example the 1970 feature film *Wanda*, by Barbara Loden, a grim study of a young woman’s alienation. But even today, in a list of 14 “coming-of-age” films from the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival, only one feature-length film, *Going 13*, is told from a female viewpoint. **32A** is in this rare and special category: the coming-of-age story told uniquely from a girl’s point of view.



*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)

## EXPLORATIONS:

1. Do you know of any other coming-of-age stories or films? How do they compare with **32A**? Which is more realistic in your opinion?
2. *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* are other titles that tell their stories from a female perspective. Compare these films with **32A**.





3. Can you think of any teen films told from a male perspective? In what ways are the female/male stories different/the same? Consider in particular common themes, storylines.

### LOYALTY

Another central theme of **32A** is loyalty, both to others and to oneself. When Maeve rejects her friends and sneaks off to meet Brian and go to The Grove, she's being disloyal to Ruth, who has an important meeting with her estranged father. What makes Maeve's treachery worse is that she has encouraged Ruth to go, and insisted that the other three will accompany her. So when she doesn't turn up, the others are surprised and dismayed. Ruth is furious and hurt: she has been betrayed. Some of her anger is misplaced: she's really hurt and angered by her father's no-show. But she directs it towards Maeve who is an easier target. As well as her loyalty to her friends, Maeve also has a loyalty to herself. She's unable to resist Brian and his invitation to The Grove. Her dilemma makes her act out of character – skipping school, smoking a joint, hanging out in the park. But she needs to see all this through, and this touches on a core issue of the coming-of-age story, the need to develop and grow. And not always in edifying or uplifting ways. Sometimes it's by taking a calculated risk of either hurting others or hurting yourself. In the end, what gets hurt is nothing worse than Maeve's pride, when Brian unceremoniously dumps her. However,

she's had an experience, and it's one she can build on. She's a teenager now, a bit sadder but wiser. She's got the first boyfriend out of the way and hopefully the next time it will be a happier experience.

### EXPLORATIONS:

1. What do you think of Maeve's loyalty to her friends?
2. How would you respond to her behaviour?
3. Do you think Maeve's friends show loyalty to her? Why/not?

### FRIENDSHIP AND PEER PRESSURE

*"Friends are God's apology for relations"* the English writer Malcolm Muggeridge famously said. In the early teenage years friends assume enormous importance, as the young person begins to separate and move away from their family towards a more independent life. These early friendships have a particular intensity, and sometimes the new friend is someone whom the parents would consider particularly unsuitable. This "unsuitability" is considered to be all part of the process of growing up, achieving autonomy and gaining a sense of self. Maeve's friends are very important to her: as a bulwark against her chaotic family, as a social grouping that fixes her status in the hierarchy of school, and as moral support. When she hears Ruth's disloyal comment – *"Maeve and Brian Power: now there's a fluke..."* – she is hurt and taken aback. But this also frees her from the constraints of the group and its peer pressure. Ultimately, the strength

of the girls' friendship is such that it survives Maeve's betrayal and they are together again at the end of the film.

### EXPLORATIONS:

1. Do you think **32A** is a realistic portrait of female friendship? Explain your answer.

### PEER PRESSURE

Does Maeve really need a bra? Someone refers to her breasts as "two fried eggs". Many early teenage decisions – to buy a bra, to take up smoking, try a drink, sample drugs or to become sexually active – are made as the result of peer pressure to conform to the group. 1970's anti-drugs campaigns such as *"Just Say No"* were aimed at helping teenagers to defend themselves against this kind of peer pressure, but the desire to conform to the group in these years is strong.

### SEXUALITY

Coming-of-age films sometimes depict early teenage sexuality as vague and unformed. Maeve wants to kiss Brian, but it's soon clear that she is out of her depth with him. As an older boy, Brian Power is at a more sexually developed stage in his life, and his friends are right to question the suitability of his relationship with the younger Maeve. Compared to his friends she does look like the child she is. When we see him dance with the older Jackie, we know she is his match. Maeve is at an earlier, more fledgling stage of sexual development.

## DRUGS

Drugs are present in **32A** – Dessie has a ‘lump of hash’ in his pocket, the lads in the park are smoking cannabis and dealing, and one of them, Simon, has taken LSD. These events are presented as a normal part of growing up in late 1970’s Dublin, and no moral value – for good or ill – is put on them by the film although the parents do express their disapproval. We see Maeve’s parents’ reaction to Dessie being caught, although he ignores their attempts to ground him. Later on when Maeve’s father hears that she was ‘out of it’ at The Grove, she is also punished. For Maeve, taking the joint in the park is another aspect of her entering Brian’s world.

## EXPLORATIONS

1. Look at the scene where Maeve is in the park at night. Why do you think she changes her mind? By the end of the film do you think her decision would be the same? Why/not?
2. What do you think is the dominant theme of **32A**?
3. Which theme do you find most interesting? Why?
4. Do you think a film set in the present day would handle these themes any differently?

## DRUG USE IN IRELAND

In the film, we see Brian and his friends taking drugs. Recreational drug use became part of the social life in Dublin in the late 1960s, one of the by-products of the Flower Power generation. It wasn’t until the early 1980s that heroin made its deadly appearance in inner city working-class communities, with such devastating effect. In more recent times, the use of cocaine, also a class-A drug, has migrated from its “glamour” niche of musicians and media types, and become a widespread drug of choice. It is thought to have been responsible for the deaths of several young people in 2007, the most high profile in terms of media coverage being the death at the age of 24 of model Katy French. In **32A**, however, drug-taking is presented as another aspect of growing up. It’s interesting to note, that because of the presence of drugs in **32A** the film received a 15A classification from the Irish Film Censor. See the website [www.32amovie.com](http://www.32amovie.com) for more information.

## EXPLORATIONS

1. What do you think in general of the representation of drugs and drug taking in films or the media? Refer to the Katy French story outlined above.

2. What do you think of the 15A classification of this film? How does it compare with other 15A titles?
3. Do you think films that show people taking drugs should place a moral value on the activity?
4. Thinking about current anti-drugs campaigns, do you think they are effective? Why/not?
5. Why, in your opinion, do people take drugs?

### In the recent National Advisory Committee on Drugs publication it states:

*In Ireland, 24% of respondents aged 15-64 years reported taking any illegal drugs in their lifetime. After cannabis (22%), the most commonly reported drugs ever used were: magic mushrooms (6%), ecstasy (5%), cocaine (5%), amphetamines (4%), poppers (3%), LSD (3%), solvents (2%), crack (0.6%), and heroin (0.4%).*

### Drugs Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland Bulletin 1





## KEY SCENE ANALYSIS

A scene is the smallest unit of action in a film or play. Action is movement towards an objective. A series of scenes is called a sequence. Most modern feature films have about eight sequences: 2 in Act 1, 4 in Act 2, 2 in Act 3.

### TWO DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

One of the principle sequences in **32A** occurs mid-way through the film and concerns Maeve's experience with Brian before and after The Grove.

During this sequence, we see Maeve on two different journeys: one journey is to The Grove with Brian, and one is on her way back. The first is a journey towards an objective. The second is a scene of aftermath, when she leaves and walks home alone. The first journey is magical, the second is sad. Note how the film creates these inflections by using different camera shots, landscapes, sound effects and music.

For this Key Scene Analysis we will focus on the sequence that culminates with the scene in The Grove. This sequence is a series of scenes where Maeve and Ruth are both trying to get what they want.

### BEFORE THE GROVE

Maeve has cut herself off from her friends and is about to enter Brian's world. She has actively encouraged Ruth to meet her estranged father, and promised to go with her: to "*be there or be square*". When Brian invites

her to The Grove, her loyalties are torn. Ruth's earlier cruel comment at school: "*Maeve and Brian Power: now there's a fluke. He'll dump her fast...*" had caused her to change her mind and go to the park with him. Then later, on hearing their hostile reaction, she makes a decision to go with him.

But first Brian brings her to the park. There, they sit around a fire and smoke cannabis with his friends. Maeve is offered a joint by Brian, and in contrast to the earlier scene when she had refused, this time she takes it. Two skinheads come up looking for drugs and buy a piece of 'hash'.

The scene is both funny and slightly frightening. You feel anything could happen. A strong visual atmosphere is created by the tree and the bonfire that lights up a small circle at the centre. On the fringes there is darkness. This scene was shot during the day but it looks dark enough to be a summer's evening. This effect, of filming a night scene during daylight hours is called *day for night* or *nuit américaine* (American night) and is achieved by using special blue filters and under-exposed film to create the effect





of darkness. This scene was shot with two cameras to save time. It was filmed in St. Anne's Park, Raheny, which is the actual park in the story, and the fire was created as a special effect, specifically adjusted and controlled by a Special Effects team.

The fire scene is followed by Maeve's walk to The Grove with Brian. These scenes are shot in the dark, romantic blue-green hue of *day for night* which underlines the transformational nature of this journey, of Brian leading Maeve into his own world.

### EXPLORATION

1. Comment on the technical aspects of the film which make up the park scene. Do you think they are effective?
2. How would you describe the atmosphere of this scene?
3. If you were directing this scene, how would you advise the actors?

### INSIDE THE GROVE

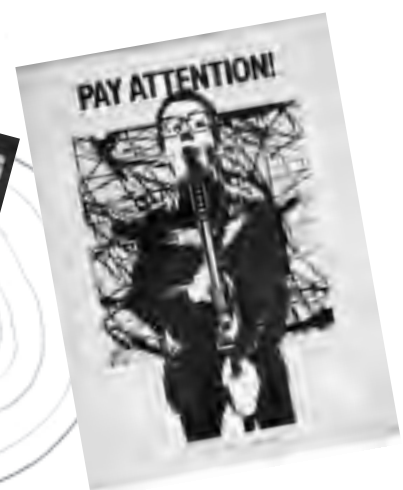
Because Maeve is underage and it's off-limits, The Grove is portrayed as a magical and desirable place to her, with fairy lights and a long queue of people trying to get in. The scene opens with two doormen ejecting some young lads from the club. After some awkward explaining, however, Brian and a clearly under-age Maeve are let in. Maeve's entrance into The Grove is a crucial moment: she's about to cross the

threshold into Brian's more adult world. To achieve this, Director Marian Quinn and Sound Designer Lars Ginzler worked on creating a sound design with an effect that would mark this transition. The use of slow motion also helps to create this threshold moment, by slowing everything down and heightening it. As the doors open, Maeve sees a whole new world. It's confusing and exciting, and she doesn't even really know what she's hearing. And then the sound effect mutates into the song. We hear the music, feel the excitement, and Maeve enters The Grove.

Music is crucial to this scene, songs from 1979 such as Elvis Costello's *Oliver's Army* and Joan Armatrading's *Love and Affection* being classic hits of the time. The lighting is muted and golden. The costumes are patterned and vibrant. Everyone is moving, and the camera work is close and tight on the dancers, enhancing the feeling of claustrophobia

that Maeve is experiencing. The hall is packed, loud and smoky: not quite what she imagined The Grove would be. The editing reinforces the sense of movement by cutting frequently between the dancers. Then the DJ plays a request and a slow number comes on. It's a romantic moment and the camera stays close on Brian and Maeve as they kiss. Maeve, looking smaller than the people around her, puts her head on Brian's chest. Her hand on his shoulder looks tiny and childlike. As the camera pulls away, she doesn't see what we do: his friends laughing at him for being with a girl so young. Suddenly, Brian gets embarrassed. He pushes Maeve away and asks her if she wants a Coke.

We cut to Ruth, Orla and Claire still waiting under Clery's clock. By cutting back and forth like this, the filmmaker can tell different strands of a story. A distraught Ruth is being comforted. Her father hasn't turned up. She erupts:





“Where the fucking hell is Maeve Brennan?” Cinematographer P.J. Dillon used long lens shots with small depth of field to blur the background. This compresses space and creates a sense of intimacy. We feel we’re “with” Ruth, Orla and Claire. They look very young and vulnerable as passers-by swirl around them. The filmmakers had to decide whether to shoot the film on 35 mm or on video. They chose the more expensive 35 mm because it made it possible to create a sense of period and gave these night scenes a richer, more velvety, feel.

We cut back to the hallway of The Grove. The lighting is brighter and more exposing, like fluorescent lighting in a schoolroom. The camera has moved further away from Brian and Maeve, and they’ve moved away from each other. The song being played, *Love and Affection* by Joan Armatrading, is now interrupted with the garbled sound of people talking. The night is about to turn from the positive to the negative. Brian, immature and embarrassed, tries to make conversation with Maeve, who has finally taken off her red jacket and is getting more comfortable in the situation. He says “*It’s really packed in there*” but she doesn’t hear him. “*What?*” she asks. He tries again “*It’s black...*” and again she doesn’t catch what he’s saying. And then he just gives up: “*It doesn’t matter.*” At that moment, Maeve’s magical night with Brian is virtually over.

But they give it one more try: they go back into the hall and start to dance to David Bowie’s *Boys Keep Swinging*. Yet they’re further apart, not really dancing together. And then Jackie appears and Maeve is cut out. Suddenly the room spins, the song goes pear-shaped, and she runs for the toilets to be sick. By the time she comes back Brian and Jackie are together and there’s nothing for the wounded Maeve to do but slink away.

#### EXPLORATION

1. Comment on the lighting, colour, sound and editing that create the mood of The Grove. How would you describe this mood? Which technical aspect contributes most to the mood, do you think?
2. Maeve and Ruth both suffer emotionally in these scenes. Which situation do you find most emotional?
3. In keeping with the coming-of-age story, these scenes are key to the development of Maeve’s and Ruth’s characters. How does each situation affect each girl?
4. In the scenes leading up to The Grove, is there anything that links Maeve’s behaviour to Ruth’s? And afterwards? What are the elements that tell us both girls are feeling the same way? What is the significance of the shot of the moon?
5. How does this scene contribute to the rest of the film in terms of the characters and the story?

#### GLOSSARY

**Slow motion** photography is an effect that can be achieved by speeding up the camera so that when the footage is projected, it appears to run slowly. This is often used to heighten certain moments in film and give them more emotional or dramatic weight.

**35 mm** is the most common film gauge – the physical property that defines its width – used in photography and motion pictures. The photographic film is cut into strips 35 millimeters wide. Most common film gauges are 8mm, 16mm and 35mm.

**Exposure** All cameras have at least two ways to control light: the shutter and aperture. The aperture is like an iris in the eye, and controls light by changing size. When a photographer takes a picture, the shutter opens briefly and the image is exposed.

**Optical filters** are devices which selectively transmit light having certain properties (often, a particular range of wavelengths, that is, range of colours of light), while blocking the remainder. Depth of field is the portion of a scene that appears sharp in the image.



# GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT

The general vision and viewpoint of a text refers to the vision of the world provided by the particular text. This may or may not be the vision of the writer/filmmaker. In examining the general vision, we are looking at the mood and feelings that are generated by the work e.g. positive or negative or particular view of life. How do you feel after reading or seeing the work?

In the case of **32A**, there are several aspects to consider when determining the general vision. Firstly, the director, Marion Quinn, grew up during this period and the scenes are very much drawn from her own experience (see interview with Marion Quinn P:18). Shooting the film on location in Raheny, where she grew up, using real locations from the period such as The Park and The Grove gives it a particular authenticity, particularly for an audience that grew up in this period. The original Grove DJ, Cecil, is the one who appears in the film. **32A** takes a nostalgic look back at a period of growing up and regards this period as one of relative innocence. In this, the film is not dissimilar to others which look back at childhood through the eyes of an adult, such as *Stand by Me*. In this film, and **32A**, the protagonist is portrayed as an innocent struggling with elements of life as they try to make sense of the world. There is also a sense that the adult life ahead of them is going to be a much tougher place. But a vision of friendship is also depicted in

**32A**, as something positive and supportive which will survive betrayal, disruption or family difficulty.



*Stand by Me* (1986)

## EXPLORATIONS

1. What do you think is the general vision and viewpoint of **32A**? Choose a scene which particularly shows this.
2. How does the film make you feel at the end?
3. Would you like to see a different ending? Describe an alternative ending which might give a different vision and viewpoint.
4. Choose another key scene which depicts a different view of life.
5. Do you think an adult would feel differently watching this film than your age-group? Discuss with your teacher or parent.





# SCRIPTWRITING

Scriptwriting is writing specifically for the screen, be it television or cinema. At its heart, scriptwriting is concerned with a visual narrative. It's not the same as writing plays, which are nearly all dialogue. It's hard to imagine – although not impossible – a play with no dialogue. But you could have a film with no dialogue. You'd have to find a visual way of telling the story.

## Scenario One

Here's a scenario:

*A man walks into a bank. He carries a black holdall. The bank is empty, only one guard in the corner reading the newspaper. The man goes up to the teller and hands over a note. The teller reads the note, then proceeds to open the cash-drawer and empty it. She pushes the money towards the man, who opens his bag and puts it in.*

*The guard continues to read the newspaper. The man leaves the bank, goes home, and lives happily ever after.*

Not very interesting, is it?

## Scenario Two

Here's another scenario:

*A man, call him Tim, an ex-soldier, works for a large multinational company. Tim has a wife and new baby, who sadly has a heart condition that requires expensive medication, without which he might die. Tim has kept his old service hand-gun, against all the regulations, because his time in the Lebanon has made him a nervous, paranoid man. But with his*

*regular job and his loving family, he lives a contented and simple life. Until one day he's made redundant. And then the money runs out. Desperate to afford his son's medication, Tim tries everything to get a new job. But the country is now in the grip of a recession and it's not so easy. In a moment of madness, Tim makes a life-changing decision: to rob a bank. He walks up and down in front of a large, multinational bank, trying to make up his mind. Finally, his son's medicine is down to the last few drops. Tim must act. He takes his old service handgun and a black holdall and goes into the bank. There's a long queue of people waiting for the teller. One guard, in the corner, reading the newspaper. Tim gets into the line. Sweat appears on his brow. In his pocket, the gun. He touches it nervously. The queue moves forward. He's the next in line... He checks the guard. He has stopped reading the paper and now looks directly at Tim... I think we know how this one is going to end. And let's not even think about the baby...*



The question is: which of these would you rather spend 90 to 120 minutes watching in a cinema?

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) was the first to formulate a written theory of drama. In his *Poetics* he maintained that it was based on three things: **pity**, **fear** and **catharsis**. Catharsis is derived from the ancient Greek and means purification or cleansing. Aristotle believed this kind of emotional climax could come from the release of pent-up emotion you get from watching a tragedy. Leading on from that, Aristotle established the need for a three-act structure i.e. a beginning, a middle and an end; pity, fear and catharsis. This is roughly the model that is still used today.

Character is expressed through conflict. Usually scripts orchestrate a series of conflicts that bring a character towards (or away from) their goal. The classic cinematic paradigm is: somebody wants something badly but is having trouble getting it. In Scenario One, there was no real character – we knew nothing about this man – and there was no conflict. Even if he wanted something badly – which we didn't know – he certainly wasn't having trouble getting it. It had a plot, but no conflict. Which made it boring. In Scenario Two, we had an empathetic character, Tim, who had a problem that he needed to solve. The baby's illness was part of the

set-up: we had to bring Tim to the point where he had no other option but to rob the bank. But it was Tim's nervousness and paranoia that added a deeper dimension to his actions. Everything in this second scenario is about bringing the character towards their difficulties. This is what conflict means. The best screenplays contain a mix of internal and external conflicts, be they character flaws (Tim's paranoia) or societal blocks (parents, governments, The Federation, the shoulds). The conflict might be nothing more than what other people think – such as in *Juno* where her pregnancy is greeted quite differently by different people – or it might be the forces of Evil. But without conflict there is no drama.

In **32A** there are several conflicts, both internal and external. Maeve is in conflict with her parents and her friends but she is also in conflict with herself. These conflicts create the drama as we watch her find her way out of them.

As we've seen in the scenario with Tim, we, the audience, need to empathise with the protagonist in order to have an interest in their conflict. Screenwriting creates the conditions that make us empathise. Above all, cinema reflects our lives back to us. What we're looking at on the screen is ourselves. We are emotionally engaged with the journey of the protagonists. We **pity** the

struggling Maeve, and her divided loyalties. We **fear** for her: her loss of friendship, her getting into trouble, her being dumped by Brian. We feel a sense of emotional relief – **catharsis** – when Maeve and her friends are reunited and their world has been restored. We have watched her struggle and ultimately resolve her conflicts and this leads to resolution. The film's resolution is what gives the audience a sense of closure.

#### EXPLORATIONS:

1. What is your understanding of Aristotle's theory of drama from this? How does it relate to **32A**?
2. **32A** is set in Dublin in 1979. How would an adult react to this? Would they empathise? How would your reactions differ to those of your parents?
3. Do you see anything of yourself in the struggling Maeve? The fickle Brian?
4. Can you write alternative endings for Scenario Two?
5. Do you think **32A** is a specifically Irish story? Explain your answer.

# Tommy Weir, Producer, talks to Judy Lunny



Tommy Weir, Producer

## **What does a producer do?**

A producer minds a project in the broadest sense, from finance all the way through producing, making the film, editing it and then planning its release.

## **How involved would you be in the creative side?**

There are many different kinds of producers, some more creative than others. The job involves creative, financial, legal, organisational skills. It depends on the personality. As a producer you should know your strengths and your weaknesses, and what involvement you want to have.

## **How did you get into this work?**

I fell into it. I come from a family of artists. My father was an artist and my two sisters both went to art college. In college I fell into arts organisation. I didn't draw or paint myself. But I ended up going to Trinity. There I started in the Douglas Hyde Gallery on the organising end of things, as a student helping out with hanging the shows, organising and producing exhibitions. The word "producer" appears in film and theatre but it actually has a role in every creative field. I didn't realise it at the time but I was evolving into that kind of role.

## **How much of the nuts and bolts of filming were you involved in?**

It's hard to feel it wasn't every aspect of the filming process: I have a delegation

issue. But you can't do everything, much as you internally might want to. What was hardest for me (with the shoot) was that the amount of legal and contractual paperwork and financial management I had to stay across meant that I wasn't as involved with the actual shoot as I would have liked to have been. That said, it would be very unusual for a producer to do that. To a certain extent we had to just trust Marion and the creative team to get on with it.

## **And does the fact that you're married make it easier or more difficult?**

I would have thought it made it easier. Because we both feel equal ownership of the project and we've approached it as a couple, as filmmakers. Whereas an awful lot of directors might look on their producers and go "*Why hasn't he or she given me the money for that?*" Marian would probably be more aware than most directors why. There was nothing hidden from her. But there was nobody to go home to who'd say "*Have a cup of tea dear, you must be exhausted*" and she probably could have used that as well. But during the process of the shoot, it's so exciting. It's not necessarily always great fun, but it's incredibly exhilarating. So even if it's hard, you're alive in a very fundamental way.

**Would you talk a little bit about the poster and the marketing of a film, what elements go into it? What are you looking for in a film poster?**





The main thing about marketing is to be different. We distributed the film ourselves, so we were responsible for our own marketing. When you haven't got a lot of money, you have to be aware that you're up against huge studios who think nothing of dropping a million dollars on marketing. Even in a country like Ireland, a film such as *Wild Child* which launched at the same time, while we had a marketing budget of €10,000 they would have a marketing budget of maybe €300,000/€400,000. You also have to be aware that you're offering something quite different. We had a film that wasn't about being a consumer product, but was actually something that was about something. So your poster should pull it away from the general mass of posters. The other factor for our film was that there were two possible markets for the piece: Young people and their parents, women and men over 40. Because the film is set back in their time, we had to let them know that this was a film that was possibly interesting for them. And then there's personal taste. An awful lot of film posters involve multi-layered Photoshop files with three heads floating in a kind of funky background. Our brief to the designer would have been around all of those things: it should look like an art-house film, it should look like a film that's not a consumer product, it should look like a film that might appeal to young people but also could appeal to their parents. We kept getting feedback

from the market generally that there was an issue around the title – **32A**. And one of the things I said to them was "How do we convey what **32A** is?" Guys might think it's a bus and girls might think it's a bra. Marian, as a director, might like the fact that there's two meanings, but in the marketplace you have to be quite clear about what it is. Hence the measuring tape appeared as a kind of device, both in the logo and on the actual poster itself. We had an initial draft done for Galway (Film Fleadh) of the four girls sitting on the fence, which is a more classic kind of art-house film poster. Very clean, very simple, a lot of people liked it, but when we hung it up in the IFI, it completely blended into the background. So the current poster that we have, with the yellow and purple, two contrasting colours, with its dated 70's feel, felt kind of appropriate for the piece. It sticks out and that's what I wanted.

#### What about the use of the Internet? Was that crucial to aspects of the production?

The Internet was vital from start to finish and was used all the way through. We live and work in Leitrim... away from all the big urban centres, but we have a website which I very actively maintain and of course we used an awful lot of e-mail during the initial legal stages of budgeting, planning, financial planning stages. I would have Skype conversations with my German co-producer where we're sharing documents, sending budgets back and forth. We'd have a

degree of a virtual "shared office", chatting about what we're looking at and trying to come to agreement about how to move forward.

The internet was used, probably most clearly, in the case of the music and the soundtrack. Our composer was based in New York, we had our edit suite here in Sligo and our sound mix based in Berlin. Jerry (Leonard), the composer, would upload files to our i-disc network disc, and we would download them, Marian would give feedback, and he would issue corrected versions, and then he would upload files that Lars (Ginzel), our sound mixer in Berlin, would download and mix with the dialogue in the studio in Berlin. And then finally through to marketing, where we use Google Analytics which shows visitor statistics to the [32Amovie.com](http://32Amovie.com) site, and we can see which page is the most popular. The internet has been vital for us.



### Why do you have a German co-producer? What do they do?

They turn up with money. They also turn up with crew and expertise. It's very hard to make a film without many different sources of money. We have actually thirteen different pools of money in **32A**. Roshi (Behesht Nedjad) my German co-producer, turned up with three of those. It's the same in the States, the American films which land here use the tax break money that's available here, and hopefully some Irish Film Board money. The other good thing about it is that you get a commitment from another country towards your project so you'll find that distributors and TV stations in those countries are interested in your piece because it's been partially financed there. And of course part of the obligations of raising finance in Germany is that you spend some of it in Germany, so we ended up doing our post production in Berlin. And you can find that other countries, such as Germany and England, have facilities that we just don't yet have here: we don't have a working Lab in Ireland, so you can't actually process film in the country. They also have a long and venerable film tradition, so they would have very high-end services and equipment available to us. And ultimately, why Germany? They like Irish stories, the Germans traditionally do co-produce well with Ireland.

### EXPLORATIONS

1. From the interview with Tommy Weir, producer of **32A**, what do you understand the role of a film producer to be?
2. What form of marketing was most important for **32A**? What form of marketing is most effective for films among your age group? Make a list of all the forms you can think of.
3. Look at the poster or website or DVD cover for **32A** and comment on their effectiveness as a marketing tool.



# Marian Quinn, Director, talks to Judy Lunny



Marian Quinn, Director

## How did you become a Film Director? Did you go to Film School?

No. My background is in acting. I think I probably always knew I wanted to write someday. There aren't as many parts for women as there are for men, and I didn't want to sit around and wait for my agent to call for an audition so I started writing. I wrote a short film and shot it with friends in New York. P.J. Dillon shot it – the same guy who shot **32A**.

I found that there was a real community of filmmakers in New York who are willing to work for nothing for a weekend, to help each other out, I would then help them out, and that took me all the way through to the editing and I learned an awful lot about the whole process. Plus I would have learned just from working on film as an actor, but **32A** is my first feature, so it was a huge learning experience in a lot of ways.

## And does being an actor inform your work as a director? Does it give you an insight into the process?

Well, it gives you an insight into the actors. My weak spot was the whole

technical end. Everyone always said to me *"Yes but you can hire good people for that."* But I still needed and wanted to learn more, particularly about post-production.

## And did you "see" the shots when you were writing the script?

Some of them, but some of them I really didn't know. And then you've no idea of what kind of location you're going to end up with. I know when we came to shooting the scene where Brian Power comes to visit Maeve and she has her first kiss on the porch, that was always the porch to me and there was no question that it was anywhere else. But our cinematographer had read the script and he was thinking "porch" was a huge, square porch that he could get the camera in and make it shoot this way and that way. I wanted the porch to be so small that it was just their little world and it wasn't terribly comfortable. And then sometimes you'd have something worked out in your head and something else would come up on the day and you'd throw it all away and use that instead. So it's about being open for inspiration as well.

## Did you storyboard the film?

Not really, no. Myself and P.J. went through every scene, talked about it and made scribbles about how we would shoot it. If anything, I would like to have more time the next time. It would be a luxury to really know your location and to really have time to think about how

you're going to shoot it. But I know sometimes people get worried about having everything storyboarded so that there's no spontaneity on the day... So we had lots of spontaneity!

## How do you approach casting and auditions?

We did a lot of workshops, a lot of improvising and theatre games. That would be my background, and I trained using a lot of theatre games. I think for kids, particularly, it's not a good idea to give them scripts because they'll learn off lines and they get into an intonation and it's not conducive to anything. What I wanted them to be is just fresh and natural, and be "in the moment". We had a casting director who would go through lots of girls and we'd narrow it down and hold workshops of about 15 to 30 girls at a time. The talent was endless: so many great kids out there. But it was really just a matter of getting four that were right for those roles, and who could work together. They were different and compatible and that's what we ended up with. In the end, we were really blessed with a great cast.

## Did you use improvisational work in rehearsals?

I really didn't work with the script with them... it was more the sense of it that I wanted. And even then, I don't think there was ever a question of them not knowing their lines... It was more their relationship and the bond that I wanted to work on, just to get them freed up, to express





themselves and also for it to appear that they were friends. And that happened very quickly. They were great, and so enthusiastic. They arrived on the set screaming the first morning and it just continued from there. Playing clapping games, singing songs. They were really up for it, excited to be working on a film: it was their summer, a great thing to do when you're thirteen...

**Do you think being an “outsider” in Ireland in the 1970s – given that you were born in the States – gave you a different eye to things?**

Yes, absolutely. I mean I think I'm just an outsider wherever I go. I was the same in America..... you see yourself “apart from”, so you observe as opposed to being in the middle of it. I'm always really envious of people who are just part of their society, because I never was. In America we were “that Irish family” – we were always on the outside. And now being here we're on the outside as well. I think it makes you an observer. For better or worse.

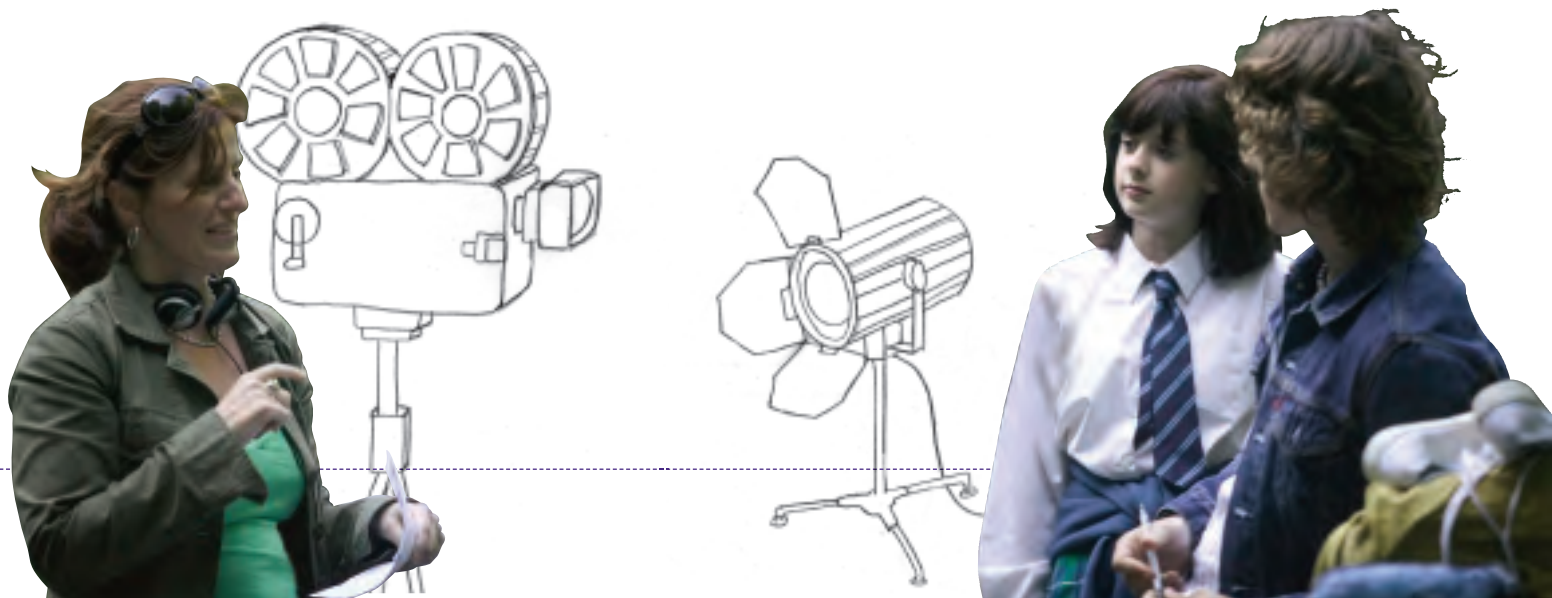
**Could you talk about the costume and design?**

Paki Smith was our production designer. We had a really hard time finding somebody who would take on this project because it's a period film with a tiny budget. Most designers would read the script, look at the budget and say “*It can't be done.*” But Paki, just decided that he would take it on and

he said “*Look we don't have any money for anything so I'm going to put it into brains*” and he hired good people. I showed him my friend's mother's house, just as an example of a house, and I said “*We're not shooting there so don't even consider it*” and I showed him Tommy's mother's friend's house as well, as another “example” but said “*We are not shooting there...*” But Paki's so charming he kept going back and visiting them. And in the end, we shot in Lily's house, because Paki is very persuasive and charming and she was very kind to let us in. There were aspects of her house that hadn't changed. I do remember the chocolate brown bathroom from when I was a teenager. And that's what we really needed – we needed someone who could just keep going and keep going until we got what we needed. And months of car boot sales. What people have really responded to is the attention to detail and all the little things – the P & T phonebook, the Kellogg's Cornflakes box – so I think it did work. I worried that we didn't have enough money for cars and things, but I

think it worked because it focused the story more on the girls rather than being this elaborate set. Equally, I was really lucky with Driscoll Calder who did the costumes. I don't know how she did it. She came in under budget. She has a really great eye: she didn't think about the costumes as just “costumes”, but we really talked about each character and their whole look and their hair, how they wear it, make up, everything. Obviously the girls didn't have any makeup but we did this for all the characters. She's done everything, and it really helped to establish the whole look. And we talked and came up with the hairstyles for the girls with the hair and make-up people. But I think she did get some clothes from England from the rentals place and some of the things she could get in the shops, and it was a really nice mix of old and new. In the '70s people didn't have as many clothes as they have now. And it is more realistic that they would be wearing their school uniform a lot of the time. We decided each girl would have an outfit or two, but I often see





teen films from America, and the girls have the most fabulous outfits and they change about ten times a day – that just wasn't realistic for the '70s. The single most expensive thing was getting the school uniform made: she had to invent that, invent a crest... This is 1979, coming into the '80s, so the styles were changing, they weren't massive big flares and platforms, so we did talk about how the film was subtle, our budget was subtle, and the clothes should be subtle... So no over-the-top 70s. And that was the same with the design: if there was wallpaper, it was on one wall: not to overstate it.

Paki and P.J. and Driscoll – those were my three creative collaborators. When I look at the film today, and I see the colours I think “wow, that really worked” that that's what we talked about in the beginning. It's really gratifying.

**You mention Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* trilogy as an influence. What was Edna O'Brien trying to express about growing up in 1940s Clare that chimed with you?**

I guess it wasn't so much what she was but it was the fact that she was following a generation, which I thought might be interesting for my generation. Because I have stayed close to some friends since I was thirteen. And even though we went all over the world – England, Australia, America – we stayed in touch and we all seemed to go

through similar phases, you know: the twenties were kind of dire, then things looked up again in the thirties, but I just thought it would be interesting because that's what I liked. I love the idea of re-visiting characters to see what ten or twelve years has done to them. That's why I thought **32A** could possibly be the start of a trilogy for a group of girls from my generation.

**And do you think there is an anti-female or gender bias in the film industry?**

I don't know if I would call it an “anti-female” bias, but if you look at the statistics, they speak for themselves. I think the problem is that it is so engrained that people don't even realise that it's a bias. I remember telling somebody that I had a story about three sisters and I was told “*Oh no, it's OK, we have one about a grandmother and a granddaughter*”. Meaning: “*We have one that has two women in the lead so we couldn't do another one with three women.*” And that's just a kind of a reflex that is so engrained – I don't think these people are bigots or sexist – but it's just so deep that I think the “powers-that-be” really feel that we wouldn't have an audience for that. Can you imagine? “*Oh, we have a film with three guys in it... Sorry, no.*”

I know this summer there have been a lot of what are known as “chick flicks” and I'm sure there's a market for that. But I don't think that's what people

mean when they're saying “there's a bias” so let's just have these movies that are exclusively for women, films that men would be embarrassed to be sitting in the audience with, and I don't think that's what I want. That's not the answer. Partly it comes from writing as well; if the scripts are not written, they're not going to be produced. But it all comes from Hollywood, the people who run the studios are male. And sometimes the women, when they do take on those roles, I think they feel like they need to act like one of the boys. The other thing to consider is that women tell stories in slightly different ways, stories with less action or less plot-driven, they might be non-linear, they might be more emotional, they might be just about a character, maybe not needing a sort of formulaic structure. We're half the population and there should be room for every type of story out there.

#### EXPLORATIONS:

1. How did Marian Quinn direct the young actors in **32A**, according to the interview?
2. How did they create the ‘look’ of the film? What do you think of it?
3. Create a set for a film about your friends – how would you create the look? Think about location, costume, makeup, props.
4. What do you think of her comments regarding films for female audiences? Do you agree?

**32A** directed by Marian Quinn, Ireland/Germany 2007.

**Running time:** 89 mins.

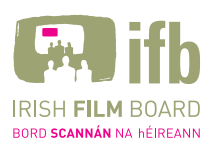
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