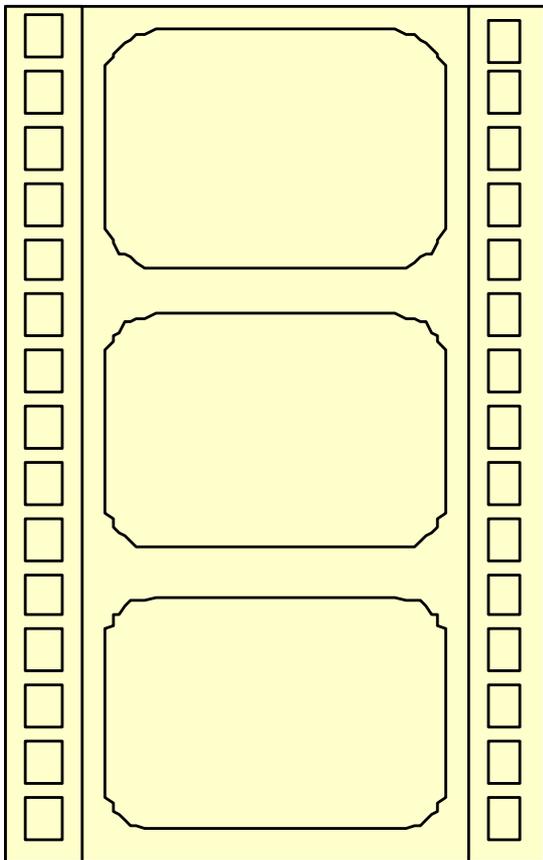


Film

INSIDE I'M DANCING

(Directed by Damien O'Donnell)

Study Notes ; A Hynes



Notes: Aidan Hynes 2011

INSIDE I'M DANCING

The film ***Inside I'm Dancing*** is set in Ireland . It follows Michael Connolly, a twenty four year old who has cerebral palsy and long-term resident of the Carrigmore Residential Home for the Disabled, run by the formidable Eileen. His life is transformed when Rory O'Shea moves in. Michael is stunned to discover that quick witted Rory, who can move only his right hand, can understand his almost unintelligible speech. Rory's rebellious nature sparks a flame in Michael, introducing him to a whole new world outside of Carrigmore.

Together the two men set themselves up in a flat employing Siobhan as their personal assistant, to cook, clean and take care of their needs. Siobhan soon becomes integral to the boys' efforts at **successful independent living** and begins to realise that this responsibility brings as many complications as it does rewards.

Inside I'm Dancing is the story of what happens when two frustrated, ambitious and romantic young men, determined to live life to the full, reach out and grasp their opportunity. It is a **humorous film**, which demonstrates how human beings can reach their potential by **overcoming prejudices** (including their own) and **barriers** in order to live inspirational and fulfilled lives. The developing friendship between Michael and Rory allows them to create the conditions to free themselves in order to live independent lives. But to live as they wish (without rules) brings its own consequences.

The opening scene introduce the viewer to **Carrigmore Home**.

The early scenes in the film demonstrate the **difficulty in communication** for some disabled people (in this case Michael's speech). Without the appropriate skills to communicate

accidents, misinterpretations occur (demonstrated early in the film by the vacuum flex caught in a wheelchair).

Eileen Sheehy is in charge of the home and she is the first to greet the newly arrived Rory O'Shea. Rory suffers from muscular dystrophy. As a new resident he livens things up somewhat, and sets the **first tense scene** in the film with his lively and coarse language.

Lights are turned out at night. It is Rory's first night in the home. To the consternation of residents and staff alike, music comes blasting from Rory's room. The charge nurse confiscates his CD player, telling Rory that he is waking the whole house. Rory feels trapped; it is **music which frees him**. When it is taken away he feels his independence has been taken away also.

The following day is art class. Rory is not interested in painting and spews soda on his paint pad using a straw. Michael Connolly, who suffers from cerebral palsy, can only articulate his frustration at Rory's bad behaviour by using the **alphabet cards**.

But later Rory comes to see Michael as he is getting physiotherapy. Rory, still sarcastic and sharp-tongued – a way for him to cope with his situation, understands Michael's speech. This frees Michael too: with Rory he doesn't have to revert to the alphabet cards all the time.

Rory tells Michael that he has spent six years in a class with people like him. Michael regards Rory's understanding of his voice as **a gift**. But he has yet to trust Rory, whose sarcasm and coarse language continues to raise eyebrows among the residents and staff.

However a **friendship** has been struck.

Annie is helping Rory with his hair, but when Rory asks for hair gel he is told that the home does not have time to be looking after his hair spikes. Not to be defeated, Rory finds an ally in Michael. Michael puts the gel into Rory's hair and spikes it.

This episode is important as it demonstrates that a person's style of hair is important, as it makes a statement about the person, in this case a disabled young Rory who feels he has the right to be assisted in giving him his **individuality** (characteristic/peculiar only to him).

Rory tells Michael that he wants to be 'out there'. Like everybody else. 'Don't you want to be like everybody else?'

Rory feels resentful that he is confined to one place. His conversations with Michael deepen as their friendship takes hold. They understand each other.

Michael is more isolated in the home than Rory. Michael's father, a highly respected barrister, does not visit him. Michael's mother is dead. It is on visiting day that Rory introduces Michael to his own father, a gentle sort of person but hardly able to look after Rory.

'She died and he dumped you,' Rory says to Michael. 'Does he know you have a secret fan club?'

The **street collection scene** is a long sequence and brings the protagonists in the film to new experiences, especially Michael who is not worldly or street wise. After spending time collecting for Carrigmore Home, Rory slips away with Michael to a bar. He says he will show Michael how to be 'romantic'. In the bar they meet two girls and Rory turns on his chat up charm. Soon he asks the girls to get them a drink – which he says can be taken from their collection boxes, to Michael's distress and disapproval.

'It's for the disabled ... life is dishonest, Michael.' Rory attempts to explain.

The girls agree and help Michael and Rory to get the alcohol, which they drink through straws.

After several drinks Rory wants to dance. The girls are uneasy about this and eventually they leave. Trouble soon starts with a customer (**fight scene**) when Rory bumps into him, but he is saved from a fight by the intervention of another customer. Her name is Siobhan.

Rory and Michael follow Siobhan and her friend to a night club. The bouncers try to stop them but Michael demands his rights under European law to be admitted, confusing and worrying the bouncers who agree to let them in.

In the **club scene** they watch and try to participate in the dance.

The next scene is after the night club. It is raining and the protagonists find themselves alone. They have no money left for a taxi and have to wheel their way back to the home. Mrs. Sheehy is not impressed. The collection had to be abandoned because of the pair's behaviour.

A new day and a new scene shows Rory take Michael to see about an **independent living** allowance. He tells the panel of three interviewers that Michael is his lawyer. The 'mishandling' of the collection money is brought up at the interview. Rory believes that they have already made up their mind about him. He pleads his case but must come back in six months.

Michael, therefore, puts in his own application for an independent living allowance. In this **appeals scene** Rory is sent out of the room but must ironically (unexpected/contradictory but true) and comically be allowed back in because Rory can interpret for him. Michael makes the case to the panel that he can make a real contribution and live a fuller life if he is given an

independent living allowance. He gets approval for his application and wants Rory with him. He claims that Rory is his speech aid and interpreter.

The **flat searching scene** throws up the barriers of access to buildings, as well as the high and unaffordable prices being asked for rentals.

At Rory's instigation, they go to see Michael's father, a senior counsel in the highest courts in Ireland. The **meeting scene with Fergal Connolly** is a striking one. Rory, with his usual sharp but pointed wit, tells Michael's father that they have come to report a case of **criminal neglect**. The camera zooms close up to Fergal Connolly's face. He is a trapped man. He has neglected his son since 1981. His colleagues and friends are watching this meeting and much is revealed about the relationship and behaviour without anyone having to say a word.

Michael's father takes them into his office.

In the **court office scene** there is another close up shot of a photograph of Michael's graduation day, with his proud father's arms on Michael's shoulders. This makes the **abandonment** of Michael all the more **unconscionable** (unfair and unjust) since it is obvious that Michael's disability is a problem his father would much prefer not to have to deal with.

'What do you need from me?' Michael's father asks.

Rory tells him that they need a proper place to live. 'Michael needs a home.'

Michael is reluctant to take anything from his father. His pride is at stake.

The episode moves to a **decision scene** where Rory and Michael sit at a bus stop. Rory convinces Michael that he should take whatever his father offers, that way they can have an independent life. 'It'll be worth it. It'll be worth it.' Rory tells him.

Now with money behind them, they **find a place to live**.

'No Rules. No interfering auld bitches ... FREEDOM!'

Following this scene is the **interview episode**. Several candidates apply for a carer's position. It is a humorous scene. Michael and Rory can find no one to suit their requirements. Until, that is, they see a girl whom they recognise in the supermarket where she works. It is Siobhan, the girl they followed to the nightclub. She agrees after some little persuasion to be their carer.

The **following scenes** show the protagonists start a new life of **independent living together**. It is not as easy as they might have thought. Michael tries to be 'independent' but the simple task of cleaning his teeth requires assistance. As much as he wishes he could do this independently of Siobhan, he must appeal for her help. Similarly, Rory finds his situation troubling in that he has to be hoisted into his bed. Siobhan is kept very busy looking after both Michael and Rory's needs. Her job is more demanding than she, too, may not have realised. But they work out a system and become good friends.

Rory is a personable character, and easily makes friends (as well as enemies) in the community where they live. He gets along well with the kids whom he challenges to a race. Later he goes joyriding with them. He will do anything to free himself, whatever the challenge that may be. In the **joyriding scene** Rory makes getting caught by the guards seem funny, asking to be arrested, and when the guard refuses Rory claims discrimination. Eventually, he gets his wish.

Rivalry becomes more of a theme as the film progresses. It is intense. It is rivalry for personal attention and love. It is demonstrated as both men demand help. One is jealous of the other when Siobhan is in attendance. The **hair make up scene** is one example. As Rory gets his hair done, Michael wants his done as well. Also, when Michael is getting **word**

lessons from Siobhan, Rory calls out for help in getting up. And so on this goes until it becomes a situation of dynamics between the three characters.

When Siobhan tries to impose **rules** about loud music in the house, Rory is upset.

Independent living for him means no rules. But there must be rules. It is also a challenge to Siobhan and her ability to work within a contract of sorts.

Michael becomes more reliant on Siobhan, and feels uncomfortable with her when she tends to his physical and other functional needs. He is **falling in love** with her and this creates a new dynamic, which eventually creates the conditions where Siobhan cannot work.

Michael waits for her to arrive for work rather than go out with Rory.

Rory's abusive language and anger is too much for Siobhan when he comes home late after his arrest. In this **scene she leaves but returns**. And though Rory says he wants no one's help, Siobhan does her duty and helps him get ready for bed. It is a rare occasion when Rory accepts help without comment. He begins to understand his responsibility, just as Siobhan understands hers and hands him the remote control for his CD player. That is his choice to make.

Michael equally has to come to terms with the new situation. His attraction to Siobhan cannot be sustained. In a troubling **scene of truth**. Rory says, 'she is not on our side'.

But Michael wants Rory to help him tell her how he feels about her. Again, for all his sarcastic talk and harsh tongue, it is Rory who is **perceptive** (sees things clearer/truthfully) in this film. He pulls no punches about their situation, and though he is a romantic figure, he is capable of rudeness and speaking out as he feels. Often it is a defence for his true state of emotion.

Rory says to Michael a little cruelly: 'What have you got to offer a woman like that? ... get a tape recorder and listen to yourself ...look at yourself in the mirror.'

It is a very **poignant** (touching and meaningful) moment in the film. Rory's harsh remarks are the reality as he sees his condition. This is not easy for Michael.

Rory's father comes to **visit scene** with a twenty-first birthday card for his son. Rory reminds him that the place is not his but Michael's.

Siobhan gets invited to a fancy dress party by a man who fancies her. She ensures that Michael and Rory invited also.

Once again it is Rory who reminds Siobhan to **be careful**. 'You know someone might think it's their lucky night.' He says this in order to protect Michael from a hard knock, as he realises that Siobhan is not interested in him romantically. The intensity of Michael's attraction for Siobhan becomes clear at the **fancy dress party scene** when he sees her dancing with another man. He interrupts them and has Siobhan dance with him. But it is an awkward dance, embarrassing for Siobhan as it puts her in a position where she has to extricate herself from Michael's grip. She returns to the man she was dancing with.

Back in the flat Rory interprets for Siobhan Michael's painful question. 'Do you have any feelings for me?'

It is where Siobhan must **speak out scene**, and make clear her position clear to Michael. 'I'm paid to do what I do for you. That isn't love. And what you feel for me isn't love either.

That's gratitude. I like working for you but it is just a job...'

To Michael's distress Siobhan admits that she made a mistake taking on the job and tells him that she is leaving.

'Don't beg, it's undignified,' Rory tells Michael as Michael gets more upset. Siobhan is equally indignant and tells both men that they cannot expect to be treated in any other way just because they are disabled. She continues: 'If a woman is not right for you then accept that, just as when you insult a man in a pub expect to be hit back.' Siobhan leaves. 'I can't help who I love, I can't help who I don't love.'

The **new carer scene** is tense the following day. Neither Michael or Rory want to eat. There is a caller, Peter, who Siobhan has hired to look after them until they can get somebody else. It is an inevitable end to a caring friendship that got misinterpreted.

Michael takes off into the rainy night, against the protest of Rory. Michael threatens to **throw himself into the river** (Liffey) scene. Rory tells him: 'I know it hurts, you're not the only one with a broken heart. You have the future, Michael. That's what I call a gift. Don't give it up.'

Rory too has been in love.

Again it is only through Rory's wit and humour that the two friends move on. They accept the new carer. They must also accept that life is to be lived on life's terms.

In the **hospital scene** Michael comes face to face with Rory's fatal illness (pneumonia). The nurse tells Michael that Rory would have known that he'd become ill and die.

The **final scenes** are heightened as Michael comes to terms with his **isolation**, and the further realisation that in order to continue with independent living, he has learned much from Rory. It is important for him to visit Siobhan in order to acknowledge this new situation, as well as to create a new beginning. He will fight for Rory's right to a carers allowance. Michael now becomes his **advocate** (spokesperson). He gets Siobhan's help in order to go before the panel and make the case he has prepared (like his father, Michael can make a great lawyer) for the

panel, whom he believes has been prejudiced towards Rory. Michael **wins the right scene** for Rory to have the services he has applied for. But it comes too late. Rory has died.

The film does not end on a sad note but more optimistic that the memory and influence of Rory has been one of goodness and **hope for the future**. Michael has come to accept himself, his medical condition and the world as it is, which offers many great things like friendships and love.

When comparing the film with the other texts on the course there are many contrasts and similarities. The similarities strike most when using the texts for the comparative on themes and issues and in the social/cultural context.

In the film **Inside I'm Dancing**, Rory is rebellious. But others, especially Michael, will learn from his behaviour. As with Nora in **A Doll's House**, and Alec and Jerry are in **How Many Miles To Babylon?** Alec (or Alex) rebels against his severe and cold mother, and the class ridden society he longs to free himself from. Jerry rebels against the oppressive regime he lives under and intends to be part of the fight against the colonial power that rules his country.

The themes of **independence and individualism** are highlighted in the texts on the course.

In the film **Inside I'm Dancing** there are many themes and issues, most notably the acceptance/non acceptance of one's situation in life, overcoming the barriers associated with disability: emotional and physical needs. The issue is one for the individual to stand up and rebel against, and make a new beginning, like Nora does in **A Doll's House**, - she too can only make change by doing something dramatic, as she does by leaving her family. She intends to fend for herself, achieve her independence. There are consequences to her action, as there is for all the protagonists in the texts who take a stance.

In **How Many Miles To Babylon?** Alec rebels against his family, against authority, all of which he sees as hypocritical and inhumane. He becomes a martyr through his love and friendship with Jerry.

The protagonists in **Inside I'm Dancing** come to learn that love has many guises and the pain of not getting what Michael and Rory feel entitled to. By taking action they learn to take on the world and grow wiser from the experience.

In **How Many Miles To Babylon?** Alec must separate himself from his family in order to live his own life. From a loveless family, a strong friendship develops between two unlikely protagonists: Alec and Jerry. (Michael and Rory are very different personalities, though they suffer a disability which unites them). Alec and Jerry are from different backgrounds, political and social traditions, but they survive in war conditions through the common theme of friendship. Their friendship deepens because they have a common interest in justice, and understand the effects of tyrannical or unjust regimes (family or the state). In **Inside I'm Dancing** an institution – Carrigmore Home – however respectful it is towards the residents, cannot fulfil the needs of these young men.

In **How Many Miles To Babylon?** the narrative focuses on two friends whose lives are divided by the bigotries of class and war. What they share as boys is a passion for horses and the Irish countryside. What they share as men is the experience of a war in Flanders, and an ordeal beyond even the horrors of the battlefield.

In the **Cultural Context**, the novel **How Many Miles To Babylon?** demonstrates the coming fall of the Anglo-Irish ruling and upper classes, and the predicted rise of the nationalist/peasant class. Alec comes from the Anglo-Irish class, whereas Jerry comes from the tenant/peasant class. Alec almost 'betrays' his class by befriending Jerry and is

indifferent/disrespectful to the hierarchical army (he is an officer by virtue of his class).

Friendship and justice is demonstrated by the relationship between Jerry and Alec. Soon it will be Jerry's class which will overthrow the unelected ruling class and attempt to set up a republic in Ireland after the first world war, and later the war of independence 1919-1921.

In **A Doll's House**, it is the maintenance of class that is essential, particularly to people like Torvald. Ibsen's play shows the hypocrisy within this middle class/bourgeois class, in which women like Nora were expected to play the role of subservience to their husband, and were treated no better than the children they were expected to rear and look after. Appearance and power are very important to this class, and 'inheritance' takes on a deeper meaning of base values, like a disease or a threat (Dr. Rank, Krogstad). For example, Torvald accuses Krogstad of being disabled by the disease of corruption, yet he shows little mercy to Nora when she herself has used a forged signature in order to save his life ... until, of course, it 'appeared' that the threat of discovery had lifted.

In **Inside I'm Dancing**, class is not an immediate issue in the film, though the protagonists are from different classes. Michael Connolly's father is a wealthy barrister, who does not want to know or help his son (out of sight is out of mind: the institution can look after him) while Rory O Shea's father is unemployed and poor but he is emotional and wants to help his son in every way possible. Again, in this text the middle class are portrayed as a group with double standards, but preaching a different political outlook of caring while using their power over another class. This thread runs from the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class to the bourgeois banker class which Torvald upholds, to the wealthy upper middle class barrister, Fergal Connolly.

What the protagonists have in common in all three texts is determination, following revelation. Nora is determined to leave her husband and family (a huge disgrace at the time)

in order to survive and find herself. Alec is prepared to face the death penalty for 'betraying' his position to the class he comes from and to the country he is meant to defend. Alec does this because he could not betray his own beliefs, nor a friendship. In the film **Inside I'm Dancing**, Rory and Michael leave Carrigmore House in order to prove to themselves and to the world that they have human needs and rights like anybody else. They are successful in demonstrating this. They, like Jerry, Alec, Nora, must 'rebel' and change the rules that have maintained the status quo (sameness, no change in social order or thinking). In **Inside I'm Dancing** it is the residents who have their 'place', in **A Doll's House** it is women who have their place, in **How Many Miles To Babylon?** it is Alec who should know his place and Jerry who should be in his place. Neither disability, hierarchy or outdated rules will keep the rebel in his or her place, and this is demonstrated throughout the three texts.

In all three texts decisions are made and with these decisions there are enormous, though beneficial in the main, consequences.