

4 *Campus Extras***Movie Review: *The Boxer* packs a punch**TORY HOKE
Features Editor

As the final installment in director Jim Sheridan's trilogy about the troubles in Northern Ireland, *The Boxer* puts most of its effort into transporting and mood-setting. The resulting neglect of character development, coupled with the absence of the typically chatty writing to which American audiences are accustomed, creates an oddly serene and thoughtful environment for a story about persecution and pugilism.

Daniel Day Lewis' Danny Flynn is the boxer released after fourteen years in prison. Emily Watson's Maggie is the girlfriend he left behind, who responded by marrying his fellow IRA soldier best friend, which, due to the age and appearance of her son Liam, the controlling influence of her father in the ranks of the IRA, and the lingering takes the camera serves up of Liam and Danny,

looks like a marriage of convenience. Danny returns to his bricked up Belfast apartment, knocks down the blockade, and rebuilds the boxing ring in the local community center, where Maggie works. Her love has endured, his love has endured, and the husband is in jail, yet they remain remarkably chaste while they decide how to direct their lives.

Sheridan uses an explicit boxing-fighting/warring-fighting metaphor to explore when it is right versus when it is manly to fight or walk away. His unflinching depictions of bombings, riots, firefights and police brutality use no slow motion, indicating his desire to offer up these images realistically and let the viewer make her own conclusion about their necessity. The climactic boxing sequence, however, does use slow motion to emphasize the viciousness of the sport and Danny's realization of

it. The sequence is gripping, but one may find Danny's change of heart at so late a date and not before a little improbable.

The one character who argues that fighting is necessary is Harry, the IRA honcho who battles Maggie's father's attempts at peacemaking. Even Harry is sympathetic, his arguments understandable, but Sheridan makes no defenses for his methods; Sheridan observes that terrorism cannot create peace, but does not attempt to make in two hours a black-and-white case of eighty years of conflict.

The film effectively transports the viewer to Northern Ireland and makes her feel as hunted and fearful as its residents. For keeping her attached to the characters, Sheridan's eye for gripping detail shows up in the prominence of Maggie's wedding ring when she reluctantly pulls away from Danny's embrace, the prominence of her father's

Claddagh ring when he reminds her about her obligations, and the way a camera flash spotlights Danny's face as he scans the audience of his fight for Maggie.

Sheridan leaves so much unsaid—why exactly did Danny

go to jail? why doesn't Maggie ever visit her husband?—that *The Boxer* feels like a genuine peek into someone else's life. The movie's ending stuns, and leaves the viewer with a feeling, but no clear conclusion.



Emily Watson and Daniel Day-Lewis star in Universal Studios' *The Boxer*, a drama set in the war-torn Belfast, north Ireland's capital.

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