



The Cinematic Life of Boxing

The Boxer

The Boxer

Directed by: Jim Sheridan

©: Universal City Studios Inc.

Production Company: Hell's Kitchen

Presented by: Universal Pictures

Produced by: Jim Sheridan, Arthur Lappin

Associate Producer: Nye Heron

Production Manager: Mary Alleguen

Production Co-ordinator: Niamh Nolan

Financial Controller: Paul Myler

Locations Managers: Geraldine Daly,
Dara McClatchie

Post-production Supervisor: Susan Lazarus

Boxing Consultant: Barry McGuigan

2nd Unit Director: Nye Heron

1st Assistant Directors: Tommy Gormley,
Ben Gibney

2nd Assistant Director: Suzanne Nicell

Script Supervisors: Pat Rambaut, Peggy Brazil

Casting by: Nuala Moisselle

Written by: Jim Sheridan, Terry George

Director of Photography: Chris Menges

Cameramen (2nd Unit): Cian de Builteár,
Sean Corcoran

Camera Operator: Mike Proudfoot

2nd Camera/Steadicam: Peter Robertson

Gaffers: Louis Conroy, Tony Devlin

Key Grip: John Murphy

Still Photographer: Frank Connor

Special Effects Supervisor: Yves De Bono

Senior SFX Technicians: Jonn Herzberger,
Andrew Wilson

Edited by: Gerry Hambling

Lightworks Editor: Dermot Diskin

Editor: Clive Barrett

Production Designer: Brian Morris

Art Directors: Fiona Daly, Richard Earl

Property Master: Nuala McKernan

Costume Designer: Joan Bergin

Chief Make-up Artist: Máire O'Sullivan

Chief Hairdresser: Anne Dunne

Main and End Titles: Balsmeyer & Everett Inc

Opticals by: The Effects House,
Peter Govey Film Opticals

Music by: Gavin Friday, Maurice Seezer

Performed by: The Irish Film Orchestra,
Gavin Friday, Maurice Seezer, Andrew Phillipott

Wind Instrument Soloist: Renaud Pion

Additional Musicians: Barnes Goulding,
Pinko Murphy, Peter O'Toole

Choir: The Choir of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin

Music Supervisor: Alex Steyermark

Music Editor: Maisie Weissman

Choreographer: Cathy O'Kennedy

Sound Mixers: Kieran Horgan, Ray Cross

Re-recording Mixers: Lee Dichter, Tom Fleischman

Supervising Sound Editor: Robert Hein

Effects Recordist: Ben Cheah

Sound Effects Editors: Glenfield Payne,
Paul P. Soucek

Stunt Co-ordinator: Patrick Condren

Boxing Trainer for Mr Day-Lewis: Barry McGuigan

Filmed at: Ardmore Studios

Cast:

Daniel Day-Lewis (*Danny Flynn*)

Emily Watson (*Maggie*)

Brian Cox (*Joe Hamill*)

Ken Stott (*Ike Weir*)

Gerard McSorley (*Harry*)

Eleanor Methven (*Patsy*)

Ciarán Fitzgerald (*Liam*)

David McBlain (*Sean*)

Damien Denny (*Eddie Carroll*)

The screening on Tuesday 14 April will include a Q&A with boxer Barry McGuigan

Whether they are stories of ferociously driven fighters who lose all sense of moral perspective in their drive to reach the top, or grim tales of losers on their way down, boxing movies tend to focus on individuals. Think of John Garfield in *Body and Soul* (1947), Kirk Douglas in *Champion* (1949), Robert Ryan in *The Set-Up* (1949) or De Niro in *Raging Bull* (1980): in each of these films, bravura performances are delivered by actors prepared to suffer as much in the pursuit of excellence as the fighters they portray. On one level, *The Boxer* conforms to this type. It has been well publicised that its star, Daniel Day-Lewis, spent three years preparing for his role as Danny, two of them under the watchful eye of his personal trainer, ex-World Champ Barry McGuigan, who professed himself suitably impressed with Day-Lewis' talent in the ring.

Terry George's screenplay is not embarrassed about invoking old fight-movie clichés. The opening image – a shot of Day-Lewis in the distance, shadow boxing in the prison courtyard – might have been borrowed from Scorsese. Danny is the boxer as loner, a taciturn, introspective figure with a streak of masochism. He welcomes the blows he receives in the ring, he tells his beloved Maggie, because they make him feel pain, and after 14 years behind bars, his emotions are frozen. With his close-cropped hair and awesome self-discipline, he is like a Jesuit priest with gloves. The sub-plot, about an old drunk (played with rambunctious charm by Ken Stott) who does his bit for community relations by reopening the boxing gym, echoes the storyline of Shane Meadows' *TwentyFourSeven* and of countless other sports yarns of years past.

There are the obligatory slow-motion fight sequences with reverberating thwacks on the soundtrack whenever anyone lands a blow. The filmmakers go out of their way to present a convincing portrait of the fighters' world. They show the training routines in meticulous detail and chart that strange father/son bond which inevitably blossoms between the wily old coach and his young charge. Even so, the fact that Danny is a boxer is ultimately an irrelevance. It doesn't affect the relationship between the various characters, all of them part of a closely knit community where ordinary values have been distorted by the years of violence.

Chris Menges' brilliant cinematography provides an austere but often lyrical backcloth. His lighting accentuates the desolation of a city under siege. Apart from the blood in the ring, there are precious few primary colours. Skies always seem grey. Using aerial photography of Belfast, as if shot by surveillance helicopters, and the mandatory footage of British soldiers and RUC officers at checkpoints, the street scenes aim for documentary-style realism. Sheridan clearly knows this world from the inside. There is one extraordinary sequence in which Joe, an IRA leader, pays a visit to his daughter Maggie. As curtains are pulled apart, where interior walls used to be there's nothing, and we realise that the entire street is like a warren. Joe and his minders pass from house to house without ever going outdoors. By honing in on the relationship between Danny and Maggie (and the opposition to it), Sheridan and George try to show in microcosm the misunderstandings, lingering bitterness and bigotry which threaten the peace process as a whole.

Clayton Stewart (*Akim*)
 Kenneth Cranham (*Matt Maguire*)
 Daragh Donnelly, Frank Coughlan, Sean Kearns
 (*prison officers*)
 Lorraine Pilkington (*bride*)
 Niall Shanahan (*groom*)
 Father John Wall (*priest*)
 Maria McDermottroe (*Betty*)
 Carol Scanlan, Kate Perry, Andrea Irvine, Joan
 McGarry, Theresa McComb, Catherine Dunne,
 Kerrie Duggan, Sharon Dunne, Derbhla McClelland
 (*wedding guests*)
 Oliver Maguire (*prison governor*)
 Sandra Corbally (*cake decorator*)
 Tess Sheridan (*pianist*)
 David Hayman (*Joe Hamill's aide*)
 Paul Sheridan, John Sheridan, Pat Mulryan,
 Peter O'Donoghue, Martin Dunne, Tommy O'Neill
 (*IRA men*)
 Maurice Henry (*Liam's friend*)
 Josie Doherty (*singer*)
 Joseph Rea (*Agnes' son*)
 Joan Sheehy (*Agnes*)
 Peter Sheridan (*Peter Mallon*)
 Larry Byrne (*old man in shelter*)
 Joe Gallagher (*car bomb driver*)
 Sean Brunett (*boy on bicycle*)
 James Hayes (*bomb victim*)
 Richie Pigott (*Sean's helper*)
 Jack Waters (*soldier on roof*)
 Pdraig O'Neill (*doorman at gym*)
 Mark Mulholland, John Cowley, Don Foley
 (*old men in gym*)
 Tim McDonnell (*caretaker of gym*)
 Philip Sutcliffe (*boxer on pads*)
 Britta Smith (*Mrs Boots*)
 Gavin Kennedy (*Bootsy*)
 Eamon Brown (*referee, 1st fight*)
 Martin Lynch (*journalist*)
 Gavin Brown (*Liam's opponent*)
 Noel O'Donovan (*timekeeper, 1st fight*)
 Joe Colgan (*Danny's cornerman*)
 Nye Heron (*Eddie's trainer*)
 Paul Ronan (*Eddie's cornerman*)
 Liam Carney (*Mr Walsh*)
 Veronica Duffy (*Mrs Walsh*)
 Des Braiden (*Mr Orr*)
 Joan Brosnan Walsh (*Mrs Orr*)
 Sean Donaghy (*Mickey*)
 Brian Milligan (*Ned*)
 Vinny Murphy, Mick Nolan, Berts Folan
 (*Danny's supporters*)
 Juliet Cronin (*cardgirl, 1st fight*)
 Kirsten Sheridan (*girl with drinks*)
 Brian Russell (*Liam's friend in gym*)
 Mickey Tohill (*Billy Patterson*)
 Ian McElhinney (*Reggie Bell*)
 Conor Bradford (*TV announcer*)
 Anna Meegan (*woman at 2nd fight*)
 Al Morris (*referee, 2nd fight*)
 Ian Thompson (*child at 2nd fight*)
 Paul Wesley (*Danny's sparring partner*)
 USA-Ireland 1997
 114 mins
 Digital

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Sheridan directs the setpieces – the fight sequences, riots and fires – with plenty of gusto while eliciting quietly intense performances from Day-Lewis and Emily Watson as Maggie. George's screenplay may deal in stereotypes, but it also acknowledges the complexity of the political situation. The martyr-like Danny apart, there are no clear-cut heroes or villains. From Brian Cox's battle-weary IRA chief to the belligerent, bloodthirsty Harry, everybody is scarred by the years of conflict. As in *Some Mother's Son* (George's directorial debut, co-written with Sheridan), there is an attempt to foreground women's experiences – to show how the machismo and brutality of the menfolk distorts their lives too. The image of the dead terrorist cradled by his grief-stricken wife may be an obvious one, but it still makes its point.

Geoffrey Macnab, *Sight and Sound*, March 1998

As a springboard for *The Boxer* script, writer Terry George first referred to an unproduced Jim Sheridan screenplay about the life of Irish World Featherweight Boxing Champion Barry McGuigan, who later became actor Daniel Day-Lewis' boxing trainer during filming. But the story evolved into a purely fictional piece and, true to Sheridan's fluid, spontaneous style of directing, the script continued to change throughout shooting.

'Barry is a gentleman of the ring,' says Day-Lewis. 'What is deeply moving to me is that he had tremendous respect for the people he was pitted against, like bullfighters in the past: purity, dignity and respect between two separate beings.'

Yet McGuigan's raw, unfiltered drive to fight showed in the relentless training he put himself through and in the fact that even after a hard day's work, it was so much in his blood, the fighting itself, that he was still up for the scrap.

While McGuigan acknowledges he trained like 'a madman', he also describes Day-Lewis as equally driven. 'Daniel and I are alike in that way,' he says. 'We both believe that you only get out what you put in. It's Daniel's nature that he doesn't do anything easily, so he trained incredibly hard. He actually *lived* the life of a fighter.'

Day-Lewis stayed in fighting form the entire 16 weeks of the shoot, to accommodate the three matches at the film's beginning, midpoint and end. 'It was gruelling to keep such an unnatural level of readiness,' Day-Lewis explains, 'because athletes go through peaks and troughs, working toward a level of fitness where you're razor sharp for the moment itself, then burning yourself up in the event.'

McGuigan reports, however, that Day-Lewis was 'the most determined person I have ever met. He's a chameleon. He moulded himself. I've worked with fighters who haven't trained half as hard. And this guy can truly *fight*. I'm a commentator for fights around the UK now and I know all the middleweights, but I can say that he could fight, right now, any of the top ten in the country. If I'd had him at 19, I would've made a world-class fighter of him.'

The combination of McGuigan's coaching, Sheridan's direction, the psychologically insightful script and Day-Lewis' tenacious immersion in his role created a subtle, potent title character with, in Sheridan's words, 'a silence at the centre.'

Production notes