

THE IRISHMAN

LUKE 23: "Forgive them, O Lord,
For they know not what they do."

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To Robert De Niro as Frank Sheeran: "He's Dead."
De Niro: "Who did it?"
"Cancer"

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Why do we not respond
To the Frank Sheeran character as his daughter responds to him—
With horror and disgust?
We know even more than she,
Though we also know she loves—it is
The only romance in the film—
The man Sheeran murders.

The answer is
De Niro plays him as an innocent
Who does not know
The effect he has,
Who has no capacity for sympathy or compassion
And who is bewildered at
The way things turn out
"Frank, you're a family man,"
But his family fears and hates him.
His true family is
La Cosa Nostra—a phrase
Never uttered in this film.
We share the innocence
Of this Italian-speaking
Irisher.
He kills; we do not.
It is only
The banality of evil.
"It's like the Army," Sheeran says,
"You do what they tell you,
You get rewarded."
They tell you to kill, you kill.

Al Pacino plays Jimmy Hoffa,
The man Sheeran kills,

In a scene-stealing whirlwind
Of a performance
That is constantly
On the edge
Of visionary madness,
Almost every motion
An astonishment.
“They wouldn’t dare!
I know things
They don’t know
I know.”

He is the great authority figure
Of Sheeran’s life,
His Pope, his Patton.
He brags,
“In the fifties Hoffa was as big as Elvis,
In the sixties he was as big as The Beatles!”
American celebrity drives Sheeran
But he also wears the ring
Of the secret society
Of murderers and gangsters.
“You do what they they tell you,
You get rewarded.”

Hoffa, brilliant and volatile,
Does not do what they tell him.
He reaps the whirlwind.

I saw this film
The night before a national holiday,
A feast based largely on fictions
Of family and the mixing of peoples.
The film is about the Judas
Who betrays the Christ,
The unknowing, unrepentant figure
Who innocently plays out the historical archetype

And who wears the golden ring
Of violence, shame, and fame.