

Nature Tourism and Irish Film

This article provides a historical overview and reading of seminal Irish film from the perspective of nature tourism. Within Irish cultural studies, tourism is frequently equated with an overly romantic image of the island, which has been used to sell the country abroad. However, using notions like the tourist gaze and taking on board influential debates around space/place, one can posit a more progressive environmental vision of nature and landscape in our readings of film.

In Ireland the topography of wild touristic sites, particularly in the west and southwest, remains etched on the tourists' imagination. Cultural film critics like Luke Gibbons and more recently Ruth Barton and Stephanie Rains have explored this phenomenon from various perspectives.¹ From the early roots of an Irish romantic vision, as developed by the American film company Kalem, spearheaded by Sidney Olcott, to the indigenous 'amateur' production of the *The Dawn*, onto more classical outsider representations of rural Irish landscapes in *Man of Aran*, *The Quiet Man* and *Ryan's Daughter*, a predominantly rural and nature-focused image of Ireland was successfully represented. More recently however, most homegrown narratives appear less interested in valorising a touristic landscape and more focused on emulating Hollywood generic product to achieve commercial success.² Contemporary filmmakers [Second Film Board primarily, from 2003 -], emulate a universal and materially wealthy, post-colonial, *urban* environment, which frequently ignores the past and re-purposes landscape for younger audiences rather than nostalgic, diasporic ones. This strategy is more circumspect however, in films like *The Butcher Boy* and *Disco Pigs*.

Ethnographic Irish identity

The Swedish intellectual Torsten Hagerstrand stresses the necessity for scholars to engage with the material, contingent world on a local level at which people's lives are essentially lived.³ How the beautiful and sometimes sublime landscapes of Ireland represent and reflect this mosaic of ethnographic connectivity remains a starting point for this paper. Being born and raised in the flat midlands dominated by *bog-land*, I will never forget my primary teacher affirming that 'we all had flat imaginations' just like our 'uninteresting' landscape. While films like *Eat the Peach*, which is actually set in the midlands, belie such misconceptions, the romantic stereotype continues to suggest that a dramatic landscape nurtures more creative artists and critical responses. The writer John B Keane for example, highlighted the importance of his rugged environment in shaping his art when speaking of the sound of the river in his hometown of Listowel.⁴ The beauty and importance of land and landscape is well captured in Keane's play *The Field*, which was effectively translated into film by Jim Sheridan.

Such spatial aesthetics are often linked to environmental values and are effectively developed within literary criticism. Lawrence Buell tried to define 'ecocentric' forms of literary imagining, as instanced especially by nature writing in the Thoreauvian tradition and continues to believe that reorientation of human attention and values to a stronger ethic of care for the nonhuman environment would make the world a better place for all life on this planet. I suggest that this drive and ambition can be extended to all forms of filmic representation.⁵

Furthermore, as sociologist Ulrich Beck remarks about debates over species extinction: ‘only if nature is brought into people’s everyday images, into the stories they tell, can its beauty and its suffering be seen and focused on’.⁶ The success of all environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on ‘some highly developed technology or some arcane new science’ but on ‘a state of mind: on attitudes, feelings, images, and narratives’.⁷ I would even go so far as to propose, with my utopian hat on, that one of the functions of popular culture is to promote an ecological agenda. We are certainly affected by our home environment and at the same time inspired by our touristic gaze as we travel and experience other places.

Filmic images of Ireland

While one cannot assume that a literary image refers unambiguously to a specific place, photography and fiction film is mimetically tied to definable spaces and places. Nevertheless, primarily for economic reasons and aided by technological innovations, objective correlatives of authentic landscapes are becoming more easily exchanged in the globalising image industries. For instance, witness the enormous touristic boon for New Zealand, as a result of being chosen to represent the varying sublime topographies and magical spaces of the *Lord of the Rings* phenomenon. On a much smaller scale, Wicklow’s wild but easily accessible landscape was used for *Excalibur* and some big budget Hollywood stories like *King Arthur*. More recently, with well targeted tax incentives, the plains of Meath were used for the battle sequences in *Braveheart* and an Irish beach doubled for the memorable opening sequences of the WW11 American landings in France for *Saving Private Ryan*. Meanwhile, more conventional Irish landscapes were represented in such nostalgic heritage films as *The Quiet Man*, *Ryan’s Daughter* and even *Far and Away*.

Economic considerations remain a primary consideration in the overall package of production within the global market of filmmaking. This has meant that authenticity of place is often severely compromised, as witnessed recently with the epic *Cold Mountain* (2003) filmed in Eastern Europe, rather than its authentic American environment.⁸ With continuing developments in CGI and SFX, it is becoming easier to create a simulacrum of real and authentic topographies using the magic of special effects. Hence, as an important economic aside, Kerry and other sites of unique and natural beauty, aided by the agency of the Irish Film Board, can no longer simply afford to wait for film companies to choose them, but have to compete within an increasingly diversified industry.

Surprisingly, there remains a dearth of analysis of Irish Tourism from a cultural and historical perspective. One recent volume edited by Michael Cronin and Barbara O’Connor helps fill this void. Stephanie Rains’ essay ‘Home from Home: Diasporic Images of Ireland in Film and Tourism’ most notably examines the relationship between the Irish-American diaspora and Ireland itself as a touristic destination. She argues that the:

representations of Ireland have not only been a constant feature of Hollywood films from the silent era onwards but these representations have been structured in ways, which have reflected the demands and imaginative positioning of that Irish diasporic audience. In particular, this has led to a noticeable filmic positioning of Ireland as “home” with all the connotations of the familiar, the hospitable and the specific, which that implies.⁹

Cinematic representations of the 'return home' are most clearly evidenced of course in *The Quiet Man*, an epic retelling of the diasporic journey of return.¹⁰ Meanwhile touristic promos like 'The Irish in Me' made for Bord Fáilte [Irish Tourist Board] portray a character Shéila, who embodies the experience of Ireland as one of spiritual home-coming, rather than 'mere' touristic pleasures. Dean MacCannell) also speaks of recapturing the lost, if 'staged authenticity' which the Western world has believed to have existed in its own 'golden age' of edenic innocence before the onset of modernity, which inspires many tourists in their choice of destination.¹¹ The Irish Tourist Board unashamedly sets out to provoke such mythic pleasures of the Irish landscape and its people wherever it can. For example, a 1966 Bord Fáilte film 'Ireland Invites You' begins with a statement:

This is Ireland, a green island set in the seas like a gem of a rare beauty, a haven of undisturbed peace in a restless world, a land of infinite variety of scenes, an ageless, timeless place where old beliefs and customs live on beside the spreading tide of human progress.¹²

This utopian image is difficult to sustain within a postmodern, Celtic Tiger Ireland. Nevertheless, the appeal to an ecologically 'pure' landscape and place remains potent. One wonders whether fictional film in and about Ireland serves similar or at least complementary purposes?

Luke Gibbons strongly contends that due to both its 'colonial history and its position on the Celtic periphery of Europe, representations of Ireland over the centuries have been enclosed within a circuit of myth and romanticism'.¹³ The dominant myth visualised in Irish cultural narratives is by all accounts a pastoral one which foregrounds an almost Arcadian evocation of the happy swain close to nature alongside the cyclical rhythms of the earth. This myth was one that was fostered and encouraged by the cultural nationalists of the new Irish State from the 1920s onwards, most notably by Eamon de Valera. One of the most enigmatic and influential politician and leader in Irish history, de Valera made his philosophy explicit much later in a Saint Patrick's Day speech in 1943, speaking of the Ireland of his dreams, where rural people were living the life God intended them to live by being at one with nature.

Let us turn aside for a moment to that ideal Ireland that we would have. That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit - a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that man should live.¹⁴

Such an insular vision dovetails with the touristic gaze, which supported a nostalgic American view of Ireland. While this connection is well documented, and the so-called first wave of Irish filmmakers (Joe Comerford, Bob Quinn, Cathal Black and others) effectively sought to challenge such representations on film, cultural debates among contemporary generations of film audiences and students, indicates the need

for radically new approaches to an appreciation of nature in film. At the outset, it would appear that a preoccupation with national/natural uniqueness is less important than it was for previous generations. While academics - and promoters of 'progressive representations' of [Irish] identity on film - we nevertheless have a duty to speak to the truth of contemporary audience pleasures as well as proselytising for a [re-] imagined future displaying the uniqueness of Irish tourism and cinematic expression. New approaches to Irish film analysis might include adapting John Urry's analysis of the tourist gaze.

Urry constructs five forms of tourist gaze, which could be applied as a structural building block for analysing film, beyond the well-known psychologically fixated feminist film theories:

- Romantic – solitary, sustained immersion gaze involving vision, awe, aura.
- Collective – communal activity, series of shared encounters gazing at the familiar.
- Spectatorial – communal activity, series of brief encounters glancing at and collecting different signs.
- Environmental – collective organisation sustained and didactic scanning to survey and inspect.
- Anthropological – solitary, sustained immersion scanning and active interpretation.¹⁵

These attributes and categories can be applied to filmic spectacle and should be factored into analysis of the representation of nature in film studies. Film analysis remains preoccupied by debates around the simulacrum of special effects together with psychological studies of the 'male gaze' in particular. This is often at the expense of appreciating closer affinities with sister disciplines like geography or tourism, which can provide more effective appreciation of audiences overt pleasures in consuming and viewing nature as spectacle. While romantic and spectatorial gazes are read by Gibbons and others through classic Irish films like *The Quiet Man*, *Ryan's Daughter* and even *Man of Aran*, the notion of a collective gaze is seldom articulated, much less applying an anthropological lens for appreciating the filmic gaze. While the notion of an environmental gaze, remains undetected within analysis of Irish landscape films. In Urry's utopian discussion of tourist gaze(s), he proposes transforming the 'romantic gaze' into a 'collective one' while at the same time transforming the spectatorial gaze into an environmental one, which ought to service the maintenance of all the attributes of human nature's unique subjectivity. Hence ideally, individual touristic pleasures should be transferred into more altruistic and sustainable eco-touristic pleasures. While beyond the scope of this overview paper, this provocative strategy could also be applied to film and Irish landscape and serve a similar therapeutic function particularly in readings of films like *Ryan's Daughter*, *The Field*, *Into the West*, etc. However, much more textual and discursive analysis is needed to support such a radical reappraisal but a start has been made with the re-application of aesthetic philosophical notions of the sublime to filmic spectacle.

Sublime Closure and Touristic Spectacle

Luke Gibbons's recent study of *Edmund Burke and Ireland* provides a fascinating insight into the importance of the sublime for Ireland and for Irish history in particular. The sublime tourist site can sometimes become the motor, the philosophical or even the psychological 'black box' for audiences and protagonists to

express their hopes, fears, desires and utopian dreams rather than simply remaining subsumed within a uni-directional romantic gaze.

The role of the spectator is all-important as the act of seeing corrects and completes the landscape. With the discovery of the vantage point that provides this balance of foreground and background, a 'sublime synthesis' occurs: the authenticity of effect takes place in the epiphanic moment in which the unified aesthetic essence of the place shines forth.¹⁶

Such literary reflections closely correspond with an exploration of the transcendent aesthetic effects of looking at nature and landscape and escaping from the everyday. The filmmaker, as 'surrogate witness for the filmgoers', Ellen Strain suggests, captures this moment of sublime synthesis in an image that conforms with audience's pre-existing conceptions of the 'real world'.

Viewing the landscape as picturesque or as sublime serves finally to personify the land. In other words, although a filmmaker or tourist's perception is required to make the vision come to life, the land with its 'authenticity of effect' becomes a narrative character affecting spectator and diegetic character alike. The spectacular landscape may have a pleasurable effect on the spectator at the same time that the land's mysterious effects are foregrounded by the narrative itself.¹⁷

Because of its enormous land mass, America has been successfully used to create effective spatial movies –generic westerns and road movies especially - which explore the human condition.¹⁸ While the miniscule size of the island of Ireland does not easily lend itself to such mythic excess, filmmakers have still been able to use landscape and travel to replicate some of these major themes. *Into the West* for instance helps to illustrate the transformation of nature spectacle and the ritual of a journey into a 'pilgrimage'.¹⁹ Meanwhile, several other narratives including *Man of Aran* as well as more contemporary films like *Into the West* and even *Disco Pigs*, can be read as journeys of knowledge for the protagonists, corresponding with a pilgrimage towards a redemptive (albeit touristic) sea-scape. Incidentally, in seminal Irish romantic narratives like *Man of Aran* and *Ryan's Daughter*, often the skyscape and especially the universal seascape play a greater dramatic role than any recognisable land-based topographies.

Kalem: Hollywood Imagery

Strange as it may seem, Ireland was nearer to having a film industry of her own almost a century ago when cinema was in its infancy, than she is today when nearly every country with any pretensions to progress or any appreciation of the power and influence of the screen makes indigenous films of some sort. Indeed, many ideological critics of that era hoped the new medium would promote the 'struggle for independence' in the minds of the younger generation. George Kleine, Samuel Long and Frank Marion formed the film company, Kalem in 1907 and its ambassador to Ireland was Sidney Olcott, a Canadian whose mother was born in Dublin.²⁰ One day, the story goes, Olcott was shown a map of the world and asked where he would like to go to make films. He pointed immediately to Ireland and kept coming back from 1910 to 1914. His flair for authenticity and his attention to detail and innovation in using genuine backgrounds that appealed to Irish exiles in the United States ensured the success of the first feature films made in Ireland. Many of the stills and shorts can

be read as inspired both by tourism and as stage-Irish [Oirish] as one could imagine. However, it seems that Olcott made a sincere effort to portray Ireland and the Irish as he found them and to deal sympathetically with their history.

Olcott settled in Beaufort, just outside Killarney, a magical place with good summers and natural light, which is so important for film, while avoiding the harsher climate of the Atlantic coast. Indeed, this was also the *raison d'être* for the successful movement of the film industry to the West coast of America. This first natural Irish studio nestled under the shadow of the McGillicuddy Reeks which looks the same now as it did a century ago when this first small film troupe arrived. A lot of their output was one-reelers that focused on beautiful nature expositions, like *The Irish Honeymoon*, which contained romantic images of Blarney Castle and the Killarney lakes among other beauty spots. The first Irish feature was *The lad from Old Ireland* (1911), described as a melodrama whose advertisement claimed it was the first film to be produced between two continents. Olcott was initially interested in telling Irish history from a heroic perspective, however, because of British outrage at the screen treatment and romanticisation of Irish rebels, and pressured by his American masters concerned about their investments, Olcott turned to the safer themes of Dion Boucicault's romantic theatre melodramas during the remainder of his stay. Film adaptations like *Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughran* were made.

Indigenous Landscape Film

In contrast to Olcott, native filmmakers hankered after a more indigenous film making industry and the roots of this can be traced back to an amateur Kerry enthusiast Thomas Cooper. While the Kalem output affirmed an unashamedly Irish and touristic spectacle, *The Dawn* directed by Cooper surprisingly helped solidify such touristic imagery. The film deals with the political rebellion and its human consequences, signalled by the opening caption, which announced that 'treachery to the motherland' was the sin the Irish would not forgive. In the opening sequence, concentrating on its evocation of nature and touristic landscape, we witness the year 1866 (the year before the Fenian rebellion) and are presented with a scene of wooded beauty with a courting couple being spied on from above. Meanwhile, men in top hats, who look very grand and genteel to contemporary eyes, are observed in a well-manicured garden signing documents and passing out rifles. The audience assumes they are rebels. One of the party moves off to meet his lady-friend and the scene is framed by further traditional signifiers of romantic nature, with a waterfall in the background. The film presents the natural beauty of a manicured nature, while being exposed to the primary life giving elements of earth, air and water. The lovers walk on, enabling audiences to enjoy the scenery while being spied on as they get into a small rowboat to navigate the lake. Conventionally the spy who appears hunched in appearance, informs the police of what is taking place. Following this tip-off the forces of 'law and order' surround the house and capture the entire group of rebel Fenians without a shot being fired. The male lover is subsequently framed for this and ostracised by the community. By all accounts a high price to pay for partaking in the exotic, romantic and touristic escape to nature. The remaining narrative sets out to redeem this 'mistake in nature'.

More contemporary films including *Odd Man Out* and *Ryan's Daughter* symbolically use the Irish landscape to 'facilitate violence, particularly in the use of cliffs and deep wells, as signs of abyss'.²¹ John Hill has effectively illustrated the links between the atavistic nature of the IRA and terrorists violence generally and their close representational association with raw nature on film. The cliffs and subsequent drop into a rocky, grey unwelcoming Irish sea represent the last vestiges

of control that the world, both natural and modern, can exercise over the lives of its inhabitants. The landscape is therefore imbued with a God-like status since the cliffs may not only 'giveth but they can also taketh away'. The sea and its power over its inhabitants became a dominant trope in Revivalist Irish literature, most notably exemplified in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and its cinematic equivalent Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* or more recently in the Sheridan adaptation of J. B. Keane's *The Field*.

Within more recent criticism, an authentic touristic and nostalgic Irishness has become closely associated with a rural landscape. As Luke Gibbons states, Irish culture has a preference for a romantic outlook (and 'soft primitivism' unlike the 'hard primitivism' of *Man of Aran*) as opposed to adopting a realist aesthetic, particularly as the rural economy declined. Like Yeats critique of materialism, America is represented as obsessed with 'lousy money' which drives Sean Thornton (John Wayne) back to 'the idyllic Ireland' of *The Quiet Man*, which is codified most explicitly as 'another name for heaven – Innisfree'.²² Many would argue that *The Quiet Man* and even the recent highly derivative 'chic flicDO YOU MEAN 'CHICK FLICK'' *Circle of Friends* and their respective success outside of Ireland, is largely based on postcard scenes of the romantic countryside which has broad appeal to wide markets looking to connect with an [in]authentic Ireland. Similarly, the more whimsical and self-parodying *Finian's Rainbow* (1968) or the recent derivative *Waking Ned* (1998) also provides a relatively successful touristic and shorthand image of Ireland with landscape used to register familiar markers of Irishness. The fact that *Waking Ned* wasn't filmed in Ireland but rather the Isle of Man, merely adds to this awkwardly synthetic sense of place. As Martin McLoone suggests, 'this seems to confirm the shoddiness and in-authenticity of the whole film'.²³

From the late 1950s up to the 1980s there was an almost total lack of full-length fictional features dramatising the indigenous rural Irish landscape. One of the landmarks which helped to re-define a new visual aesthetic was the first wholly Irish Film Board funded feature *Eat the Peach* (1986), which dealt with early forms of global capitalism and recession in its depiction of local workers unable to live their dreams within a politically corrupt landscape. In this film, landscape seems to echo Seamus Heaney's claim that Irish bog-land cannot hope to emulate the vast American prairies, which slice a big sunset evening. For Heaney, Irish bogs are compressed layers of history, forcing the eye inwards rather than drawing it towards the horizon. In a country where the 'Troubles' loomed large in the Irish consciousness, as violence continued to flare in the North, revisionist cultural artefacts attempted to find new ways of appropriating and therapeutically using the landscape. The midlands bog (relocated near the North for narrative and other reasons) and an ersatz culture of Irish Country and Western music are framed within a narrative of a traditional stereotype of the imaginative but impractical Celt - 'a small time Fitzcarraldo who extends all his energies on impossible dream'.²⁴

Into the West and Disco Pigs

Audiences are seduced by *Into the West*'s use of potent universal mythic allusions, particularly through the beautiful white horse as symbolic of freedom. Meanwhile, the emotional excess in the text is seen as highly provocative and engaging. The narrative 'works' on a mythic level as 'a search for a validating metanarrative'.²⁵ However, Barton reiterates that the film 'teeters on the brink between sentimentality and irony'.²⁶ while affirming that cinema 'with its appeal to the oneiric (belonging to dreams) has been central to the establishment of the west as a dream space and time'.²⁷

Into the West is somewhat reminiscent of Yeats' evocative Celtic revivalist poetry while also addressing a universal children's audience, with the superb performances of Ossie (Ciaran Fitzgerald) and Tito (Rúaidhrí Conroy). Its success lies in its attempts to tap into a 'Disneyland' market while still retaining 'realist'/'local' elements which reflect on contemporary Ireland. Such strategies pinpoint how and why Irish films can be successful in competing with the universalising mythic tropes of Hollywood. However, critics will argue, at what cost - citing their multiple reductionism and stereotyping. The whole narrative structure of *Into the West* is preoccupied with touristic imagery and childish imagination. The escape from the realities of life is necessary for its two child heroes Ossie and Tito, because it is against their true gypsy nature, to live in a high-rise Ballymun tenement with their father. The signifier used for fantasy and escape is provided by a beautiful and mysterious white horse called 'Tir-Na-nOg' (land of eternal youth) given to the boys by their grandfather. Played by David Kelly, the grandfather looks every bit the old, pre-mass-media communicator of fantasy for a people oppressed by invaders and poverty – the 'seanachi' (storyteller).

By the end of the journey the father also realises his 'true' nature and resolves with his children never to go back to the flats again. The spirit of his beloved wife (which has parallels with the highly successful *Ghost* [1990]) is let go, as he ritualistically burns her caravan home. The (mythic) protagonists can now return to their 'natural' roots. *Into the West* works best by using the power of landscape to frame its closure. The final denouement has the young boy being saved by the power of his unseen mother – a Spielbergian moment if ever there was one and reminiscent of the futuristic New York underwater *mise-en-scene* in *AI Artificial Intelligence* (2001). Like *Riders to the Sea* and *Man of Aran*, the sea becomes both therapeutic and transcendent, allowing its protagonists to act out their crises within a Homeric framework.

Such a utopian closure is very different however, in *Disco Pigs* where the backdrop of the beach is used to carry out what could be regarded as an assisted 'suicide' and calls to mind the opening therapeutic sounds of a mother's womb, from where the initial voice-over begins. Like many dystopic texts the majority of the narrative is framed around various forms of dysfunctional environments, which are not conducive to character development much less any form of self-actualisation. Only in the final sequences are the primal forces of nature called upon to foreground the ultimate negation of the essential life principle when the female protagonist Runt, finally realises and accepts that she must kill the one she loves for them both to be 'free'. The majestic sea and blue skyscape answers the enigmatic question asked three times during the film: what is the colour of love? This poetic trope is used as a backdrop to naturalise such psychological violence and emotional turmoil. Incidentally, this form of dramatic foregrounding of nature as a brooding presence, which defines and destroys, is also evident in classics like *The Field* when the Bull McCabe's irrational love of land results in him driving his cattle over the cliff and walking into the sea while trying to fight back the waves.

For contemporary audiences, the evocation of raw rural nature is less important or relevant and simply remains a benign, nostalgic and therapeutic antidote to the trials of modern urban living. At the beginning of the 21st century it seems that Irish film has reached a crossroads in terms of whether to use its natural environment and beauty in creative ways or simply as a nostalgic repository of the past. But as

McLoone passionately concludes ‘to ditch what is unique about the past’ (and I would add our beautiful landscape) is ‘to run the risk of ditching also what is unique about the present and thus to capitulate tamely to the globalising and homogenising tendencies of the modernisation process’.²⁸

Recent films which both radically foreground the past and subvert idyllic representations of landscape, include *The Butcher Boy* and *When Brendan met Trudy*. In a valuable reading of *The Butcher Boy*, McLoone focuses on its reflective evocation of nature as evidenced in the ‘imaginary’ nuclear explosion on the site of a conventional picture-postcard image of a lake. The film frames a panoramic view, but as the shot is held, the lake suddenly erupts in a (sublime) atomic mushroom, shattering both the natural landscape and its romantic residue. This is a long way from the gentle romantic evocation of nature on a Kerry lake in *The Dawn* or numerous other representations of Irish nature, and dovetails later in the film when Francie, the very traumatised main protagonist, eventually gets to the ‘primal scene’ of his parents honeymoon site in Donegal. The boy begins to realise that the innocence and idealism of the touristic beauty of Bundoran never actually existed for his parents. This representation of conventional touristic spaces belies the ideology of rural landscape as a creator of an authentic identity.

A more recent ‘postmodern’ film, *When Brendan met Trudy* is often critiqued for its lack of identity and place, which in turn militates against the *raison d’être* of indigenous national cinema. This apparent lack of specificity of place is used by critics to dismiss this and other contemporary urban films like *About Adam* in particular. I would just like to draw attention to one minor scene from the film when the professional robber Trudy takes Brendan to the site of a miniature heritage famine village, represented as a tourist curiosity, from where she intends to steal figures and a model horse. The ‘Great Famine’ of the mid-19th century remains a historical milestone in Irish history that is loaded with traumatic meaning. Nationalist commentators have blamed the deaths of a million Irish people on British imperialist government, though this has been somewhat ameliorated by revisionist historicising in recent decades. In this playful, irreverent and ahistorical narrative, a general respect, reverence and almost pride for those who died in the famine is strangely subverted as part of the process of dismantling some of the most sacred cows and taboos of Irish national identity. Trudy appears to have a complete lack of regard for the memorial site of the famine while laughing off the past. Before stealing part of the miniature village, she comments to Brendan ‘looking at them makes me feel hungry. Fancy a sandwich’.

Concluding Remarks

Olcott and his Kalem Company captured the minds and imagination of many in the early part of the 20th century, with his evocative and raw representations of nature and landscape, which were excavated, to connect with an image-hungry diasporic Irish community in America and elsewhere. Being appropriated for a cultural nationalist project embodied by de Valera’s vision of Ireland from the 1930s until more recent decades, the film medium in Ireland valorised nature and landscape as part of a romantic nationalist project. This is evidenced through the endorsement of a stoic romantic primitivism in *Man of Aran* and even evidenced by the nationalistic and touristic escape to nature in *The Dawn* for instance. More recently there has been an abdication of representations of rural nature as a therapeutic trope, evidenced by the

sometimes playful and irreverent critiques of the past and rural representations in particular. Currently, Irish national cinema is subsumed by ersatz urban crime drama narratives such as *Intermission*, *Veronica Guerin* and *The General* which emulate the postmodern playfulness of British drama, alongside registering an attempt to capture or [re]present the universal generic language of Hollywood and thereby validating the commercial imperative. It could almost be stated that while all but losing the native language and overcoming a preoccupation with the past and our unique landscape, the primary authentic indicator of identity remains an Irish accent, but even this is sounding less strident and resonant.

Nevertheless, being an eternal optimist, I would seek to discount such a pessimistic reading. Globalism has become more dynamic and reflexive and the core versus periphery dichotomies no longer remain mutually exclusive, as indicated for example by the success of a small animated feature made in Ireland and nominated for an Oscar: *Give Up yer auld Sins* (2002), alongside recent fascinating historical allegories like *How Harry Became a Tree* and the re-telling of civil war history in *The Wind that Shook the Barley* which won the Palme d'Or.²⁹ Nonetheless, new images of Irish spatial identity which also serve as a touristic stimulus are needed to keep our landscape culturally vibrant.³⁰ Adopting John Urry's categorisation of the spectatorial gaze, this paper calls for some form of 'environmental tourism' to be replicated in film as a most effective and ethical long-term bulwark for our native image industry. But of course there are no guarantees of success. Like Olcott at the beginning of Irish film history, pragmatic solutions have to be found to address globalised threats to indigenous film industries and the maintenance of regional accents. We need to excavate and discover new discursive images of Ireland that go beyond the violent historical political 'Troubles' and the more recent religious and sexual traumas of the past, which have preoccupied the postcolonial cultural mindset. Mindful of the dangers of repeating existing forms of national amnesia, there are nonetheless numerous diasporic touristic stories that will hopefully represent and embody the Ireland of the future.

Filmography

- The Lad from Auld Ireland dir. Sidney Olcott 1911
- Man of Aran dir. Robert Flaherty 1934
- The Dawn dir. Thomas Cooper 1936
- Odd Man Out dir. Carol Reed 1947
- The Quiet Man dir. John Ford 1952
- Finian's Rainbow dir. Francis Ford Coppola 1968
- Ryan's Daughter dir. David Lean 1970
- Excalibur dir. John Boorman 1981
- Eat the Peach dir. Peter Omrod 1985
- Riders to the Sea dir. Ronan O'Leary 1987
- The Field dir. Jim Sheridan 1990

Into the West dir. Mike Newell 1992
Far and Away dir. Ron Howard 1992
Circle of Friends dir. Pat O'Connor 1995
Braveheart dir. Mel Gibson 1995
The Butcher Boy dir. Neil Jordan 1998
The General dir. John Boorman 1998
Waking Ned dir. Kirk Jones 1998
Saving Private Ryan dir. Steven Spielberg 1998
Disco Pigs dir. Kirsten Sheridan 2001
When Brendan Met Trudy dir. Kieran Walsh 2001
About Adam dir. Gerry Stembridge 2001
How Harry Became a Tree dir. Goran Paskaljevic 2002
Intermission dir. John Crowley 2003
Veronica Guerin dir. Joel Schumacker 2003
King Arthur dir. Antoine Fuque 2004
The Wind that Shook the Barley dir. Ken Loach 2006

NOTES

¹ In 'From History to Heritage: Some recent developments in Irish Cinema', Barton situates so-called heritage narratives in relation to Irish tourism imagery, which has tended to promote Ireland as a 'feel good' location and suggests that, though its cinematic and literary period dramas, Ireland has fashioned itself (and been fashioned) as a 'symbol of a living imagined history, a country hanging suspended in a pure and permanent past'. (1997: 85)

² One disgruntled Irish filmmaker complains of an 'urban form of fascism' with regards to film scripts. This is borne out by numerous reviews of his 2000 art-feature *Country* which suggests a very strong antipathy to any contemporary Irish narrative dealing with the rural past as being de-facto unsophisticated and uninteresting. I would counter that rural landscape alongside historical narratives can still produce a unique insight into a contemporary Irish mindset.

³ Whelan, Kevin. 'The Region and the Intellectuals', 130. Only if the meta-narratives by which intellectuals' structure their thoughts are in dialogue with the micro-narratives by which people understand their lives will there be fruitful cooperation. Thus, 'the intellectual engaged with the region has to be equipped with a bifocal vision – the eye of the mammoth and the eye of the microbe'. Adapting this strategy, I mention my late father who was a farmer and nurturer of the land. An image of him surveying all he owned, as he stood leaning over the farm gate gazing into his fields, is still locked in my consciousness. This 'primal scene' calls to mind various academic strategies for understanding this phenomenon, from Romantic, Aesthetic, Touristic, Spatial as well as Ideological ways of appreciating and engaging with any topography. My rootedness in the land, following the well-worn cliché of how you can take the man out of the land but not visa versa, has probably given me the tenacity to remain preoccupied with these ideas, which became a focus of study for a good number of years.

⁴ Ecological identity, defined by Mitchell Thomashow suggests that it is a holistic term for all the different ways people construe themselves in their relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self. An even more relevant definition, because it is more localised in space and more attuned to cultural specificity, is Yi-fu Tuan's 'topophilia', the idea that humans have culturally mediated affinities for certain types of landscapes (cited in Buell 2001: 26). (Is this true of the rugged sublime beauty of Kerry but not of the flat bogland of the midlands?)

⁵ Eco-critic Jonathan Bate suggests how the dream of deep ecology will never be realized upon the earth, but our very survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the work of our imagination. This ecological sensibility can also be mapped across Irish Romantic representations of wild/rural landscape, alongside less written about sea-scapes and sky-scapes, which remain a unique aspect of the Irish touristic spectacle. In order for ecocriticism to earn its relevance, its critical practice must be greatly extended since the environmental crisis threatens all landscapes – wild, rural, suburban, and urban.

⁶ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the US and Beyond*, 1.

⁷ Ibid, 1. Regarding ecology [which has important impacts for tourism], Jhan Hochman sees: 'the task of green cultural studies as the examination of proliferating cultural representations of nature – i.e., lexical, pictorial and actual manipulations of plants, animals, and elements – for their potential to affect audiences affecting nature-out-there'. [See *Green Cultural Studies: Nature, Film, Novel and Theory*. University of Idaho Press, 1998 and also David Ingram's *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. University of Exeter Press, 2000.]

⁸ Ireland has lost several films for similar reasons because of increased competition. I note that Hungary is building a giant 150m complex, which will be one of the biggest studios in the world, just 25k from Budapest. Hence the Irish Film Board website actively foregrounds how Ireland can be seen as a 'key location' for the international film community.

⁹ Stephanie Rains, 'Home from Home: Diasporic Images of Ireland in Film and Tourism' in Cronin, Michael and O'Connor, Barbara. eds. *Irish Tourism: Imagery, Culture and Identity*, 196

¹⁰ However, Irish film and touristic studies needs to closely examine and initiate audience research into how various images and narratives actually relate to and connect with the huge Irish diaspora.

¹¹ Ibid, 207.

¹² Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor in 'From Gombeen to Gubeen: Tourism, Identity and Class in Ireland, 1949-99' effectively unpack the contradictory messages encoded in many touristic discourses between modernity and pre-modernist pastoralism. (Ryan, 2001:165-184)

¹³ Gibbons, Luke. *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p194

¹⁴ Moynihan, Maurice. *Speeches and Statements of Eamon de Valera 1917 – 1973*, 466

¹⁵ Urry, John. *Consuming Places*, 191

¹⁶ Buzard, J. *The Beaten Tracks: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways of Culture 1800-1918*, 188

¹⁷ Ellen Strain, in Degii-Esposti. C. ed. *Postmodernism in the Cinema*, 163

¹⁸ Brereton, *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*,

¹⁹ In 1993, Zygmunt Bauman, in *Postmodern Ethics*, dismissed the metaphor of 'postmodern nomads' as a way of understanding 'modern pilgrims' (tourists). Unlike pilgrims, nomads do not have a final destination which plots in advance their itinerary. 'Nomads, therefore, are a flawed metaphor for men and women cast in the postmodern condition. Vagabonds or vagrants offer more apposite a metaphor ... What keeps him on the move is disillusionment' (Bauman 1993: 240).

²⁰ See Denis Condon's 'Touristic Work and Pleasure: the Kalem Company of Killarney' (7-16) in *Film and Film Culture*. Vol. 2. (2003) School of Humanities, Waterford Institute of Technology.

²¹ Ketterman in, MacKillop, *Contemporary Irish Cinema*, 154

²² Gibbons in Rockett, K., Hill, J., and Gibbons, L. *Cinema and Ireland*, 199

²³ McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, 126

Such Irish narratives together with the under analysed Tom Cruise vehicle, *Far and Away* cannot be read as 'smart' or even 'postmodernist' texts with their kitsch humour which contrasts badly with the more acerbic indigenous standards of Irish comedy. Nevertheless, academic debate has to at least acknowledge audience pleasure and understand how such films connect with a global Irish diaspora.

²⁴ Gibbons, Luke in Rockett, Hill, and Gibbons, L. *Cinema and Ireland*, 243

²⁵ Barton, Ruth. *Irish National Cinema*, 128

²⁶ ibid, 133

²⁷ ibid, 135

²⁸ McLoone, Martin. *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, 218

²⁹ A detailed study of this and other 'farming' films are discussed in 'Ecology, Farming and Irish Cinema', for a forthcoming American ecology reader. Furthermore, *The Wind that Shook the Barley* and other recent films are analysed in a forthcoming chapter for a University College Dublin media and communications reader.

³⁰ As Gerry Smyth affirms in *Space and Irish Cultural Imagination* (2001) '[G]eography must reawaken the notion of a situated humanity and its attempt to dwell on and with the earth'. (8) While Simon Schama affirms in *Landscape and Memory* (1995) that the 'core myths which inform the human imagination of nature may be discovered throughout the modern world'. (9) These myths must also be excavated through film, which according to James Charles Roy, represent our 'Celtic fascination with landscape and topography' (cited in Smyth: 21).

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