

Follow-up on Ken Loach, the director of *Jimmy's Hall*

The Old Oak

From Fri 29 September (in the UK)

Following *I, Daniel Blake* (on a callous bureaucracy's denial of benefits to a disabled worker) and *Sorry We Missed You* (on the exploitation of the gig economy), Ken Loach completes his 'North East Trilogy' in the same highly emotive register, fearlessly exploring uncomfortably honest stories with a deep compassion for his characters.

Heartbreaking, but never without hope, *The Old Oak* is a striking reminder of why Ken Loach is, and always will be, one of the UK's most important and essential filmmakers.

He has said that *The Old Oak* is his final film. His writing partner, Paul Lafferty, is the brother-in-law of our friend Ann Campbell.

Calvary notes:

Slide 3: Sligo

The setting is meant to be Sligo, a small seaport town in the western coast of Ireland. Even when set in the present, the West in Irish film, literally opposite Dublin, evokes rural, traditional Irish society, a society that was held up as the Irish ideal by Eamon De Valera, who created an Irish identity that was defined as being not British.

Slide 4: References that may need explaining:

Fianna Fáil ("Soldiers of Destiny"): From 1926 to 2011 the dominant political party in Ireland. Lost the majority in 2011 due to what was perceived as poor management of the country's economy. The competing political party, which won the 2011 election, is Fine Gael ("Tribe [or these days Family] of the Irish").

the Dáil or Dáil Éireann: the Irish Chamber of Deputies. There is also the Seanad Éireann (the Senate).

Leinster House: in Dublin, the Irish Capitol Building where Parliament meets

The *Gardaí* or *An Garda Síochána* [show-hana] = "the Guardians of the Peace"; the Irish national police

"Whaddaya hear, whaddaya say": Stanton's friend Leo uses Jimmy Cagney's signature line from *Angels with Dirty Faces*

Slide 5: GOOD NEWS (1990s–2000s)

Politics: Mary McAleese elected President of Ireland. She worked to bring "different sections of the Irish community together" as well on relations with Northern Ireland (358)

Literature: poetry (Seamus Heaney), literature (John Banville [screenplay for *The Last September*], Colm Tóibín [novel basis for the movie *Brooklyn*], Roddy Doyle (the "Barrytown Trilogy"—*The Commitments*, *The Snapper*, *The Van*—and screenplay for *When Brendan Met Trudy*).

Irish cinema and films about Ireland: *The Commitments*, *Michael Collins*, *The General*, *Angela's Ashes*, *Veronica Guerin*, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, *Once* were all international successes. Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan = influential and established Irish filmmakers. Sheridan: *My Left Foot*, *The Field*, *In the Name of the Father*, *Some Mother's Son*, *In America*; Neil Jordan: *Angel*, *The Company of Wolves*, *Mona Lisa*, *The Crying Game*, *Michael Collins*, *The Butcher Boy*, *The Good*

Thief, Breakfast on Pluto. Sheridan's *My Left Foot* and Jordan's *The Crying Game* were the two films that put Irish filmmaking on the international map, which led to the establishment of the second Irish Film Board.

Ireland as location for filmmaking: *Braveheart, Saving Private Ryan, King Arthur, The Tudors, Camelot*, due to favorable tax codes. Northern Ireland: *Game of Thrones*.

popular music: U2. *Riverdance*

sport:

football: Ireland in the 2002 World Cup; Keane sent home.

Rugby Union success. **The Gaelic Athletic Association** (!) allowed the playing of a non-Gaelic game at the GAA headquarters because Landsdowne Road was being rebuilt. "On 24 February 2007, Ireland played England at Croke Park and, despite concerns, the capacity crowd respected the rendition of "God Save the Queen." The singing of "Ambrán na bhFiann" was clearly emotional for many of the Irish squad," which beat England 43–13. "The Irish rugby team contributed to the momentary lifting of the prevailing national gloom of economic recession by securing the first Irish Grand Slam in sixty-one years in 2009" (362).

Ambrán na bhFiann (*Aw-rann na Veen*) = "The Soldier's Song," the Irish National Anthem

Rugby Union Grand Slam: when a team in the Six Nations—England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, and Italy—beats all the others.

Horse: Irish-trained horses won 10 races at Cheltenham in 2007; 13 in 2011.

Slide 6: BAD NEWS

Death of the Celtic Tiger

Celtic Tiger: 1990s brief and unusual period of economic recovery

The causes of Ireland's growth are the subject of some debate. Significant aspects of economic growth include increased participation by women in the labor force; decades of investment in domestic higher education; targeting of foreign investment, particularly from America; a low corporation tax rate; an English-speaking workforce; and membership of the European Union, which provided transfer payments and export access to the Single Market.

But world economic crisis in 2007 killed the Celtic Tiger, as a result of irresponsible and reckless financial institutions and a hands-off government.

"The youth of Ireland are once again being forced to emigrate to seek employment. Two hundred thousand are predicted to leave in 2011 and 2012. Many of those who remain are tethered to huge mortgages and a dispiriting negative equity as Irish property prices plummet" (396).

Fianna Fáil, the dominant political party in Ireland since its founding in 1926, lost the 2011 election because they were blamed for the poor economic situation.

The three pillars of Ireland = Fianna Fáil, the Catholic Church, and the Gaelic Athletic Association. In 2011, only the GAA had not lost status and respect (see Slide 5 note about athletic success).

Slide 7: The Catholic Church in Ireland post-1990

Church Control over Private Morality: Sex

“when sex was not open to discussion or acknowledgement, everything was hyper-sexualized. . . Sex lurked everywhere. . . . Precisely because of its own success in keeping sex out of the public arena, Irish Catholic conservatism was forced to become deeply Freudian, to read everything as an expression of hidden libidinal desire” (200).

One politician (Oliver J. Flanagan, Fine Gael TD [Teachta Dála, member of Dáil Eirann]) said, “Sex never came to Ireland until Telefís Eireann [RTE One] went on the air” in 1961. (200)

“Ireland . . . was a naturally healthy body. Films [especially American films] might contain toxins that would make it sick. Censorship was a health and safety issue” (201).

The Magdalene Laundries and their exploitation of young women

In 1991, over 92% of the population in the Republic of Ireland were still Catholic. “But what was distinctive about Irish Catholicism was that this large majority was not just nominally Catholic but professed to be both committed and practicing, unlike other traditionally Catholic countries, such as France, Spain, Italy, or Portugal” (Fuller, xiii).

Then:

7 May 1992: Eamonn Casey, Bishop of Galway: resigns. The emphasis in the first report was on the money that Casey had been paying to an American woman who had a child. Casey took the money from his diocesan funds, which was bad enough. But later it came out that Casey was the father of that child.

1993: Michael Cleary, a powerful and charismatic priest, was found to have had a 28-year relationship to his “housekeeper,” essentially his common-law wife, with whom he had two sons. The first boy was given up for adoption, but Cleary and Hamilton raised the second one. This news came out after Cleary died.

Result: As a notion, Ireland was fixed (Catholic, rural, and nationalist). But the experience of living in Ireland was incoherent, a dual experience of received images of the country, and actual and painful departures from those images.

“ordinary Catholics realized that, when it came to lived morality, they were way ahead of their teachers. The flock was much more sophisticated than the pastors” (437).

Charges of sexual activity by priests became common in the newspapers. But then, in 1994 a priest named Brendan Smyth was arrested in Northern Ireland on charges of pedophilia. He ran off to the Republic and extradition orders were refused. It was in this atmosphere of mistrust and disappointment that the allegations of the sexual abuse of children and the cover-up that followed became public.

The Irish had lived under the Church’s sexual repression since the Famine in the 1840s, so the hypocrisy did great damage to the Church’s position in society.

CHURCH AND STATE: 2002–2014

“When all sex is wrong, no kind of sex can be more wrong than any other” (208).
“This is part of what created a perpetual open season for sexual predation on children”
(208).

The scale of the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy was apparent by 2004. A three-part documentary *States of Fear* provoked a furious response when it was broadcast on RTÉ in April-May 1999. A series of government-sponsored investigations and reports further shocked the public.

The cover-up or even the blind eye was seen as worse than the actual abuse, which is saying a lot.

The Ryan Report, issued in 2009, investigated the treatment children held in Irish institutions responsible for their care received from 1914 to 2004. The report convincingly proved that these institutionalized children were subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

“Ireland is no longer the most Catholic country in the World,” broadcast on NPR on 26 August 2015. “Once, more than 90 percent of Irish people attended church each week. Now it's only about 30 percent. That's lower than in the U.S. One major reason is the avalanche of sex abuse scandals that rocked the Catholic Church in Ireland in the '90s. Maeve Lewis runs an organization for victims of priest sexual abuse.”

After the Ryan Report, a government official said this “might be time for the State to take on its responsibilities for the education system.”

“In almost any other developed society, this would be a virtually incomprehensible statement. In Ireland, it is a potentially potent one.” [Fintan O’Toole, “Lessons in the Power of the Church” (*Irish Times*, 6 June 2009)]

O’Toole: “It is necessary to understand why Ireland, almost alone among developed societies, allows basic social services [especially education and health services] to be run by a secretive, hierarchical organization that has repeatedly been seen to regard itself as accountable to no one—not even to the law.”