

## Irish Film intro (f23)

### Slide 2: Map

### Slide 3:

#### I. What do we call the country?

Erin, Eire, Ireland (meaning the whole island), the Emerald Isle, the Oud Sod, Ulster: *what do these terms mean/ tell us about attitudes towards the country?*

When we mean the Republic of Ireland, let's just say Ireland.

When we mean the rest of the island, the part that is still part of Britain, let's say "Northern Ireland."

**Why is a sense of identity important?** (Consider our current crisis of national identity: "That's not who we are")

### Slide 4:

Six traditional, fundamental principles of Irish identity (1920s–1960s):

- (1) Irish identity must be essential (i.e., not simply defined as *not British*)
- (2) the *historic nature* of the Irish nation must be reflected; one of the oldest in Europe
- (3) Gaelic culture and Irish language
- (4) Gaelic culture = rural culture
- (5) Catholicism: brought to Ireland in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE
- (6) economic and cultural self-sufficiency (Sinn Féin is generally translated as "Ourselves Alone")

### Slide 5:

conflicts and tensions as a result of these traditional principles

Catholicism = another difference from Britain

source of conflict with Irish Protestants

negative effects on women

"shame and guilt became aspects of Irish morality" (McLoone 22)

ideology of self-denial

Irish Ireland versus Anglophone Ireland

tradition/history versus modernization

Gaelic Revival versus Irish language (mandated in 1922, but a failure)

rural versus urban: the city was largely excluded from cinematic representation until the 1970s and early 1980s

agriculture versus industry: emphasis on the landscape as a symbol of Irish purity (Industry = British; the Irish government didn't support industrial growth until the late 1950s)

### Slide 6:

#### Ireland on Film

Like many smaller countries, Ireland has never had a commercially viable, independent film industry that is self-supporting like our Hollywood. Neither Ireland nor Northern Ireland had a reliable funding source for film production until the 1990s (Second Film Board, 1993).

The lack of a substantial native film-production system means looking at how other nations, particularly Britain and the United States, portrayed the country.

### Markers of Ireland and Irishness:

US films: Ireland as a rural utopia (ignoring poverty, narrow-mindedness, lack of opportunity)

British films: violent strife, but represented as personal rather than political. Violence, thus, as a character trait, due to hot tempers and drink.

### **Slide 7:**

#### **Censorship in Ireland**

Protective tariffs = an economic wall between Ireland and the rest of Europe

“the most extensive and most punitive censorship regime in Europe” (McLoone 25)

built a cultural wall between Ireland and mainstream Europe.

Censorship of Films Act 1923, passed by De Valera’s government with the support of the Catholic Church

Even emigration was blamed on the movies (Barton 50): Irish girls lured to Britain by the ‘glamorous unrealities’ shown in movies.

### **Slide 8:**

#### **Hollywood’s Ireland**

*Man of Aran* (Robert Flaherty, 1934); *show clip* (see Google map! “Man of Aran cottage”)

hard life, primitive culture → Irish inferiority *but* nobility and simplicity

appears to be a documentary, but includes scenes representing behaviors (e.g., shark hunting) that were no longer actually practiced

mannerist camera positions that heroicize the people in their struggle against the sea, which is the source of their livelihood and of great danger

along with *The Quiet Man*, *Man of Aran* is a key film in the romantic tradition of Irish representation

#### The Hollywood Irishman:

James Cagney: clips from *The Public Enemy*, *G-Men*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Footlights Parade*, *Angels with Dirty Faces* (“Whaddaya hear, whaddaya say” in *Calvary*)

the Irishman as tough and violent, but loyal to his friends; shift from gangster to G-Man, following the Production Code concern about excessive violence (after *Scarface* comes out in 1932) and about gangsters as protagonists and audience attachment; Irish priest movies like *Angels with Dirty Faces* and *The Bells of St. Mary’s* (Pat O’Brien and Bing Crosby).

Changes in character types:

Irish brawler → WWII soldier

James Cagney → gangster, then G-man, then George M. Cohan

the Irish priest → new visibility and positive influence in the 1930s and 1940s: *Angels with Dirty Faces*; *The Bells of St. Mary’s*

*The Informer* (John Ford, 1935): IRA drama; **show clip “Forgiveness” (2.10) weeping mother**

initially banned, but allowed after appeal. Hugely popular in Dublin

Ford’s representation of Catholicism: sin and redemption; Catholic iconography. Ignores some of the more damaging ways in which the Church shaped Irish society, as we will discuss the role of women → the tropes of the weeping woman and the feisty colleen

*Darby O’Gill and the Little People* (Disney, 1959): clip last wish: Banshee, King Brian (3 mins)

Irish folklore: primitive “religion” accepted by the priest  
well-received fantasy film, but shot in California

*The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952): clip 1a arrival 2.10 (note the total lack of modernity); 4a kiss 2.00 (feisty colleen)

emphasis on community

**allegory** and the “national romance”: the embodiment of Ireland as a woman (as love object or mother); cf. the masculine symbols for the US and Britain (i.e., the American cowboy— e.g., John Wayne; and the British aristocrat): the dramatization of the romance between the woman (i.e., Ireland) and the man (i.e., the US or Britain) suggests some possible future reconciliation.

images from the film were used in tourism promotions, an important element in the Irish economy

The Irish, however, strongly disliked the film

Irishness in US popular culture: especially prominent in the 1990s, the decade of the Celtic Tiger and American investment in technology and science research in Ireland

“it would be difficult to overstate the positive currency of Irishness in US popular culture”: e.g., *Riverdance* (1995); U2; *Angela’s Ashes* (1996); 7 Irish-themed TV shows (1998–2001)

## Slide 9

### II. How do we define an Irish film?

(1) *Broadly?*

“a body of films made inside and outside Ireland that addresses both the local and diasporic cultures” (Barton 5).

Note: not everyone agrees with this definition. See especially the Irish Film Board.

E.g., engagement with Irish politics, particularly nationalism (i.e., an end to partition)?

Irish film interrogating and/or defining some sort of national identity, or as rejecting that as an essential task of Irish filmmaking.

(2) *Inclusion of iconic images?*

Character Types: “the fighting Irishman, the buffoon, the long-suffering mother, the feisty colleen, the rebel son” (Barton 7)

*Cf. Men and Masculinities and the lack of heroic Irish men in Irish films*

E.g., John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara in *The Quiet Man*, or the silhouettes-against-the-sky used in Robert Flaherty’s *Man of Aran*.

The Landscape: “In the Irish context the extraordinarily picturesque and photographic quality of the landscape has combined with an immigrant culture predicated on nostalgia and a history of **tourism** to endow the romantic vision of the landscape and its people with an enduring potency” (Barton 7).

(3) Consistent themes

rebellion, sacrifice, departure and return

Emphasis on rural Ireland: The city was largely excluded from cinematic representation until the 1970s and early 1980s (the beginning of the First Wave era).

Dominance of the landscape in Irish film fed Irish-Americans nostalgia for the Oud Sod, but also had symbolic and ideological value. Landscape = a symbol of Irish purity.

**Slide 10:**

**Irish Film Now**

Where are they made?

Who makes them?

What are they about?

What do they say about an Irish national identity?

Are they political? Note: all films are political. It's what they say *and don't say* that's important.

The word "indigenous" is often used to distinguish Irish film.

Funding-based restrictions on content and purpose