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The Quiet Man ... and Beyond: **An Introduction**

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‘Consider what *The Quiet Man* and Maureen O’Hara did for Irish tourism. The film put the country on the international stage and opened doors that might not have been opened otherwise. We can be proud of that.’ – Senator Michael McCarthy, Seanad Éireann, 13 December 2006¹

In 1951, when John Ford came to Ireland to make *The Quiet Man*, few could have imagined the impact this ostensibly slight romantic comedy would have on the land of Ford’s parents, as well as the film’s lasting appeal. Irish-themed films had been a staple of American cinema since the silent era, but few films made in Ireland up to then had enjoyed more than modest success. *The Quiet Man*, however, would become Ford’s greatest commercial success and set a template for Ireland’s promotion of itself for over half a century.² While audiences have remained enthusiastic, the critical reception of *The Quiet Man* has been less assured. For many Irish filmmakers, *The Quiet Man* was responsible for a particular brand of whimsy which would be the target of much of their work, a development noted by Fidelma Farley and others in this collection.³

Nonetheless, particularly since the publication in 1987 of the influential Irish film studies text, *Cinema and Ireland* – including Luke Gibbons’s seminal essay ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema’ – the film has undergone considerable reassessment. Furthermore, the breadth of scholarship apparent in this collection reflects the continuing engagement with the film amongst the academic community, and few films have managed as successfully to maintain both the public’s affection and critics’ and academics’ attentions. In 1996 the film topped an *Irish Times* poll for the best Irish film of all time.⁴ Almost ten years later, in 2005, with many more Irish (and Irish-themed) films made, *The Quiet Man* still occupied number four in a poll of 10,000 people across Ireland organised by Jameson Irish Whiskey and the monthly magazine *The Dubliner*.⁵ Arguably the film’s impact is most apparent in the many subsequent films, some of which are mentioned in this collection, including *Waking Ned Devine* (1998) (discussed below by Michael Patrick Gillespie), which have attempted to recreate its style and content. There have even been rumours of a sequel of sorts to the film in recent years, though this has yet to materialise.⁶

Yet the impact of the film has gone beyond the landscape, cottages, whimsical storylines and characters found in subsequent film work. Irish fashion designer Paul Costello, for example, remarked controversially in 1998 that ‘when we Irish think of style, we should be thinking of Maureen O’Hara in *The Quiet Man*’.⁷ Indeed, the continuing public interest in O’Hara, who visited Ireland in July 2004 as special guest of the Galway Film Fleadh, owes more than a little to her iconic role in what Michael Dwyer, in an *Irish Times* interview at the time of her visit, called ‘her most famous film and her personal favourite’.⁸ In a testament to O’Hara’s enduring popularity, the Samhlaíocht Kerry Film Festival inaugurated the Maureen O’Hara Award in November 2008 and included a screening of *The Quiet Man* in honour of O’Hara in its programme of events.⁹

The Quiet Man has even been invoked across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. In 2005 during a visit to a Protestant school on the Shankill Road in Belfast by the Republic’s President Mary McAleese, the school’s headmistress welcomed the President by recalling a scene from *The Quiet Man*:

'There's a lovely scene of John Wayne filmed in a bar where the men of Inishfree discover who he is. They say to him, "The men of Inishfree bid you welcome";' she said.

And she added: 'Then it comes to Squire Danaher, who is not a bit best pleased, who says: "There is one man in Inishfree, the best man in Inishfree, who doesn't." Well, let me tell you, we are the best of the Shankill, and we bid you welcome.'¹⁰

It appears that this reference to the *The Quiet Man* provided a means to articulate feelings often difficult to express given the sensitivities associated with relationships between Catholics and Protestants, Unionists and Nationalists in the North and that between the North and the South of the island.

Yet the film has not been without its critics. The remarks of then *Irish Times* columnist Kevin Myers in 2001 reflect continuing misgivings regarding the film:

The Quiet Man is as utterly gruesome a misrepresentation of any country that I know of – it was, after all, set at the time when the nearby Letterfrack Industrial School was reaching prodigious heights of brutality and rapine. It prepared the way for further frolicsome grotesqueries such as *Finian's Rainbow* and *Far and Away*, and much other such rubbish.¹¹

There is in Myers' remarks an implicit suggestion that film has a responsibility to represent reality, warts and all, though some contributors here – including Barry Monahan and Michael Patrick Gillespie – do suggest, in line with Luke Gibbons's seminal reading, that Ford's film is repeatedly raising questions about its own representation. However, the success of such an internal interrogation is challenged by others, including John Hill who raises 'doubts as to whether the ideological operations of the film are quite as complicated as recent writing has suggested' in a piece originally written for *Cinema and Ireland*, though published here for the first time. Sean Ryder is also keen to emphasise the limits of the political critique that others have recognised in Ford's work, while for Eamonn Slater, Ford's film achieves the remarkable distinction of making an English garden the

most globally recognisable depiction of an Irish landscape. By including such criticisms of the film, we hope in this collection to offer some sense of the complexity of reactions Ford's work continues to evoke. Indeed, with regard to the character of Mary Kate Danaher, for example, this collection includes quite different and sometimes contradictory perspectives on her role and position within the film and its consequences for the representation of women more generally, evident in the chapters by John Hill and Díóg O'Connell's post-feminist analysis.

We have divided this collection into four sections, with a fifth 'Final Reflections' segment which includes contributions from the Chairman of *The Quiet Man* Fan Club, Des MacHale, and co-editor Rod Stoneman. MacHale, whose previous publications, including *The Complete Guide to The Quiet Man* (2000) and *Picture The Quiet Man* (2004), have contributed greatly to our understanding of *The Quiet Man*, considers his own personal fascination with the film, its role as a 'cult movie' and the emergence of the 'Quiet Maniacs'. Stoneman, meanwhile, while also reflecting on the film's continuing cult status, draws on his own experiences as Chief Executive of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board to consider the continuing popularity of the film with reference to representations of Ireland today and contemporary filmmaking practice.

The first section, entitled 'Ritual, Intertextuality and Style', features contributions which are concerned with, or touch upon, each or sometimes all these issues. It is appropriate that Luke Gibbons, whose pioneering work referred to repeatedly in this volume contributed significantly to the scholarship concerning this film, begins this collection with an examination of the role of ritual in Ford's work, prominent within *The Quiet Man* but apparent throughout the Irish-American director's *oeuvre*. The role of ritual is picked up elsewhere in this collection, including by Caitríona Ó Torna and Brian Ó Conchubhair who argue that the Irish language in Ford's film is intimately linked to ritual and rites of passage. While Gibbons begins with *The Quiet Man* and the prominence of ritual within that film, he moves from this to an examination of ritual, a significant part of Ford's Irish heritage, throughout the director's work and, indeed,

its relevance in society for communicating and expressing what language and 'protocols of reason or instrumental action' find impossible to articulate.

Gibbons's chapter sets the tone for this collection as a whole in which, as our title suggests, contributions often use *The Quiet Man* as a taking off point for considering other or subsequent work, primarily by Ford but also by others, as well as the central point of study. This is a feature of James P. Byrne's following study which argues for *The Quiet Man* as a Western myth of Irish-American assimilation, placing the film in relation to contemporary political developments – including the Korean War – and the Western genre. In the process, Byrne moves from a consideration of the classic western genre to the representation of Irish America in Phil Joanou's *State of Grace* (1990), arguing that, while Joanou's film is suffused with western tropes, it questions and rewrites 'the simple mythology of American assimilation'.

Sean Ryder too is concerned with the Americanness of *The Quiet Man*, regarding it as a film whose depiction of Ireland is compromised considerably by its roots and focus, being centred ultimately in, and on, the United States. For Ryder, who examines *The Quiet Man* in relation to the more recent film adaptations *The Field* (Jim Sheridan, 1990) and *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1990), the local values and nuances of Maurice Walsh's original short story undergo an important readjustment in *The Quiet Man* in favour of a positioning of Ireland as 'some version of modernity's "Other", either in the form of "tradition" or of "postmodernity"'.

Adrian Frazier's contribution is also focused on the relation of *The Quiet Man* to Irish literature, though of the literary revival rather than the contemporary period. Frazier finds intriguing parallels between the literature of this formative period in Irish literary history and Ford's film, including with John Millington Synge's masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907).

Fidelma Farley offers a comparative study of *The Quiet Man* and Vincent Minnelli's *Brigadoon* (1954), a film that John Hill also comments on and a work that occupies a comparable place in Scottish cinematic history to that of *The Quiet Man* in Ireland's. While recognising significant parallels in the manner in which Ireland and Scot-

land have been represented in film, Farley identifies important divergences in how scholarship concerning both countries' representations has interpreted such depictions.

Also drawing on scholarship of *The Quiet Man*, particularly the work of Luke Gibbons, Michael Patrick Gillespie's contribution offers a reconsideration of the much criticised *Waking Ned Devine*, a work Martin McLoone has described as representing the worst of what *The Quiet Man* encouraged.¹² However Gillespie argues for 'a narrative complexity that manipulates rather than panders to national stereotypes' within *Waking Ned Devine*, a provocative position that reflects the complex ways in which Ford's film has influenced subsequent readings of representations of Ireland and Irish people.

The second section, entitled 'Language, Style and the Visualised Nation', begins with Cairtriona Ó Torna's and Brian Ó Conchubhair's examination of the place of the Irish language, rumour and myth in Ford's life and self-image in order to assess the function of the Irish language in *The Quiet Man*, as well as other films by Ford, including *The Informer* (1935) and *The Long Gray Line* (1955). For Ó Torna and Ó Conchubhair, language played an important role in Ford's work in allowing him to connect to, and speak on behalf of, other marginalised minorities within the United States.

Tom Paulus's contribution is concerned centrally with the language of film itself and provides a consideration of 'internal patterns of film-style and the filmmaker's craft' within *The Quiet Man*, looking in the process at Ford's style in previous and subsequent films, as well as other studio films produced contemporaneously. In a thought-provoking piece, Paulus considers the factors that bear upon, and the effects of, the style a director chooses in his film work, including the use of Technicolour in *The Quiet Man*, the first film depiction of Ireland to do so.

While Paulus is concerned with style in *The Quiet Man*, Barry Monahan contends that the film challenges the cinematic 'look'. By setting aural and visual cues against each other repeatedly, Barry argues that the film dramatises 'a particular mode of viewing the nation that is appropriate to the historical moment of its production', a transitional moment between the more inward-looking nationalism

of de Valera and the outward-looking internationalism of Lemass marked by emigration and increasing tourism.

Section three, 'Landscape, Politics and Identity', begins with Eamon Slater's close study of the particular landscape represented in *The Quiet Man*, a landscape, Slater argues, atypical of the West of Ireland and actually closer to a traditional English garden. For Slater, studies of Irish landscape, including that depicted in *The Quiet Man*, are best focused on the construction of landscape as a cultural object, whether physically or ideologically.

Official concerns regarding the representation of the Irish landscape, and country as a whole, is the subject of Roddy Flynn's chapter, which examines the political machinations that surrounded the production of *The Quiet Man* in 1951 through a study of the government correspondences and records relating to the production of the film. Flynn charts the concerns expressed in government circles regarding the film's portrayal of Ireland and the efforts by the Department of External Affairs, which initially had acted as the interface between the film's producers and the government and went to considerable lengths to facilitate the production of the film, to subsequently assess, and frame, responses abroad in an attempt to shape international perceptions of the film and Ireland.

In the final chapter in this section, John Hill provides a useful review of the movement of critical study on *The Quiet Man* – and indeed Irish film studies more generally – in his contextualisation of his own contribution, originally written in 1983. Hill, in one of the more critical contributions on the film, which places *The Quiet Man* in relation to Ford's western films as a whole, examines its relationship with more general patterns of representing Ireland and contends that *The Quiet Man*'s portrayal conforms largely to a 'limited (and limiting) conception of Irish identity'.

The following section examines the role of Mary Kate, and Maureen O'Hara, whose continuing popularity reflects the centrality of the compelling character she plays within the film. Díóg O'Connell, through a formalist examination of the narrative function of some of the more controversial scenes within the film, attempts to account for how a film that ostensibly seems quite regressive in terms of its rep-

resentation of women is still enjoyed by female viewers. O'Connell argues that the narrative complexity of *The Quiet Man* is such that it 'neither presents a story that can be appropriated for feminist ends, nor can it be simply boxed as another misrepresentation of women'.

Ruth Barton's study also looks at O'Hara's roles outside *The Quiet Man*, recognising in the process a 'peculiar combination of dominance and subordination' which for Barton 'is the key to O'Hara's characterisation in *The Quiet Man*' and which 'she brought with her to that role from her earliest screen performances'. For Barton, similarly to O'Connell, O'Hara's performances more generally often contested the 'male gaze', as articulated in Laura Mulvey's seminal essay.¹³

This section ends with Conor Groome's piece which contends that, given her independence and relationship with the elements in *The Quiet Man*, in any other Ford film Mary Kate might well have been classified as a 'whore' but for the unique ethnic situation of being Irish. By being Irish, Groome argues, Mary Kate 'traverses the gender and racial demarcations' one might usually associate with the characters she depicts.

As this outline of our contributions suggests, *The Quiet Man ... and Beyond* brings together a diverse and eclectic range of perspectives on *The Quiet Man*, from both established academics and emerging scholars. While their views may occasionally be at odds, their engagement with the film and Ford's work attests to the continuing relevance of both to Irish and international film and cultural studies. When this project was first mooted, prior to a conference held in the Huston School of Film & Digital Media in September 2005, one senior academic asked of one of the editors, in an unguarded moment, 'is there anything else to say about *The Quiet Man*?' As this collection indicates, there most certainly is more to say, and we hope these stimulating and sometimes provocative contributions will ensure that this conversation continues for some years to come.

Endnotes

¹ Seanad Éireann, Volume 185, 13 December, 2006. Irish Film Board (Amendment) Bill 2006: Order for Second Stage. Bill entitled an Act to amend and extend

the Irish Film Board Act 1980. Debate available at <http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie>.

² For more on this, see S. Meaney and J. Robb, 'Shooting Ireland: The American tourism market and promotional film', *Irish Geography*, 39.1 (2007), 129–42.

³ See also Luke Gibbons, *The Quiet Man* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), p. 3.

⁴ Michael Dwyer, 'The Top Ten: taken as read', *The Irish Times*, 21 February 1996, p. 42.

⁵ Michael Dwyer, 'Why boy couldn't eat girl at fleadh', *The Ticket. The Irish Times*, 1 August 2006.

⁶ Anonymous, "'Quiet Man" to have a comedy offshoot', *The Irish Times*, 24 August 2000.

⁷ Quoted in Brendan Glacken, 'Paul, Gene, Roddy and Style', *The Irish Times*, 8 October 1998.

⁸ Michael Dwyer, 'Not such a quiet woman', *The Irish Times*, 10 July 2004.

⁹ See Anne Lucey, 'Fricker to receive Maureen O'Hara award', *The Irish Times*, 28 October 2008. The first recipient of the award was Oscar-winning actress Brenda Fricker.

¹⁰ Gerry Moriarty, 'Visit lifted by a welcome and cheerful event – that winning goal', *The Irish Times*, 9 September 2005.

¹¹ Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 27 April 2001.

¹² See Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 59. Also Harvey O'Brien, 'Waking Ned', *Harvey's Movie Reviews*, 1999, <http://homepage.eircom.net/~obrienh/wn.htm>.

¹³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Film Theory and Criticism*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 833–44.