Gaelic Games and “the Movies”

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9. The Wind that Shakes the Barley (Ken Loach, 2006).

From the earliest days of the cinema, sport was one of the most popular subjects of representation. Indeed, the first successful attempts to capture motion in photography, in the work of Eadweard Muybridge in the early 1870s, were focused on sport, from a horse galloping to ‘how pitchers throw the baseball, how batters hit it, and how athletes move their bodies in record-breaking contests’. As film developed as an enterprise, ‘the first flickering, commercial motion picture’ was the depiction of a prize fight between ‘Battling Barnet’ and ‘Young Griffo’, a four-minute film shot by Woodville Latham and his two sons and shown to an audience in 1895. This was preceded the year before by Thomas Edison’s filming of a boxing exhibition match between Mike Leonard and Jack Cushing, fought in Edison’s Black Maria, the first recorded motion picture use of ‘actors’.

Unsurprisingly, when film arrived in Ireland, Irish sport, including Gaelic games, would soon feature. The earliest record we have of the
THE GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION 1884–2009

filming of a Gaelic game – a clip that does not survive, unfortunately – is a 1901 Cullen’s Challenge Cup hurling game between ‘Rovers’ and ‘Grocers’ played at Jones’s Road – now Croke Park – on 8 December 1901. The Irish Animated Photo Company (an early Irish actualities company) film was shown as part of a ‘Grand Gaelic Night’ at the Rotunda the following Wednesday.5 Gaelic games would continue to feature in both actualities and newsreel, even if many of these, particularly between the wars, would emerge from foreign companies, often with a strong British bias.6

As the twentieth century developed, sport and the media became increasingly interconnected. As Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes have noted, ‘Sport and the media … are now integral components of what we often called the entertainment or cultural industries’.7 However, while sport has been a recurring presence throughout film history, sports fiction films – the primary focus of this chapter – have played a relatively small role in the pantheon of cinema history, such that there is considerable difficulty in defining what exactly a ‘sports film’ is.8 As J.H. Wallenfeldt observes in *Sports Movies*, though the sports film is ‘among the most engaging the cinema has to offer and one of Hollywood’s specialties … it isn’t easy to define the difference between a sports film and a film with sports in it’.9 Wallenfeldt’s comments are particularly relevant in the Irish context, where it is difficult to definitively identify a distinct genre of Irish sports film *per se* – outside of documentary – and indeed few fiction films that feature sport at all, and still less that feature Gaelic games.

However, Gaelic games have had a place in film, and arguably a role that outweighs the actual minutes of screen time such games occupy. In particular, I want to explore how representations of Gaelic games have related to two major forces in twentieth- and indeed twenty-first-century Ireland – nationalism and tourism. Both of these issues are important to any understanding of the role and significance of representations of Gaelic games in film and, indeed, sometimes intersect in the context of individual films.

Mike Cronin has argued in *Sport and Irish Nationalism* that

As sport is so popular and has such a long history in Ireland it is the ideal vehicle to use to establish an understanding and appreciation of how Irish nationalism has been formed and has functioned over the last century or so. While the political and literary versions of nationalism are elitist, the nationalism that is propagated by sport is not. While literature is high culture and the preserve of the few, sport is low culture and the passion of the many.10
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However, cinema, similarly, has a place in society comparable to sport in that it too appeals across all sections and is arguably embraced even more by the lower classes than those who occupy the upper echelons. Indeed, in the early decades of the twentieth century cinema acquired a huge following among the working classes that would be sustained throughout the century, at least until the advent of television. While precise attendance figures are difficult to find, the number of venues showing films and the sheer speed with which they emerged is indicative of a considerable following. As Irish film historian Kevin Rockett has recorded: ‘By 1916, 149 cinemas and halls were listed as showing motion pictures and, by the end of the silent period, 1930, there were 265 cinemas and halls throughout the island as a whole.’

In her contemporary study of ‘Cinema Statistics in Saorstát Éireann’, Thekla J. Beere found that by 1935 there was one cinema for every 16,000 people in the Free State, and one cinema seat for every twenty-seven persons. The vast majority of these cinemas had showings at least five days per week. Beere estimated 18.25 million admissions per year to cinemas in the state – an average of over 350,000 people, of a population of nearly three million, attending each week – with most in Dublin and urban Ireland. While this is far from the highest figure per capita in Europe in this period, Beere’s description of the rise of cinema ‘from a little-known new invention to one of the greatest social institutions the world had ever known’ is certainly appropriate to Ireland.

The popularity of cinema among the Irish people is apparent both in its influence and use in the milieu of rising nationalism and the attempts made firstly by the British administration (concerned about film’s contribution to nationalist sentiment) and subsequently by middle-class Catholic Ireland (more worried about film’s impact on the moral fabric of Irish society) to control its influence, culminating in one of the first pieces of legislation, the Censorship of Films Act, passed by the new Irish Free State in 1923. Cinema’s importance in communicating to nationalist Ireland the tumultuous events of 1921 was signalled by Ken Loach in an important scene in The Wind that Shakes the Barley (2006), where we witness the ordinary foot soldiers of the IRA acquire their information on developments post the Anglo-Irish treaty in the picture house.

Loach is actually closer to the truth in this scene than some viewers may have realised. As Rockett has noted, the most important indigenous film company in Ireland prior to independence, the Film Company of Ireland (established in 1916), ‘made a short film for the Republican Loan Bonds campaign which featured Michael Collins,
Arthur Griffith and other prominent nationalists. Indeed, it was Collins himself, who has been described as ‘one of the first Republicans to realise the propaganda value of the new medium of film’, and who arranged for this and several other republican films to be made. As Rockett also notes, ‘In Ireland the [Republican Loan Bonds] film had unorthodox exhibition when Volunteers entered cinema projection rooms, ordered the projectionist at gun point to remove the film being shown to put on the Republican Loan film instead.’

Loach’s The Wind that Shakes the Barley (illus. 9) also features an opening scene depicting the playing of hurling – prohibited during the war of independence – which results in the interrogation of the participants by the black and tans and the eventual killing of one because of a refusal to give his name in English. Loach is alive to the political significance of the game of hurling and cinema-goers in Ireland in 1918 would have been still more so, when one of the most important films made by the Film Company of Ireland, Knocknagow, was released. Indeed, the political resonances of this work could not have been lost on contemporary audiences, based as it was on the hugely popular book of the same name by the prominent Fenian, Charles

10. Knocknagow (Film Company of Ireland, 1918).
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Kickham. While much of the novel is taken up with a succession of drawn-out love stories, in the film, no doubt to accentuate the political resonances of the work, it is relationships to the land that are to the fore. To further connect with recent tumultuous events, the film had its first public showing on the second anniversary of the 1916 Rising, on 22 April 1918, in the Empire theatre in Dublin.

But the film has a further significance in terms of representations of Gaelic games, as it contains one of the first depictions of hurling on film – when the central protagonist, Mat Donovan, leads his local team in a game (illus. 10). This depiction could only have further encouraged its political connotations for contemporary spectators, given the British government’s imprisoning of many GAA members after 1916, including the association’s president, James Nowlan. Furthermore, hurling sticks were used by republican volunteers for both training and drilling sessions, in the absence of sufficient arms, throughout the 1910s, as depicted in several recent films including The Wind that Shakes the Barley and Neil Jordan’s Michael Collins (1996).

While Knocknagow was a major production of the Film Company of Ireland and showed great promise for the nascent Irish film industry, the following four decades would see relatively little fiction filmmaking in Ireland, let alone films that had Gaelic games as their subject. Important newsreel and documentary work was done by the National Film Institute of Ireland from 1948 onwards (and latterly Gael Linn) to film successive All-Ireland finals (and sometimes semi-finals) before the advent of television. While not wishing to downplay the significance of these films and their important contribution as among the first detailed indigenous depictions of Gaelic games, it is worth noting their relationship with the nationalist and traditionalist ethos of the new state. As Mairéad Pratschke has noted of Gael Linn’s Amharc Éireann series in particular:

The meaning of Irishness is the underlying theme of the entire Amharc Éireann series. The films are pointedly in Irish, and nowhere in the series is it more clear what Irishness entails than in the films that deal specifically with traditional Irish culture … The extensive coverage of such Irish sports as hurling and Gaelic football, and the exclusion of English soccer, also underlines the role of these games in traditional Irish identity.

In terms of fiction filmmaking, however, it would be primarily left to filmmakers outside of Ireland to depict the country and its pastimes in film, some examples of which we will return to shortly.
However much Gaelic games were part of the construction of Irish identity before and immediately after independence, the depiction of these games in Irish films when a critically engaged indigenous cinema finally began to emerge in the late 1960s would also be part of the deconstruction of such an identity and critique of the failures of the state. Indeed, one of the first major works that would anticipate the emergence of an indigenous cinema of national questioning in the 1970s included a segment focused on revealing the continuing anachronisms of the GAA, in particular the ongoing imposition of a ban on players from watching or participating in English games. Peter Lennon’s *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968), while a documentary work, none the less in its highly critical approach to the Irish state on the cusp of huge change in the late 1960s anticipated the work of fiction filmmakers such as Bob Quinn, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black and Fergus Tighe in the 1970s and 1980s.

Indeed, if there is one indigenous narrative film that deserves the title of GAA ‘sports film’ it is Tighe’s partly autobiographical début work filmed in his home town of Fermoy, Co. Cork in August 1986. The film was over four years in production and shot on a shoestring budget of £112,000 – funded by RTÉ, the Arts Council and Bord Scannán na hÉireann/ Irish Film Board. Indeed, *Clash of the Ash* was one of the final films to receive funding from the board before it was deconstituted in the round of cutbacks that followed the return of Fianna Fáil to government in February 1987. Furthermore, the film became the subject of the debate that followed the board’s demise in the Seanad where Senator David Norris called on the government to reverse its decision in the interests of the Irish film industry. Norris picked out *Clash of the Ash* in particular as an example of the finest work funded by the board and drew attention to a letter from Tighe published in the *Irish Press* on 3 July 1987 where the director remarked that the film was only made ‘because the crew worked for nothing, the equipment was mostly borrowed and I went into debt of £700’.

*Clash of the Ash* has been described as ‘one of the key Irish films of the 1980s’. ‘This 50-minute drama’, the *Irish Times* reviewer continued, ‘offers a portrait of a still largely uncharted part of contemporary Irish society – small town life and the struggle of the young to resist its stifling conformity.’ The film was well received on release and won several awards, including the Starting Out category award at the Eighth Celtic Film and Television Festival, the fiction prize at the Interceltic Festival in 1987 and the Gus Healy Award for Best Irish Short at the Cork Film Festival in the same year.
Described by Éamon Sweeney as one of the few films with a ‘real feel for the GAA’, it is not so surprising when one considers Tighe’s own background as a hurler, winning an All-Ireland senior colleges hurling medal with St Colman’s in Fermoy. Indeed, the violent climax to the film’s final hurling game re-enacts an event Tighe has recalled from his own playing days. As Lennon did in Rocky Road to Dublin, Tighe used his depiction of Gaelic games to draw attention to his own concerns regarding the state of the nation in the mid-1980s. Phil Kelly is the star player with the Fermoy hurling team and is tipped to make the county minors, but his application leaves something to be desired, at least in the eyes of the team’s foul-mouthed and two-faced trainer, Mick Barry. His mother meanwhile is more concerned with Kelly’s lack of application to his Leaving Cert. studies, but Kelly’s interests lie further afield than the modest plans his parents have for him in the local garage, particularly after he meets the glamorous Mary, returned from London. While the GAA had promoted for much of the century an ideal notion of Ireland as Irish – Irish-speaking if possible – and celebrated the bravery, nationality, masculinity and high ideals of its members, Tighe’s film reveals its central protagonist, Phil Kelly, the star of the local team, to be a poor student, temperamental, violent and prone to binge drinking and drug abuse. This includes a scene of Kelly and Mary smoking a joint brazenly in the local coffee shop, where Kelly boasts of smoking joints ‘all the time’.

Indeed, such is its depiction of Ireland in the mid-1980s that the film was lucky to be made at all, especially when the local bishop got his hands on the script. Advised by the president of St Colman’s college, where Tighe had hoped to make the film, the script was condemned as blasphemous and resulted in a call to the local GAA club in Fermoy by the bishop asking that they would have nothing to do with the production. In a sign of changing times in Ireland, the local club declined the bishop’s advice and continued to facilitate the production while the local technical school provided teams and permitted Tighe to use its grounds for the film. Colman’s president and the local bishop may have been partly concerned for the reputation of a school, whose first president was Archbishop Croke, first patron of the GAA and a cleric with a particular concern for Irish culture and its representation. The bishop’s ire was no doubt further inflamed by aspects of the script which may have offended religious sensibilities but which are absent from the finished film, including a shot early on, shot 17, described as ‘THE FACE OF CHRIST, crucified on a hilltop shrine, the RAIN TEEMING down as a DROP OF BIRDSHIT splatters on his forehead’ and a scene,
also left out, of the young protagonist playacting outside a church and choosing to head for a pint rather than go to mass.\textsuperscript{34}

Overall, in both script and film, we are presented with a town characterised by unemployment, drug abuse and emigration, where hurling offers one of the few outlets for youths to unleash the frustrations and disappointments of their everyday life. Unsurprisingly, these frustrations spill over into violence on the field of play, in the film’s climactic encounter in the county final between Fermoy and Mitchelstown. When Kelly is hit over the head with a hurley by an opposing player, he retaliates in a similar fashion, and runs from the pitch with his trainer’s shouts of ‘there’ll be no job in the bank for you’ ringing in his ears (illus. 11).

The Irish Film Board was re-established on 30 March 1993, the morning after Neil Jordan won an Oscar for his screenplay for \textit{The Crying Game} (1992). Though not depicted, Gaelic games (in particular hurling) is mentioned in Jordan’s film, providing an opportunity for the IRA man Fergus to bond with his British soldier prisoner, Jody, as they compare the Irish game (‘that game where a bunch of Paddies whack sticks at each other?’ as Jody calls it) with cricket. Jordan’s most famous depiction of Gaelic games is found in his later film \textit{Michael Collins} (1996). Jordan’s biopic, however, proved controversial when
released in Ireland on 8 November 1996, not least because of the manner in which it portrayed the events surrounding 21 November 1920, ‘Bloody Sunday’, when British forces opened fire on a Gaelic football match between Tipperary and Dublin in Croke Park. Interestingly, in light of its popularity in other international productions, in the original script it is hurling, not football, that Collins describes as being played, with the unfortunate player killed on that day – Tipperary midfielder Michael Hogan – taunting the British armoured car with a hurling stick before being shot dead.35 *Michael Collins* was funded largely by the Hollywood studio Warner Brothers to the tune of $28m and, conscious of the need to provide epic cinema for an international audience, Jordan chose spectacle over substance in his re-enactment, shot at the Carlisle soccer ground in Bray. As the film’s producer, Stephen Wooley, has admitted, speaking of the attempt to raise funding from the studio, ‘The reality is to make this story … you have to make it an epic picture’.36 Presumably Jordan at first thought hurling would provide the greater spectacle, but thought better of it in the final production. It is a fact that on ‘Bloody Sunday’ British armoured cars did not invade Croke Park;37 this was how Neil Jordan depicted events, however (illus. 12).

Jordan has defended his use of armoured cars as he wanted this ‘scene to last more than 30 seconds’,38 yet his choice of spectacle over

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fact is also apparent elsewhere in the film, including a scene which depicts the IRA’s use of a car bomb, a weapon that wouldn’t appear in the Irish conflict until the 1960s.

But spectacle is central to another related activity that has had a considerable influence on the depiction of Ireland and Gaelic games in film: tourism. Solange Davin’s remarks about television in *The Media and the Tourist Imagination* are equally, if not more, applicable to film: ‘The hallmark of television and of tourism is, first and foremost, spectacle.’

Those international productions that have featured Gaelic games have often been influenced, or concerned with, a force termed by John Urry as ‘the tourist gaze’. In referring to the ‘tourist gaze’ Urry was drawing on Michel Foucault’s ideas of the medical gaze or the surveillance gaze of the Panopticon in his 1990 book of the same name to describe a culturally constructed manner of perceiving a place which informs tourist expectations. For Urry the tourist gaze was ‘constructed through difference’ and ‘in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness’.

Furthermore, whereas in commercial cinema, stereotypes play a central role, providing ‘characters with an almost instant knowability’ by ‘reducing other landscapes, other peoples, and other values … to a normative paradigm’, the tourist gaze is similarly, Urry argues, ‘constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs’. ‘The tourist’, Jonathan Culler has also observed, ‘is interested in everything as a sign of itself … All over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behaviour, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs or, indeed, typical Irish pastimes, such as Gaelic games. Urry’s work has been criticised for allowing too much agency to the tourist in the construction of the gaze, and indeed failing to ‘acknowledge that tourists are equally vulnerable to the gaze of others’, with So-Min Cheong and Marc L. Miller arguing for what they call a ‘touristic gaze’ for which professionals within the tourism industry, from guides to tourist agencies, who select particular aspects of a place to focus upon, are chiefly responsible. Apart from such professionals, film, and particularly since the second half of the twentieth century popular media such as television, have also had a significant role to play in influencing tourist preconceptions, while also working from their own particular presumptions regarding tourist expectations in constructing representations of places and cultural practices. With regard to perspectives on indigenous sports, Gaelic games are by no means
unique in this respect and John Arundel and Maurice Roche’s 1998 study of the relationship between British rugby league and Sky television found similarly that

[A]s with the tourism industry, the media sport industry, in general … tends to promote local identities in a way which transforms them from the unreflected ‘ways of life’ and traditions of local people, into reflexive and organised cultural productions and stagings for outsiders, whether tourists or TV viewers. [Where] this process does not threaten the very existence of cultural forms and ways of life, it certainly raises the problem of their ‘authenticity’ in their new touristic or mediated guise. 47

Ironically, as Gerry Smyth has noted, the search for the ‘authentic’ has none the less been an important determinant of tourism in Ireland, though one ‘with a long and troubled career in Irish cultural history’. 48 Hurling in particular, by far the most common sport portrayed, or alluded to, in international productions, would seem to have provided an authentic and ‘primitive’ contrast to the modernity of American sports such as American football, while also apparently containing the violence so often associated with the Irish. As Rockett, Gibbons and Hill in their influential study Cinema and Ireland have noted, in terms comparable to Urry’s description of the tourist gaze, ‘Whether it be rural backwardness or a marked proclivity for violence, the film-producing nations of the metropolitan centre have been able to find in Ireland a set of characteristics which stand in contrast to the assumed virtues of their own particular culture.’ 49 Hurling’s setting in rural Ireland, and the apparent violence of the game, seemed to encapsulate both of these elements, and it is these traits that are often to the fore in depictions, descriptions and references to the sport in American productions.

The tourist gaze, while greatly influenced by brokers within the tourist industry, from tourist agencies to guides and local beneficiaries, is also subject to engrained or established prejudices and preconceptions. By 1952 and the release of The Quiet Man (arguably the single most important text in framing both a tourist imagery and influencing preconceptions of Ireland) and the establishment of Bord Fáilte, particular emphases were already apparent in representations of hurling in American cinema. Indeed, in the first American productions to focus on hurling in the 1930s we find a recurring emphasis on the alleged violence associated with the game. The GAA organised
annual tours to the US in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s by the All-Ireland winners in both hurling and Gaelic football to promote the games stateside. These visits would seem to have inspired some American producers to consider hurling in particular as a subject for their work. While both Pathé and Fox Movietone newsreels covered several of the games during these visits, hurling would also appear in a number of short films released in cinemas in the early 1930s including two segments of sports series narrated by seminal American broadcaster Ted Husing, ‘Ted Husing’s Sports Slants’ and ‘Sports Thrills’, made by the Vitaphone Corporation for Warner Brothers, in 1931 and 1932 respectively, and most controversially, the MGM-produced Pete Smith Specialty *Hurling*, made and released in the US in 1936, a film that resulted in a deputation from the GAA visiting the Irish film censor to demand that objectionable images be removed. In all of these depictions, it is the potential for injury in the game of hurling that is to the fore in the minds of the producers, as evidenced in the promotional posters and advertising materials (illus. 13) used to promote *Hurling* (1936).

Irish America provided both the participants and no doubt a large segment of the hoped-for audience for films such as *Hurling*. The presence of this huge ethnic community in the United States was an important factor in the popularity of Irish-themed subject matter in American productions. As Martin McLoone has noted, Irish American filmmakers such as John Ford were also engaged in a project of exploiting the performative potential of Irish stereotypes in
film while contributing to the assimilation of Irish-America into mainstream American life. However, as the reactions of the GAA would suggest, the performative dimension of films such as Ford’s *The Quiet Man* and particularly *The Rising of the Moon* was not always recognised by audiences in Ireland. As Arjun Appadurai has noted in his discussion of the increasing ‘deterritorialization’ of the planet (the process through which such diasporic communities have emerged), while such deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies ... the homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups, and it can sometimes become so fantastic and one-sided that it provides the fuel for new ethnic conflicts.

This ‘fantastic and one-sided’ perspective might be compared to certain preconceptions regarding the tourist gaze, both in its distance from life or culture in Ireland and its concern with contrasting presumptions regarding American culture with the exaggerated depictions of Ireland found in some American films. While one is hesitant to compare the work of a filmmaker of the stature of John Ford with a film such as *Hurling*, none the less it is notable that where referred

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to in Ford’s films, hurling also seems inevitably to precede or suggest an occasion of violence, though the game of hurling itself is never depicted.\textsuperscript{55} With regard to the tourist gaze, Ford’s own comments indicate at least an awareness of the contribution of his work to tourism in Ireland,\textsuperscript{56} while, as Luke Gibbons has noted, Ford’s most popular Irish-themed film, \textit{The Quiet Man}, provided a template for Bord Fáilte’s promotion of Ireland from its establishment in 1952, the year of \textit{The Quiet Man}’s release, apparent in such subsequent travelogue films as \textit{The Spell of Ireland} produced two years later and particularly \textit{O’Hara’s Holiday} made in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{57} While we do not actually witness a game of hurling in \textit{The Quiet Man}, significantly the mere mention of the game, during a dispute between the engine driver, Costello (Eric Gorman), the train guard, Moloney (Joseph O’Dea), and the stationmaster, Hugh Bailey (Web Overlander), seems to inspire violence in those discussing it (illus. 14).

A common motif in representations of Ireland is its positioning as a primitive traditional society. As Gerry Smyth has observed:

One of the discursive mechanisms through which this effect is realised is the ‘chronotope’, described by Joep Leerssen (after Bakhtin) as ‘a place with an uneven distribution of time-passage, where time is apt to slow down and come to a standstill at the periphery …’ What Leerssen is referring to here is the impression that not only is the island physically removed from ‘real’ life, but also that time functions differently there.\textsuperscript{58}

For Ford’s next Irish-themed film, \textit{The Rising of the Moon}, time did indeed appear to function quite differently in Ireland, not just through the film’s depiction of the country as a traditional society, emphasised in the characters and stories chosen for this three-part work called \textit{Three Leaves of a Shamrock} during production and on release in the United States, but equally in the difficulty this society appears to have in adapting to modernity. This includes, in the central segment – ‘A Minute’s Wait’, based on a one-act Abbey play by Michael J. McHugh – the Irish approach to time-keeping, whereby in rural Ireland time, here represented by the Ballyscran to Dunfallail train, could wait for everything from prize goats to bishops’ dinners, and, in one of the film’s most infamous sequences, the local victorious hurling team with its piper’s band, both additions by screenwriter Frank S. Nugent to the original play. Though a commercial failure on release in 1957, \textit{The Rising of the Moon} was important as part of Ford’s ongoing attempts to promote the establishment of an Irish film industry that would partly encourage others to set up
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Ireland’s first designated film studios at Ardmore the following year. In terms of representations of hurling, however, the film included a controversial depiction that resulted in considerable press coverage during the film’s production and a staunch defence of the film and Ford’s work by Irish Times columnist Myles na Gopaleen. ‘A Minute’s Wait’ was shot in Kilkee, Co. Clare. As Joseph McBride has observed, the segment reinforces the insidious notion of Ireland as a backward island filled with lovable incompetents who haven’t yet made it into the twentieth century. Ford’s use of an old-fashioned train with an engine built in 1886 was deliberately anachronistic, provoking a complaint from the director of the West Cork Railway who could not understand why Ford refused a modern train with a diesel engine. ‘He’ll find out when the tourists come over next summer,’ Ford grumbled in what [Frank S.] Nugent [the film’s scriptwriter] took as an allusion to the tourist craze for jaunting carts provoked by The Quiet Man.59

Myles na Gopaleen – probably better known today as Flann O’Brien, the acclaimed author of the novels At Swim Two Birds (1939) and The Third Policeman (1967) – was an occasional commentator on cinema and was particularly upset by reactions to The Rising of the Moon among members of the GAA, even before the shooting of the film was complete. On Tuesday 1 May 1956, both the Irish Press and Irish Independent reported the shooting of a scene of hurlers returning victorious from a game, with some ‘on stretchers’ after ‘an encounter’ which, the Independent correspondent related, ‘from the appearance of the players, must have been bloody and very rough, and hardly played according to the rules of the Gaelic Athletic Association’.60

Unsurprisingly, the GAA responded with some alarm to the reports the following day with a statement, published in both papers, from the general secretary, Pádraig Ó Caoimh, declaring that he was ‘deeply concerned lest there should be any substance in this report’. The statement went on to note that Ó Caoimh had been ‘in touch with Lord Killanin, one of the directors of Four Provinces Productions, the production company behind the film. ‘He has assured me that the report referred to is exaggerated and completely out of context; that there are no stretcher-carrying scenes, and that in fact there is nothing offensive to our national tradition in this film.’61 The controversy rumbled on none the less, and by Friday of that week it was on the front page of the Irish Times, where it was
announced that the shooting of the scenes ‘resulted in an official
deputation (consisting of Rev. John Corry, CC, chairman and Mr
Seán O’Connor, treasurer) from the Clare County Board of the
GAA making a strong protest yesterday in Kilkee to Lord Killanin’.
A statement was issued by the board which said it was a matter of
‘grave concern to the GAA that the national game of hurling
should, or would appear to be held up to ridicule ... the matter of
15 players returning home all suffering injuries would be calculat-
ed to give the impression that instead of a national sporting game
that they were casualties returning to a clearing station at a battle-
field’. While noting that such violent incidents and injuries were
extremely rare in GAA games, ‘Father Corry pointed out that the
scene as depicted was completely derogatory to the Gaels of Ireland
and to the hurliers in particular. The scene if placed on the screen
as filmed would bring the association into disrepute and would be
calculated to hold up the national game to ridicule both at home
and abroad.’

These final remarks were quoted at length by Myles na Gopaleen
some weeks later while referring to what he called the ‘farcical drool
emitted by the GAA’. Na Gopaleen, apparently at that time a regu-
lar reader of the provincial papers, ‘the only true mirrors’ he
observed ‘of Ireland as she is’, was quoting the Clare County
Board’s statement not from the *Irish Times* but from the *Clare
Champion*. He went on to note a report on the same page of the
*Champion* of a local hurling game between Ruan and St Josephs
where the game was described as ‘probably one of the worst exhibi-
tions of bad sportsmanship ever seen on a Gaelic field’. There was
‘literally a procession to the Co. hospital from the match’, the report
continued, while ‘One, a spectator from Ennis, had survived the war
in Korea but he almost met his Waterloo in Cusack Park.’ Na
Gopaleen was dismissive of the GAA’s criticisms of the film and
while extolling the virtues of Ford (apparently a close friend, the
article suggests), remarked that

To many people, the possibility of vital injury is part of
the attraction of hard games ... The non-belligerent
spectators regard absence of such occurrences as an
attempt to defraud them. They have paid their two bobs
to see melia murdher. Failure to present it is, they feel,
low trickery.

It would appear that na Gopaleen, a commentator whose own
contributions to the *Irish Times* were often *tour de force* performances
in themselves, including his celebrated moniker, admired the
performative elements within Ford’s work while also being highly critical of the hypocrisy he sensed in the reactions of the GAA. Indeed, na Gopaleen may also have recognised the ‘self-interrogation’ Luke Gibbons has identified in Ford’s *The Quiet Man*, in *The Rising of the Moon*, which seems as much concerned with ridiculing the reactions, and lack of familiarity, of tourists to Ireland (in this case the holidaying English couple depicted on the train as the injured players pass by on stretchers) to a sport such as hurling as it does with any particular critique of the potential for violence in hurling itself. As the lady asks, ‘Charles, is it another of their rebellions?’ Charles replies, ‘I gather it’s the local cricket team’ (illus. 15).

Ultimately, it seems the reactions of the GAA were not taken seriously among those involved in the production. Records of correspondences with Lord Killanin held in the Lord Killanin collection in the Irish Film Institute reveal that the film’s producers collected correspondences and newspaper clippings both for and against the depiction, and would appear to have been amused more than alarmed by the response (illus. 16).

Anita Sharp Bolster, who played the part of the recently wed English woman in ‘A Minute’s Wait’, recalled, in an article published after the film’s production, the arrival at the film’s wrap party of...
‘John Ford [and] [Lord] Killanin … doing a very funny turn in the hurley boys’ jerseys’. Furthermore, Ford appeared in a small part in an Abbey theatre Irish-language play shortly after the film’s production in which a ‘short passage of Gaelic dialogue was improvised for him’. When asked if ‘he was going back to Spiddal’ (the birthplace of his parents) he said he was not as he was ‘afraid of the GAA’.68

While The Rising of the Moon was on release in Ireland, another foreign film, a British adaptation of Catherine Cookson’s novel Rooney directed by George Pollock – in which hurling would have an important role – was in production. Pollock, according to Sandra Brennan in the All Movie Guide, is ‘best remembered for directing films in the 1960s Miss Marple series’.69 The film was produced by George H. Brown, who had enjoyed a minor success two years previously with another Catherine Cookson adaptation, Jacqueline, a film that also saw the transfer of a Cookson story from its original English setting to an Irish locale, if in the north rather than the south of Ireland. Brown, incidentally, has a rather intriguing connection with Irish cinema, including The Quiet Man. He was the first husband of Maureen O’Hara, who, though not at all interested in Brown, married him, her autobiography suggests, to stop him hassling her to do so, a rather novel approach to rejecting a potential suitor. The marriage was
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never consummated and was quickly annulled when O’Hara’s mother got wind of it.\textsuperscript{70}

Though not a Hollywood production, produced as it was by the British Rank Film Company, in its style, content and humour \textit{Rooney} is clearly influenced by previous Hollywood depictions of Ireland. While set in Dublin, the original Catherine Cookson novel of the same name was set in the English coastal town of South Shields, the town in which Cookson was born and where much of her work is set. Indeed, an important aspect of her work was her ability to capture the distinctive accent of the north-east of England, and her contribution to the representation of the region and its people was recognised in later life when she was awarded the Freedom of the Borough of South Tyneside (known today as Catherine Cookson country). However, in its tranference to the Dublin milieu considerations of accent were far from the producer’s mind, reflected in the choice of non-Irish actors (such as Liverpool-born John Gregson as the eponymous Dublin binman James Ignatius Rooney) for most of the leading roles, who make little attempt to approximate an Irish, never mind Dublin, accent in the film. The production of \textit{Rooney} was motivated not so much by a concern with authenticity of voice or place but rather by the expectation of cashing in on the success of \textit{The Quiet Man} with international audiences earlier in the decade.

Described by Éamon Sweeney as maybe ‘the most stage-Irish film of all time ... [making] \textit{Darby O’Gill and the Little People} look like a documentary’\textsuperscript{71}, the rudiments of stage Irishry are apparent in \textit{Rooney} right from the opening shots of the Guinness brewery, which we are told is ‘essential to the life of a great city’. From early on faces familiar from \textit{The Quiet Man} appear, including Barry Fitzgerald as the querulous grandfather in Rooney’s rented accommodation, and Jack MacGowran, who plays one of Rooney’s closest friends and co-worker, Joe O’Connor. \textit{Rooney} also takes from \textit{The Quiet Man} not just the whimsical depictions but also the almost musical quality of the film; in this case workers without notice break into song, particularly the risible theme tune ‘Rooney-Oh’ (illus. 17).

It is in this context that Rooney includes hurling as a significant part of the narrative, with the central protagonist, James Ignatius Rooney, a Dublin dustbin man whose real talents (apart from being much sought after by a succession of landladies) are on show with his local hurling club – the fictitious Sons of Erin. The club depicted in the scenes of Rooney playing early on in the film was actually St Vincent’s and their star player, and dual county star and twice All-Ireland medal winner in football in 1958 and 1963, Dessie ‘Snitchy’
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Ferguson, attempted valiantly, with little success, to educate Gregson in his use of the camán. Rooney is eventually spotted by a county selector, leading to a place in the Dublin county team that reaches the All-Ireland final. His hurling exploits are also paralleled by his developing relationship with the much put upon Máire (played by English actress Muriel Pavlow), the niece of the lady who runs his rented accommodation.

The film’s distance from reality is also apparent in its depiction of a Dublin team wearing the black and amber of Kilkenny – required because Kilkenny had played in, and won, the 1957 hurling final which was used for the scenes in Croke Park in which our hero is depicted. Kilkenny’s opposition in that game, Waterford, were offered first option of having Gregson togged out in one of their jerseys for the parade. However, ‘conscious perhaps that this was the Déise’s first final appearance since their victory over Dublin in ’48 – and not wishing to add to the team’s nervousness – the Waterford mentors refused permission.’

The captain of the 1957 Kilkenny team, Michael Kelly, has recalled the All-Ireland and Gregson’s involvement:

He stepped into the pre-match parade, tucked in behind Seán Clohessy, the left full-forward. A lot of people, especially Waterford people, wondered at the time who was Kilkenny’s extra man! The scenes from play that feature in the movie were filmed afterwards. We went back up to Dublin the following Saturday – both teams – and filmed those scenes in Croke Park.

The première of Rooney was a major event for Dublin city, including in the audience the president of Ireland Seán T. O’Kelly and receiving considerable coverage throughout the press the following day. Critical reaction to the film was also generally positive, regarding it, surprisingly, as a film eschewing stage-Irishness. However, the one recurring criticism of the film in the press was of its suggestion of violence (yet again) in association with hurling. As the Irish Independent critic remarked: ‘Why Pollock wanted to introduce a bit of Donnybrook Fair stuff at another hurling game is his own affair, but he could have left it out.’ Benedict Kiely’s review in the Irish Press was particularly critical. ‘Mr Gregson is not … Christy Ring’, Kiely reminded readers (in case there was any doubt) and ‘The Croke Park scenes … I found embarrassing. The preliminary hurling game, with Noel Purcell et cie in grips on the green sward, I found offensive.’ Kiely also recalled in his review angry reactions to the depiction of battered and bruised hurlers returning from a game in The Rising of the Moon.
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Furthermore, he makes the astute observation that we have in *Rooney* a depiction of a national sport unlikely to be found in films concerning English national pastimes. ‘Nor do I recollect’, he declares,

any occasion on which a Wembley Cup Final, or say, Twickenham, on the day of a Wales–England game (or Lords on the day of a Test match) was used thus as a stage-setting for mediocre comedy. Here was one excellent case for the application of the ban. Keep the mummers off the green ground of Croke Park. It was meant for higher things.\(^77\)

Whether, as John Ford seemed to suggest, film had a significant impact on tourist numbers coming to Ireland in the 1950s is hard to quantify precisely. What is clear is that the numbers did increase as the decade developed and four days before the Irish première of the final film I want to discuss, the Justin Herman-directed *Three Kisses* (1955) at the Capitol theatre in Dublin on 18 July 1956, the *Irish Times* carried a front-page headline declaring ‘Tourist industry has prospects of record year’. ‘Since the beginning of the summer’, the report continued, ‘[Aer Lingus, British railways, and the British and Irish Steam Packet Co.] have been transporting the biggest number of holiday-makers to this country in their history’.\(^78\)

The Oscar-nominated *Three Kisses*, like the Pete Smith Specialty *Hurling*, was released – along with a further Paramount short on the Irish bloodstock industry, *Champion Irish Thoroughbreds* (1955) – as an opener for a main feature, this time as part of the Paramount Topper series,\(^79\) running for two weeks in Ireland as support for the Alvin Ganzer-directed *The Leather Saint* (1955). *Three Kisses* features a young hurler, Colm Gallagher, narrator of the film, who progresses from playing with his local team in the fictional rural Cork village of Ballykilly to training with the senior Cork team and eventually playing in the Munster championship final. Gallagher’s sporting prowess is partly motivated, the film suggests, by his quest for three kisses from the girl he loves, thus giving the film its title, each a reward for his improving fortunes on the playing-field.

While *Three Kisses* is unquestionably quite a patronising and problematic depiction of Ireland, it is a considerably more interesting work than this description might suggest, not least because, though written and directed by an American filmmaker, it is one of the first examples of the Gaelic Athletic Association and Bord Fáilte together informing and facilitating a major American studio to produce a
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fictional work⁹⁰ (though one billed as ‘documentary’) on Gaelic games primarily for international consumption. In terms of the GAA’s involvement, as well as featuring several scenes from hurling games in the Munster championship, including the 1955 Munster semi-final between Cork and Clare, the film also includes appearances by the legendary Cork manager, Jim ‘Tough’ Barry⁹¹ (illus. 18), most of the great all-Ireland winning Cork team of the 1950s in training (including Vincy Toomey, Paddy Barry, Seánie O’Brien, John Lyons, Joe Hartnet, Mick Cashman, Christy O’Shea and Jimmy Brohan (to whom I am grateful for his assistance in identifying those mentioned here)), the GAA general secretary Pádraig Ó Caoimh in attendance at an under-age hurling game in Ferranferris and several other prominent hurling figures from Cork in the 1950s.⁹² With regard to Bord Fáilte’s involvement, newspaper reports of the Irish première of Three Kisses – which was also the Irish première of Champion Irish Thoroughbreds – describe the film as having been made with the co-operation of the board and give considerable space to the comments of its then director-general, T.J. O’Driscoll, who introduced the film to audiences on the night. According to the Irish Times, O’Driscoll ‘welcomed the growing interest among foreign

film companies in making films in Ireland’, pointing out that ‘film-making was a costly business which the board could not attempt on its slender budget, in the ordinary course of events. For that reason it was more than grateful to Paramount for making these films and distributing them throughout the world.’ In the *Irish Independent*, under the headline ‘Film and the Irish tourist industry’, the paper’s film correspondent also quoted O’Driscoll’s remark that ‘Films are one of the best methods of publicising the tourist industry of this country.’

Film reviews also recognised the tourist potential of the work. Benedict Kiely in the *Irish Press*, under a headline ‘The tourists and the screen’ remarked of *Three Kisses* and *Champion Irish Thoroughbreds* that

> Even with their defects from our point of view, they could get people interested in Ireland … we should always remember that films like these documentaries and *The Quiet Man* are meant not for us but for an American public. *The Quiet Man* I’m told was a great help to the tourist trade; and why not indeed. Who wouldn’t like to spend a holiday in a land of green fields, sunshine, horse-racing, singing, fighting, boozing and romance?

Given the differing concerns of each of the organisations involved, however, it is not surprising that the finished film is one more remarkable for the tensions it reveals between an attempt to depict indigenous culture authentically and engage a diverse international audience (with preconceived notions of Ireland and the sport of hurling) than for the quality of either the sport depicted or film produced. The film, none the less, features an intriguing encounter between the traditional and the modern – young Gallagher’s village of Ballykilly, for example, is depicted as an idyllic pastoral and pre-modern space, complete with familiar horse and cart in the background and village pump for running water. However, Gallagher’s – who seems remarkably young for the honour – elevation to the senior Cork team is described as being picked to represent the ‘city’ rather than the county, and the city itself is depicted as ‘the mighty metropolis … with its busy vehicular traffic and its fine buildings of stone and brick’. However, there is in all of this quite a patronising tone apparent, including in the film’s representation of women and the women’s sport of camogie, and where the mere mention of someone having been to the US is considered a remarkable achievement by the narrator, ostensibly young Gallagher himself. Indeed, the film
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is narrated in an extraordinary accent, which suggests the tension between a wish to present an authentic Irish voice but also one that remains accessible to an American audience. And it is an American audience that is the primary concern here, for all involved in the production. A recurring feature of representations of hurling, as apparent in the films I have mentioned, is the bewilderment of those who encounter it from afar at the apparent irrationality of the sport and its potential for violence. A strong focus is placed in Three Kisses, therefore, on illustrating the rationale behind the game, emphasising its rules and downplaying the potential for injury. However, it is a less than convincing riposte to previous representations. As the cinema correspondent of the Irish Times remarked: ‘The soundtrack informs us that “though you may suffer a fracture of a leg or a concussion of the brain … [hurling] is not considered a rough sport – at least, not by us Irish.”’ ‘This’, the indignant correspondent continues, ‘is certainly nice to know!’

To conclude, in line with the depiction of sport in cinema generally, Gaelic games is not the most popular motif associated with Ireland in film. However, it does none the less occupy a significant role. In particular, the forces of both nationalism and tourism have influenced how Gaelic games have been depicted, with the latter principally influential in fiction filmmaking given that most fiction films featuring Gaelic games have emerged from outside Ireland. The focus of filmmakers such as Miller, Ford, Pollack and Herman on audiences in America, influenced by preconceptions regarding the tourist gaze, has had considerable consequences for the portrayal of a Gaelic sport such as hurling. Indeed, hurling would seem to have provided a useful motif for filmmakers outside of Ireland encapsulating prevailing stereotypes regarding the Irish, including their alleged proclivity for violence. While a filmmaker such as John Ford may provide his own internal interrogation of this phenomenon within a film such as The Rising of the Moon, ultimately the images of badly injured players returning from a game on stretchers may contribute to the perpetuation of such stereotypes. For what is remarkable for those who follow the sport of hurling is not so much the potential for injury but rather the sophistication and skill levels involved in a game in which injuries are no more common than many other field sports, aspects almost entirely absent from these foreign depictions. Even in a film such as Three Kisses, which appears at least partly an attempt to correct these perceptions, the complicated address involved in such a project ultimately compromises the veracity of its portrayal. Colm Gallagher is clearly the local guide who is bringing the uninitiated into the world of hurling, remarking along the way
on the perceived incorrect preconceptions regarding the sport. However, all of this is very much framed within a context understandable to the would-be tourist, a fact commented on by local observers of the film. In this respect, a film such as Three Kisses anticipates Dean MacCannell’s observation in the late 1970s that the ‘structural development of industrial society is marked by the appearance everywhere of touristic space’. Indeed, Three Kisses might be regarded, following again from MacCannell’s seminal essay, as an example of ‘staged authenticity’, lending the film, adapting MacCannell’s words again, an ‘aura of superficiality, albeit a superficiality that is not always perceived as such by the tourist, who is usually forgiving about these matters’.

Local commentators tend however to be less forgiving. As the Cork Examiner reviewer remarked on the film’s release in Ireland, while drawing comparisons between the film and other depictions of hurling, including that found in The Rising of the Moon:

That more Americans are likely to come here looking for the ‘traditional’ Ireland is evident from the film … It is in line with other productions of the type … Three Kisses … accurately describes the game itself, but the film company have gone to a great deal of trouble with the insertion of the ‘Blarney’.

Result: the picture becomes a farce and hardly a true representation of the Irish scene.