

BTP2BR_T_50 Film as Social and Cultural Critique in 21st-century Ireland

Spring Semester, 2025
Seminar, 2hrs, graded, 5 credits
MA, required-optional
Tue 10.00-11.40, Rm 109

Instructor: Gula Marianna
Office hours:
Tue 16.00-17.00 &
Wed 12.00-13.00 Rm 108

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As Irish cultural critics, Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin observed on the threshold of the 21st century, with the coming of the Celtic Tiger “culture as social critique has [to a great extent] given way to culture as commodity” (*Reinventing Ireland* 2002). Focusing on the cultural medium of film in the same seminal collection, Debbie Ging claims that “a booming economy has started to erase self-questioning in favour of a more marketable vision of Irishness.” Despite this tendency since the early 1990s, Irish cinema has never entirely lost its critical edge, which indeed became stronger again with the collapse of the Celtic Tiger success story eight years into the 21st century. The present course concentrates on five Irish auteurs, Neil Jordan, Lenny Abrahamson, Martin McDonagh, John Michael McDonagh and John Carney, whose films, pointing beyond the boundaries of the national, offer oblique social and cultural critique (of neoliberalism, modernity at large, the Catholic Church, essentialising conceptions of national, ethnic, cultural and gender identity) in highly unconventional, formally innovative ways – Abrahamson’s alternative Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger films deploying a minimalist aesthetics, while Jordan and the McDonagh brothers relying on playful (often darkly comic) exuberance. John Carney’s musical films closing the course offer innovative takes on the musical genre.

Requirements

1. In-class participation: Since most classes are planned to be interactive, their success will largely depend on the students’ readiness to watch, read and discuss the assigned films and articles.

2. Reader’s journal: students are required to keep a reader’s journal in a separate notebook, recording opinions, impressions and raising questions.

3. Home essay or end-term test: at the end of the course students can choose between **two alternatives**: they can either write an end-term test (consisting of mini-essay questions) or submit an essay of about 2500-3000 words, word processed (double-spaced, type size 12) that meets the formal and academic requirements of a research paper: use of secondary material and scholarly documentation, conforming to the MLA Style, are required. The essay can focus on a film or films discussed in the course addressing an aspect or aspects not discussed in class or further elaborate on an aspect touched upon in class; or can explore any other 21st-century Irish films functioning as social and/or cultural critique. The deadline for submitting the home essay is **2 December**.

4. Class attendance: more than three absences (including health related absences, apart from severe, exceptional cases) will result in failing the entire course.

NB #1: The quality of students’ written and spoken performance will count significantly toward their final grade.

NB #2: Artificial Intelligence Policy: Students choosing to write an essay should rely on their own creativity and intelligence and **should not use Generative AI tools**.

Grading

The final grade will consist in the following:

- In-class participation 25%
- Reader’s journal 10%
- Home essay or end-term test 65%

Final Grades	
87-100%	5
75-86%	4
63-74%	3
51-62%	2
0-50 %	1

Schedule

1.	9 Sep	Ireland in the 21st century (Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger Ireland) Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. Kirby, L. Gibbons and M. Cronin, “Introduction: The Reinvention of Ireland: A New Perspective.” <i>Reinventing Ireland</i> (2002) (1-20) F. O’Toole, “Foreword” & E. Maher “Introduction” to <i>Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland</i> (2009) (vii-xiv and 1-7)
2.	16 Sept	Cinema in 21st-century Ireland Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruth Barton, “Introduction.” <i>Irish cinema in the twenty first century</i> (2019) (9-27) Recommended reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debbie Ging, “Screening the Green: Cinema under the Celtic Tiger” (2002)
3.	23 Sept	I. Lenny Abrahamson’s alternative Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger films: “Stories that weren’t being told” – <i>Adam and Paul</i> (2004): “Just move” [Watch also <i>About Adam</i> (dir. Gerry Stembridge, 2000)] Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “If Irish cinema is going to be really great, it has to stop worrying too much about being ‘Irish cinema’: Q & A with Lenny Abrahamson and Mark O’Halloran.” <i>Contemporary Irish film</i> (2011) (127-48) Recommended reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dióg O’Connell. “Immersed in Two Traditions: The Narratives of <i>Adam and Paul</i>, <i>Garage</i> and <i>Prosperity</i>” <i>Contemporary Irish film</i> (2011) (115-26) Barton, Ruth. “Rural and Small-town Ireland on Screen” & “Images of the City.” <i>Irish cinema in the twenty first century</i> (2019) (167-223) Debbie Ging, “It’s Good to Talk? Language, Loquaciousness and Silence Among Irish Cinema’s Men in Crisis” (especially the subsection “Speaking and Silence” <i>Men and Masculinities</i> (2013) (110-22)
4.	30 Sept	<i>Normal People</i> (2020-TV series, an adaptation of Sally Rooney’s novel): A romance outside class Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Máté Gábor. “Introduction: Why Normal is a Myth (And Why that Matters).” <i>The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture</i> (2022) (17-26)
5.	7 Oct	<i>Normal People</i> (2020-TV series): A romance outside class
6.	14 Oct	II. John Michael McDonagh: “One part humanism to nine parts gallows humour” – <i>The Guard</i> (2011): A 21 st -century playboy of the Western world Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debbie Ging, “It’s Good to Talk?: Language, Loquaciousness and Silence Among Irish Cinema’s Men in Crisis” (especially “Speech as masquerade”). <i>Men and Masculinities</i> (2013) (122-29) Recommended reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canning, Laura, ““Not in front of the American”: Place, Parochialism and Linguistic Play in John Michael McDonagh’s <i>The Guard</i>” (2012)

		<p>[pp. 206-08]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>The Guard</i>: Emmet O’Brien Talks to Brendan Gleeson and Writer/Director John Michael McDonagh About Their Surprising New Film,” <i>Film Ireland</i> (2011)
7.	21 Oct	CONSULTATION WEEK (NO CLASS)
8.	28 Oct	<p>Calvary (2014) – killing a good priest</p> <p>Required reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas O’Connor, “Calvary” (2 pages) vs Laura Canning, “Calvary” (4 pages) • Martin McLoone. “Settling Old Scores?: Religion, Secularisation and Recent Irish Cinema” <i>Film, Mediascape, and Popular Culture</i> (2008) (111-26) <p>Recommended reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foucault, Michel. “Scientia Sexualis.” <i>The History of Sexuality: Volume I</i>. (the significance of confession in Western culture) (51-73) • Peadar Kirby, “Globalisation, Vulnerability and the Return to Religion: Reflections from an Irish Experience.” <i>Cultural perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland</i> (2009) (93-112) • Barton, Ruth, “Rural and Small-town Ireland on Screen” (especially “Old Stereotypes Reworked: <i>The Guard</i> and <i>Calvary</i>”) <i>Irish cinema in the twenty first century</i> (2019) (167-223)
9.	4 Nov	<p>III. Martin McDonagh: “One part humanism to nine parts gallows humour” – <i>In Bruges</i> and <i>Six Shooter</i> (a short film) (2008 and 2004): “Give the boy a chance”</p> <p>Required reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrick Lonergan, “Martin McDonagh as Filmmaker.” <i>The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh</i> (2012) (135-56) <p>Recommended reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • José Laners, “‘Like Tottenham’: Martin McDonagh’s postmodern morality tales.” <i>The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh</i> (2012) (165-178) • Eamonn Jordan, “McDonagh and postcolonial theory: practices, perpetuations, divisions and legacies” <i>The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh</i> (2012) (193-208) • Debbie Ging, “It’s Good to Talk? Language, Loquaciousness and Silence Among Irish Cinema’s Men in Crisis” (especially “Speech as masquerade”) <i>Men and Masculinities</i> (2013) (122-29)
10.	11 Nov	<p>The Banshees of Inisherin (2022): not giving the other a chance</p> <p>Required reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karen O’Brien, “A symbiotic relationship: the works of Martin McDonagh and ecocriticism.” <i>The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh</i> (2012) (179-92) <p>Recommended reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joan FitzPatrick Dean, “McDonagh’s gender troubles.” <i>The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh</i> (2012) (209-22)
11.	18 Nov	<p>IV. Neil Jordan: Breakfast on Pluto (2005): The peepshow and the confessional – Ireland reimagined through a queer lens</p> <p>Required reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MacLeod, Allison, “Mapping Ireland’s Queer Films.” <i>Irish Queer Cinema</i> (2018) (18-27) <p>Recommended reading:</p> <p>Barton, Ruth. “Queering Rural and Small-town Ireland: <i>Breakfast on Pluto</i>.”</p>

		<i>Irish cinema in the twenty first century</i> (2019) (157-59)
12.	25 Apr	V. John Carney's musical films: "Happy sad" – <i>Once</i> (2006) and <i>Sing Street</i> (2016) Required reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neasa Hardiman, "'Once Won't Happen Twice': Peripherality and Equality as Strategies for Success in a Low-Budget Irish Film." <i>Contemporary Irish film</i> (2011) (81-90) Recommended reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dióg O'Connell, "Artisanal meets mainstream" and "The Sleeper Phenomenon." <i>New Irish Storytellers: Narrative Strategies in Film</i> (2010) (174-183) • Ruth Barton, "Images of the City" (especially "Musical Dublin") (2019) (199-205)
13.	2 Dec	End-term test
14.	9 Dec	Evaluation

Secondary sources (required and recommended reading):

- Barton, Ruth. *Irish Cinema in the Twenty First Century*. Manchester UP, 2019.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Pantheon, 1978.
- Ging, Debbie. *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Huber, Werner, and Seán Crosson, eds. *Contemporary Irish film: new perspectives on a national cinema*. Wien: Braumüller, 2011.
- Kirby, Peadar, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, eds. *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*. London: Pluto, 2002.
- Lonergan, Patrick. *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*. London: Methuen Drama, 2012.
- MacLeod, Allison. *Irish Queer Cinema*. Edinburgh UP, 2018.
- Maher, Eamon, ed. *Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.
- Máté Gábor. *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture*. Penguin, 2022.
- McLoone, Martin. *Film, Mediascape, and Popular Culture: Cityscapes, Landscapes, Soundscapes*. Dublin: Irish Academic P, 2008.
- O'Connell, Dióg. *New Irish Storytellers: Narrative Strategies in Film*. Bristol: Intellect, 2010.

Further recommended reading:

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Cleary, Joe, and Claire Connolly, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Flannery, Eoin, and Michael Griffin, eds. *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography and Popular Culture*. Syracuse UP, 2009.
- Foster, R. F. *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change from 1970*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Gibbons, Luke. *Transformations in Irish Culture*. Indiana: Notre Dame P, 1996.
- Gillespie, Michael Patrick. *The Myth of an Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films*. Syracuse UP, 2009.
- Kuhling, Carmen and Kieran Keohane. *Cosmopolitan Ireland: Globalisation and Quality of Life*. London & Dublin: Pluto, 2007.
- Maher, Eamonn and Eugene O'Brien, eds. *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and its Aftermath*. Manchester UP, 2014.
- McIlroy, Brian. *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism*. Ed. New York, London: Routledge, 2007.

Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan. *The Anthropology of Ireland*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006.