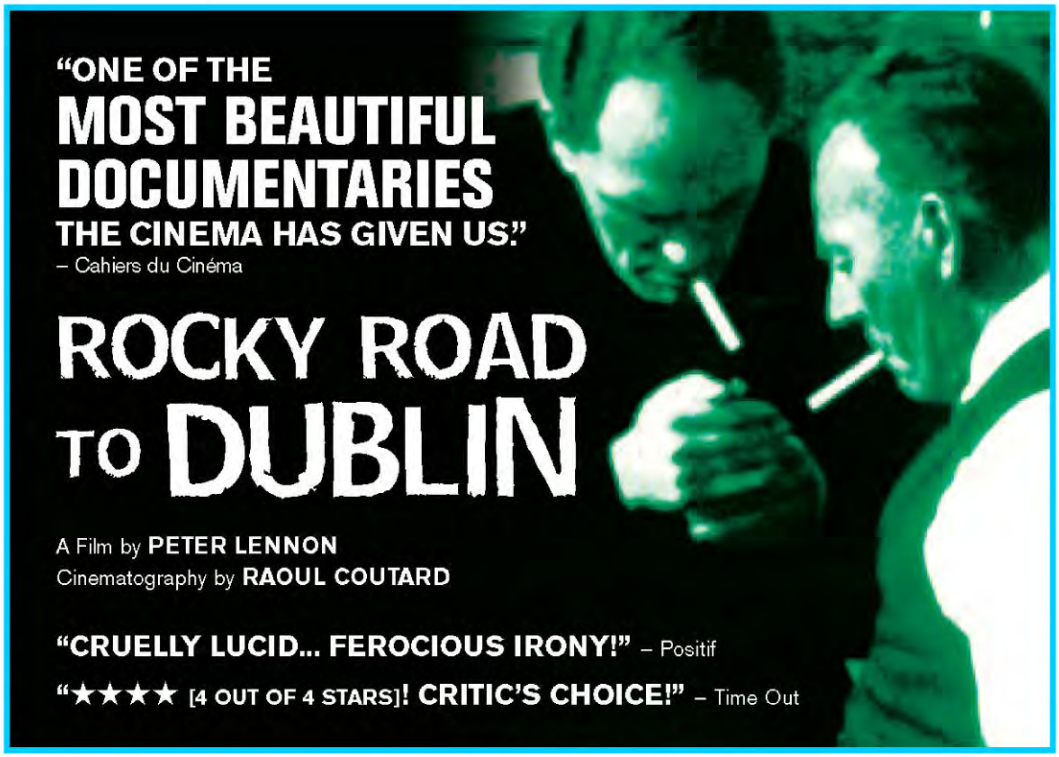


69 minutes / b&w / 1967

ICARUS FILMS
32 Court Street, 21st floor / Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 488-8900 / f. (718) 488-8642
mail@IcarusFilms.com / www.IcarusFilms.com

Synopsis

ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN is a provocative and revealing portrait of Ireland in the Sixties, a society characterized by a stultifying educational system, a morally repressive and politically reactionary clergy, a myopic cultural nationalism, and a government which seemingly knew no boundary between church and state. Now available in a newly-restored version prepared by The Irish Film Institute, this controversial film can at last be reassessed after a nearly forty-year period of neglect.

Encouraged by the controversy he had stirred with a series of newspaper articles and inspired by French 'New Wave' filmmakers of the era, Dublin-born Peter Lennon, who had lived and worked in Paris as a journalist for a decade, decided to revisit his native country in 1967 to make a film assessing the state of the nation.

Amidst scenes of everyday Irish life—on the streets, in the classroom, at pubs, sporting events, dance halls, and a lively discussion amongst Trinity College students—ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN blends interviews with writers Sean O'Faolain and Conor Cruise O'Brien, a spokesman for the Gaelic Athletic Association, theater producer Jim Fitzgerald, a member of the censorship board, an editor of *The Irish Times,* film director John Huston, and a young Catholic priest, Father Michael Cleary.

Featuring the inspired photography of legendary French cinematographer Raoul Coutard, and an incisive, literate voice-over commentary by Lennon, ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN captures an Ireland on the cusp of enormous social changes but still mired in a regressive, semi-theocratic mentality that would later erupt in repeated church scandals. In a striking example of the film's unwitting prescience, one of its most colorful figures—Father Cleary, "Ireland's singing priest"—was later revealed to have fathered two children with his 17-year-old housekeeper.

Although the stereotypical image of Ireland as a cultural backwater seems to bear little relation to the country's reputation today, a culturally vibrant and economically vigorous "Celtic Tiger," it is in such moments that ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN, as a historical film, illustrates not only how far Ireland has come but also how little it has changed.

A doleful member of the patriotic GAA faces expulsion if he watches cricket or rugby

A hurling match
Filmed by Raoul Coutard

Father Cleary sings the Chatanooga Shoeshine to women in a Dublin TB hospital

John Huston on location in Ireland for *Sinful Davey*

Father Cleary and a graveyard worker sharing a cigarette light

Review Excerpts

"Blisteringly critical, an affectionate and fair-minded portrait, beautifully photographed… by Coutard and with a lean, eloquent commentary by Lennon and songs by the Dubliners."

- **Philip French, The Observer**

"★★★★ (Four stars!) [T]his 1968 documentary by the Irish writer and former Guardian journalist Peter Lennon glows with idealism: a brilliant, affectionate, exasperated portrait of his native land, in thrall to reactionary politics and a repressive church decades after throwing off the English yoke. Almost 30 years on… [it] still has a blazing raw energy, coupled with shrewd insight. It could have been the seed for an Irish new wave in the cinema, but Lennon's countrymen cold-shouldered his movie. A tragically missed opportunity."

- **Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian**

"★★★★ (Four stars!) Critics' Choice! This intimate documentary portrait of Ireland in 1967… [with its] breezy camerawork, as informed by Lennon's critical affection for his homeland… provides the film's real pleasure, as we duck in and out of pubs, universities, sports fields, playgrounds and churches of Ireland."

- **Time Out, UK**

"A sharp and mercilessly effective documentary that provides a fascinating depiction of a not too distant, but very alien, Irish past."

- **Channel4 International**

"Peter Lennon's film (magnificent photography by Raoul Coutard) is one of the three or four most beautiful documentaries the cinema has given us."

- **Cahiers du CINEMA, June/July 1968**

"Peter Lennon traces for us a cruelly lucid portrait of Ireland: the charm of Ireland tormented by bigotry, Puritanism… the stuffed stupidity of certain officials… the hilarious ardour of the swinging priest, the brain washing of school kids are captured with a ferocious irony."

- **Positif, Summer 1968**

"The film earned critics' award among exhibits at the short-lived Cannes Festival this year, perhaps in that crowded category of film for the blind."

- **The Irish Press, 1968**

"Rocky Road to Dublin indeed! The film is anticlerical, antigovernment, anti-G.A.A. (patriotic sports association), anti-censor, anti-Abbey Theatre – anti EVERYTHING."

- **Evening Herald (Dublin), 1968**

"If our film managers have any gumption at all they will be queuing up to book it."

- **The Irish Times, 1968**

"Politically intelligent and formally innovative... not just historical, it is a contemporary film."

- **Fortnight (Belfast)**

"A documentary like no other... tender and sarcastic. Astonishing!" - **Paris Match**

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 2006

CRITICS

FILM REVIEW

Irish Independence in the 60's, With Affection and Sarcasm

By NATHAN LEE

"What do you do with your revolution once you've got it?" is the driving question in "Rocky Road to Dublin," an essay on Irish independence, or what passes for it, by the filmmaker Peter Lennon. The movie opens today at Anthology Film Archives following its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival — in 1968.

Long forgotten and recently restored, "Rocky Road" was the last film publicly screened at that fractious event before it was shut down by filmmakers in solidarity with the student and labor protests then raging in Paris. (Scenes from the festival are featured in a "making of" companion piece on the current program.)

Inspired by the modernism of the French New Wave and close in tone to the wry essay-films of Chris Marker, the documentary deploys a terse, sarcastic commentary over its montage of daily life and interviews.

"Too often," runs a characteristically dry observation, "the solution for social problems was to go and have a few drinks." Mr. Lennon finds "the close involvement of Irish politicians with the clergy is not so much a villainous conspiracy as a bad habit." Other topics include censorship, bad education, the mating rituals of bourgeois teenagers and the banning of "English" games like soccer and cricket.

With much of this roughness since paved over, Mr. Lennon's tough-love valentine to the motherland retains interest for its historical perspective, sardonic tone, lively structure and finely etched black-and-white cinematography by the legendary Raoul Coutard.

Rocky Road to Dublin

Opens today in Manhattan.

Directed and narrated by Peter Lennon; director of photography, Raoul Coutard; edited by Lila Biro, Philippe Delesalle and Guy Delooz; music by the Dubliners with Luke Kelly; produced by Victor Herbert; restoration produced by Se Merry Doyle at Loopline Film; released by First Run/Icarus Films. Playing with Paul Duane's 27-minute documentary, "The Making of the Rocky Road to Dublin" at the Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Avenue, at Second Street, East Village. Running time: 69 minutes. These films are not rated.

NEW YORK
AUGUST 21, 2006

NEW THIS WEEK

MOVIES

EDITED BY SARA CARDACE

ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN

Made in 1968 by Irish journalist Peter Lennon (and shot by New Wave legend Raoul Coutard), this beautiful, energetic, and uncompromising documentary's portrait of an Ireland ossified in religious tradition and reactionary politics was so incendiary that it was banned from release at the time. Though hard on the culture, Lennon's film is also full of love and wistful idealism; see it now in its full restored glory. (1 hr. 10 mins.; R) *Opens 8/17.*

ABOUT THESE LISTINGS Where indicated, these synopses are condensed from reviews by Ken Tucker and David Edelstein; the remainder are by Logan Hill, Bilge Ebiri, and *New York*'s editors. Stars (★) denote recommended releases, ranging from best-of-the-year picks to worthy curios to flawed movies with one outstanding element.

Typography by Robynne Raye/Modern Dog Design Co.

Rocky Road to Dublin

Cast: Sean O'Faoláin, Conor Cruise O'Brien, John Huston, Douglas Gageby, Jim Fitzgerald, Father Michael Cleary, Liam O'Briain and Phyllis Hamilton
Directed by: Peter Lennon
Distributor: First Run/Icacus Films
Runtime: 69 min
Rating: NR
Year: 1968

Given *Rocky Road to Dublin*'s allegiance to the aesthetic of the French New Wave, it was fitting that Peter Lennon's famous documentary was the last film to screen at Cannes in 1968 before the festival was halted in solidarity with the events of May '68. Since then, the film, whose title derives from a 19th-century Irish song about a man who travels to England from Tuam, has remained virtually unseen, banned for many years in Ireland. First Run/Icarus Films resurrects the film for a limited run at the Anthology Film Archives, allowing audiences a significant, unparalleled glimpse of life in Ireland in the '60s. The sardonic eloquence of the film may be a kindred spirit of the French New Wave but it also shares roots with the electric humanism of Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon's films, which similarly evinced the capacity of art to document life. But whereas Mitchell and Kenyon illuminated the spirit of England's middle class during the turn of the 20th century, a more pessimistic Lennon focuses entirely on the social stasis of Ireland's people, who were forcibly being gripped by "masculine pejoratives" and hypocrisies of their church and government, like the censorship boards that outlawed the playing of foreign games. The film blends interviews with writers, artists (including director John Huston), priests, and everyday people with footage of landscape, sporting events, people dancing and singing the night away in pubs, and children chatting away in classrooms, arguing lucidly and surreptitiously for the extinction of a country's outmoded sate of affairs.

Ed Gonzalez

Time Out New York
AUGUST 17–23, 2006 ISSUE 568 $2.99
TIMEOUTNEWYORK.COM

Rocky Road to Dublin

★★★★½

Dir. Peter Lennon. 1967. N/R. 67mins. Documentary.

FATHER SINGS BEST
A priest croons to a woman in a Dublin TB hospital.

A rare and invaluable document of Ireland on the verge of modernity, Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* created a scandal at home upon its initial appearance in the late '60s. Almost four decades on, it remains a blisteringly cogent yet subtly affectionate critique of a society that, nearly a half century after gaining independence from Britain, remained very much under the thumb of a socially conservative clergy. Beautifully shot in somber black and white by legendary cinematographer Raoul Coutard, *Rocky Road* systematically attacks every major institution in Irish life, from the church-run schools to the censors (a list of banned writers contains a damning number of Nobel laureates) and the pubs. It closed after only a few weeks in a single Dublin theater, but Lennon's central theme, spelled out early in the film as "what to do with your revolution once you've got it," resonated with audiences abroad.

On the same bill is Paul Duane's 26-minute "The Making of *Rocky Road to Dublin*," which details the doc's enthusiastic reception in France, where it became the last movie to play at the infamous 1968 Cannes Film Festival before it was shut down in solidarity with ongoing worker and student revolts. Made in 2004, the short includes vintage footage of Lennon arguing with Jean-Luc Godard at the Cannes screening, as well as recent interviews with Lennon and Coutard. (Opens Thu; Anthology.)
—Joshua Land

95 FILMS REVIEWED

Sight&Sound

JANUARY 2006

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

bfi British Film Institute

Additional Camera
Denson Baker
2nd Unit Directors of Photography
John Ogden
Leilani Hannah
Pick-up Director of Photography
Paul Goldman
Water Unit Cameraman
Roger Buckingham
Camera Operator
Darrin Keough
Gaffer
Rick McMullen
Visual Effects
Fuel International
Special Effects
Image FX
Editorial Consultant
Nicholas Beauman
Art Director
Michael Iacono
Set Decorator
Tracy Dunn
Props Master
Jan Edwards
Construction Supervisor
Chris Budrys
Costume Designer
Emily Seresin
Key Costume Supervisor
Cappi Ireland
Costume Supervisor
Nina Edwards
Make-up Supervisor
Deborah Lanser
Make-up Artist
Simone Wajon
Prosthetics
Wendy Sainsbury
Hair Supervisor
Wendy De Waal
Hairstylists
Jason Gardner
Adele Durno
Wigs
Kylie Clarke
Title Design
Michael Garrett
Titles/Digital Opticals
DeLuxe (London)
Frank Sinatra Vocals Sung by
Tom Burlinson
Music Orchestrated/ Arranged by
Rupert Gregson-Williams
Lorne Blafe
Soundtrack
"One for My Baby (and One More for the Road)", "Night and Day", "That's Life", "I've Got You under My Skin", "You Make Me Feel So Young", "All the Way" – Tom Burlinson; "Momma" – Billy Thorne & The Aztecs; "Golden Miles" – Healing Force; "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" – Bachman Turner Overdrive; "When I Fall in Love" – Chet Baker; "Mannish Boy" – Muddy Waters; "In and Out" – Brian Auger & The Trinity; "Tutti Frutti" – Elvis Presley; "Boogie Part 1" – Carson; "Albatross (60s Radio Edit)" – Chris Coco; "Movin' " – Brass Construction; "Papa Loves Mambo" – Perry Como and His Orchestra; "The Riddle" – Sid Rumpo; "Silvery Moon" – Sherbet
Sound Recordist
Guntis Sics
Re-recording Mixer
Howard Bargroff
Supervising Dialogue Editor
Stewart Henderson
Stunt Co-ordinator
Richard Boue

CAST

Dennis Hopper
Frank Sinatra
Melanie Griffith
Barbara Marx
Portia de Rossi
Hilary Hunter
Joel Edgerton
Rod Blue
Rose Byrne
Audrey Rose Appleby
David Hemmings
Mickey Rudin
David Field
Bob Hawke
Victoria Thaine
Penny
Stephen O'Rourke
Jilly Rizzo
Nicholas Hope
Phil
Tony Barry
Ralph Blue
George Vidalis
Vinny
Peter Demlakian
Ruby
Paul McDermott
band manager
Richard Williams
Billy Thorpe
Paul Nicholson
Richard Warne
Brett Creswell
Jon Holliday
The Aztecs
Simon Bull
Mr Ed
Vincent Ball
Rex Hooper
Stephen Holt
Sean Lynch
Palm men
Jennifer Hagan
Doris
Simeon John
Sammy Davis Jr
Alex Babic
Hal
James Garcia
Jim
Lena Cruz
Margarita
Marcia Hines
manicurist
Hamish McDonald
art dealer
Pam Morrissey
Aunt Joyce
Peter Callan
mechanic
Keith Robinson
Mr Fiddler
Nathanuel Links
photographer
Mark McCann
Andrew Blaxland
reporters
Stephen Curry
Ferret
Gary Eck
Shorty
George Brodbeck
band conductor
Nicholas Papademetriou
Luigi
Tony 'Danger Mouse' Young
union man
Tony Harvey
Jim North
Abe Forsythe
bellboy
Richard Thorpe
barman
Max Fairchild
Kerry Packer
Michelle Collins
Mrs Appleby
Andrew Johnston
Goran
Jemma Byrne
Penny's baby

Dolby Digital
Colour by
DeLuxe London

Distributor
ContentFilm

8,598 ft +12 frames

Rocky Road to Dublin

Ireland 1968
Director: Peter Lennon
Certificate: not submitted

The idea that the Irish journalist and Parisian correspondent Peter Lennon's political documentary *Rocky Road to Dublin* was a totemic movie among France's militant students and workers in May 1968 may come as a surprise to some. The claim, made in the publicity material for the movie's rerelease and in Paul Duane's recent short documentary *The Making of Rocky Road to Dublin*, is undeniably true: the film was screened both to agitating students at the Sorbonne and to striking trade unionists at the Renault factory in Billancourt. And yet, our contemporary expectations, post-Michael Moore, of populist and aggressively polemical movie documentaries have become so desensitised to subtlety that Lennon's film seems almost too coolly distant, observational and even chivalrous to have any revolutionary cachet.

Lennon's critical technique, a contrapuntal editing style that borders on Eisensteinian montage, intercuts footage of street traders stacking vegetables with the middle-class glamour of the Royal Dublin Society's annual horse show, and follows privileged chin-stroking discussions among students of Trinity College Dublin with stark scenes of working-class schoolchildren blankly reciting their catechism. It's a provocative style that exposes social inequalities, and it certainly inflamed the fervours of French fans and Irish detractors at the time. But today such juxtapositions are common visual currency in even the most mundane television news reports.

Similarly, Lennon's central narrative conceit for the movie, the portrayal of "Ireland [condemning] itself out of its own mouth", has lost much of its potency. Interviewees like the censorship board's professor Liam O'Briain, are unfailingly polite and disarmingly articulate, and though they espouse naive reactionary viewpoints they are never completely humiliated *Fahrenheit 9/11*-style.

Dirty old town: John Huston

Ironically, as the explicitly touted political message of *Rocky Road* has been leavened over time, the movie's strong visual language has acquired a remarkable urgency of its own. Photographed by the legendary French cinematographer Raoul Coutard during a two-week break between Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black* and Godard's *Weekend*, the film is defined by the Frenchman's typically roaming camerawork and unexpectedly intimate portraits. Repeatedly, Coutard, often in extreme close-up, captures the open, inexperienced faces of excited Dublin youths at bar-room sing-songs or tennis-club dances; the tone of these portraits, as confirmed by Lennon in Duane's documentary, is deliberately affectionate. No less intentional is the menace (only accentuated by the passing of time and the exposure of institutionalised clerical abuse) conveyed by Coutard's shots of omnipresent black clad priests.

Hindsight has also added a dizzying piquancy to the footage of *Rocky Road*'s most notorious interview subject, father Michael Cleary. The priest became a national icon in his own country for his media-friendly and youth-orientated persona (the late comedian Dermot Morgan even created a satirical version of Cleary called 'Father Trendy'). Here, he sings to bedridden women, he discusses the importance of sex within marriage and he espouses the vows of celibacy. He was later famously exposed for having fathered a child with his long-term lover Phyllis Hamilton – the couple were together even as Cleary was interviewed for this film. Hence, a brief shot, stolen by Coutard at the film's closing wedding party, of Cleary staring quietly at a line of dancing couples, has an undeniable satirical energy to it – and an almost unbearable poignancy. It's a tragic emblem of conflicted, servile, yet hypocritical modern Ireland on screen. And it's typical of a film in which the narrow immediacy of documentary and the wider terrain of art interpenetrate with such unexpected ease. **Kevin Maher**

■ **SYNOPSIS** A documentary about Dublin in the late 1960s. A brief history of Irish political independence is illustrated by an archival photomontage, after which the short story writer Sean O'Faolain bemoans the betrayal of his country's republican ideals by the clergy-controlled state. Footage of the crumbling inner city of the Irish capital is contrasted with middle-class civility at the Dublin horse show. Priests are everywhere. The journalist Conor Cruise O'Brien ponders Ireland's potential influence at the United Nations. The film-maker John Huston outlines the need for an indigenous Irish film industry. Students at Trinity College Dublin thoughtfully debate the bias of the press, while children at a Christian Brothers' school recite the temptations to chastity and the effects of original sin. Theatre producer Jim Fitzgerald criticises the petty-bourgeois stance of the country's national theatre, while film censor professor Liam O'Briain claims that the youth of Ireland are at the "gates of hell". Young priest Michael Cleary entertains a women's hospital ward with an impromptu rendition of 'Chattanooga Shoeshine Boy'. He then attends a wedding reception, after which he discusses the Church's attitude to sex and the need for celibacy in the priesthood. Professor O'Briain reluctantly suggests that the country is at the beginning of a wonderful new age.

CREDITS

A film by
Peter Lennon
Commentary
Peter Lennon
Photography
Raoul Coutard
Georges Liron
Editing
Lila Biro
Philippe Delesalle
Guy Delooz
Background Music
The Dubliners
with Luke Kelly

©none
Production Company
A Victor Herbert production
A film by Peter Lennon
Production Manager
Anthony Lennon
Sound
Tom Curran

WITH

Sean O'Faolain
Conor Cruise O'Brien
John Huston
Douglas Gageby
Jim Fitzgerald
Fr Michael Cleary
Liam O'Briain
Phyllis Hamilton

Black and White

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Video certificate: 12
Running time: 99m 8s

DUB.

Guardian Unlimited
film Reviews

Rocky Road To Dublin

★★★★☆No cert

Peter Bradshaw
Friday September 16, 2005

The Guardian

Almost 30 years on, this 1968 documentary by the Irish writer and former Guardian journalist Peter Lennon glows with idealism: a brilliant, affectionate, exasperated portrait of his native land, in thrall to reactionary politics and a repressive church decades after throwing off the English yoke. Lennon enlisted Godard's cameraman Raoul Coutârd for his project, and the result of their freewheeling shoot, interviewing priests, politicians, schoolchildren and artists, still has a blazing raw energy, coupled with shrewd insight.

It could have been the seed for an Irish new wave in the cinema, but Lennon's countrymen cold-shouldered his movie. A tragically missed opportunity.

INTERNATIONAL Herald Tribune FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 1968

PRIEST AND GRAVEDIGGER—Scene from Peter Lennon's film "Rocky Road to Dublin." Gravedigger: "It's only another job when you're doing it for strangers." Priest: "You can't die with everybody." Gravedigger: "No."

Mary Blume

Irish Revolt Stirs Sorbonne Circuit

PARIS—A brand new system of film distribution has emerged in France. It might be called the Sorbonne circuit, although it includes other strike-bound campuses and factories where films are being shown free of charge. A Paris post office, for example, recently showed "The Grapes of Wrath" to the wives of striking workers so they would back their husbands' struggles.

But if most of the films on the Sorbonne circuit are oldies, they have been joined by a first-run color feature, "Rocky Road to Dublin," written and directed by Peter Lennon, a Paris-based Irish journalist who writes for "The Guardian."

"I never saw a revolutionary film that has been caught in so many revolutions," Mr. Lennon said. The film, his first, was chosen for the prestigious critics' week at the Cannes Festival. No sooner had it been shown than the festival was broken up by the revolutionaries.

Nice University students promptly invited Mr. Lennon to show the film to them. Then, as the sit-ins spread, it hit the Sorbonne circuit. It played at the Sorbonne last night, will have a re-run at the Faculté de Droit on Saturday, is booked for Nanterre, and played to the Renault workers last week, with a freshly laundered sheet as a screen.

Good Company

"At Renault it was fallowed by a discussion and 'Potemkin,'" Mr. Lennon said. "Good company for the first Irish feature film."

"Rocky Road to Dublin" might be considered a guide to what shouldn't happen after a revolution. Mr. Lennon says it is "a personal description of a community which survived 700 years of English occupation and then nearly sank under the weight of its own heroes and clergy."

The film includes interviews with Sean O'Faolain on the failure of the revolution, with Conor Cruise O'Brien on Ireland's failure to play a significant world role, with priests, students, John Huston, and with the secretary of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which has patriotically banned such "foreign" games as soccer, rugby, cricket and hockey.

Mr. Lennon grew up in Dublin in the 1930s. "We were told we were the sons and daughters of revolutionary heroes and that our role now was to be one of gratitude. Well-behaved gratitude," he says. "What was expected from us was a new kind of heroism: heroic obedience."

Mental Dictatorship

Joyce's description of Ireland as the sow that eats her farrow is as good as any, Mr. Lennon says. He is especially disturbed by what he calls a peculiarly Irish form of mental dictatorship. "The strongest weapon they have is not the law," Mr. Lennon says, "but the way you're conditioned in childhood to be ashamed."

To his surprise, Mr. Lennon had very little trouble making his film in Dublin. "There is a myth in Ireland on the son coming back and being repentant," he says. "So if you come back they assume you must be repentant."

"Rocky Road to Dublin," produced by Victor Herbert, was photographed by Raoul Coutard, master of the hand-held camera and a great favorite of Godard and Truffaut. Mr. Lennon, who hopes next to film a short story of his that appeared in "The New Yorker," says his film is a systematic attempt to break down Ireland's strict film censorship.

He smuggled "Rocky Road to Dublin" into Ireland in May, held a press showing, then got the film out before it could be seized.

"The idea was to make a scandal and get out," Mr. Lennon says, "and to create a force as strong as censorship—curiosity. I think they'll have to let it be shown now."

Press Excited

Press reactions in Ireland were excited and varied. "Acute, humane, unsentimental," said the "Irish Times." "Anti-EVERYTHING!" said the "Evening Herald."

One of the curious features of Ireland is that this strangely sympathetic backwater of a country attracts so many people of such different backgrounds. "That was considerably helped by 'The Quiet Man' making Ireland a funny place," Mr. Lennon says.

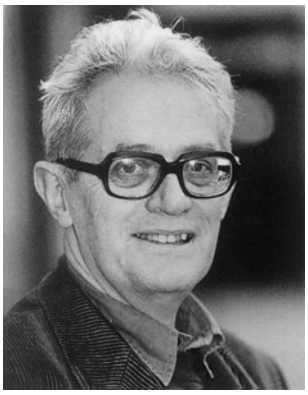
"The Irish have emerged as funny, drinking like hell, and never having hangovers—which most certainly isn't true.

"There are other aspects. The Irish are amusing, but their humor has desperation. So does their drinking. There is a whole area of distress and panic that doesn't show."

The Sorbonne circuit likes the film, and not only because of its references to censorship and university freedom.

"It's a very funny film," Mr. Lennon said. "Not because I'm a funny director, but because the people are funny—in a painful way."

Filmmaker Biography



Peter Lennon

Peter Lennon was born in Dublin and reported from Paris for the *Guardian* throughout the sixties. During the seventies he worked in London for the *Sunday Times* and the *Listener* before rejoining the *Guardian* in 1989. He has had short stories published in the *New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly*. He began his journalistic career on *The Irish Times*, Dublin.

Lennon is also the author of *Foreign Correspondent: Paris in the 60s* (Picador, 1994) which deals with the end of the Algerian War and the May '68 student revolt, as well as encounters with French old and "new wave" film directors – Renoir, Godard, Truffaut, Charbol, etc.

His film *Rocky Road to Dublin,* which he wrote and directed, was his only film, though he plans to return to documentary filmmaking.

THE GUARDIAN
Manchester Friday January 10, 1964

Climate of repression

BY PETER LENNON
first of four articles on censorship in Ireland

IN these four articles I will try to explore with some thoroughness an extremely delicate subject: the extent to which Church and State prohibitions exist in Ireland, their true nature, and the effect of what I believe to be widespread and deep-rooted systems of suppression of information have had on a generation born 15 or 20 years after the revolution.

The opinions expressed will necessarily be subjective: in other words, they are open to discussion. And since these articles will contain nothing which is either blasphemous or "indecent or obscene" I will waive copyright restrictions for Ireland and extend a friendly invitation to any Irish publication to reprint this series, free of charge—but uncensored.

It is my fear that the majority of people in Ireland have now been successfully persuaded that anyone who protests in these matters is an eccentric. If you protest from the inside you are a crank; if you do so from the outside you are a traitor. As much as any Irishman I am irritated by the constant stream of often facile and smug criticism which reaches us through British papers. I would rather not help to reinforce the popular feeling in Britain that we are a foolish and bigoted community. But I am left with no choice.

One of the first things which strike you when you come to Ireland is the enormous discrepancy between the reality of the Irishman in private and his public image. Far from being the niggardly, emasculated, diluted, naive creature, the sanctimonious figure of hypocrisy which is his image on public platforms and in local print, he is generally a warm, crafty, good-humoured, mocking character. He is a little bawdy, casually obscene in his talk (that is, he offends, not too seriously, against the strict laws of reticence), and he is absent-mindedly blasphemous. But his great virtue is his easy talent for human relationships in which prejudice can easily dissolve. This is to be found not only in one's friends but casually in the postman, the shopkeeper, the man behind the bar, and indeed—which accounts for his influence in Irish life—in the parish priest.

WITH this goes another striking discrepancy—between what is said in private and what is allowed to appear in print. One of the Irishman's favourite indoor sports is mockery of extremist leaders of the clergy; another is hilarious retelling of the latest absurdities perpetrated by his censors. There is no reason why, in a healthy society, a too authoritarian clergyman should not, occasionally, be gently mocked in print or why the extent of the lack of popular support for our self-styled moral guardians, the censors, should not be publicly declared. Such public criticism, considered quite normal in England or France, no longer exists in Ireland.

The motivation behind lay censorship and suppression in Ireland has little to do with a genuine concern with morality and even less to do with spirituality. I am certain that not 10 per cent of those most vigilant in protecting our morals could define the word "obscenity" or give more than a fumbling account of what is really undesirable about pornography. In fact the enthusiastic laymen who bring to the subject their marvellous inaccuracy frequently embarrass the more intelligent clergy. They, more often than the clergy, are the instruments which help to perpetuate a policy formed by our revolutionaries.

Historically one can see that revolutionary leaders are almost always obliged to bring in censorship while they are in the process of fabricating the new public image; and they frequently resort to a puritanical wave to try to give a new, scrubbed, pure look which will lead people to believe that whatever they were up to was for the betterment of the country and was in any case extremely respectable.

In Ireland the onslaught of puritanism was also inevitable because the Church—having a fine record in our centuries-old struggle for freedom (awkward moments like the Parnell affair apart) and such an emotional grip on the people—could not be left out. And it happened to be a Church impregnated with Jansenism. Our image of respectability was, in spite of ourselves, also based on the traditional figures of the older, anglicised generation: Irish *Victorians*. But if we are to preserve our sense of proportion—or at least our sense of humour—in the present predicament, it is as well to bear in mind that few of the people who built up the Irish Republic were religious men. The majority of the men in Ireland are not religious to any practical extent.

THE institution of a puritanical censorship (which also takes care of the image of the national hero) was regrettable, but it need not have been a catastrophe. The disaster was that those who seized power more than forty years ago have never let go (there is no essential difference between the two main parties) and the real danger is the thoroughness of their domination. The generation now emerging may have even less chance of developing a sane and civilised attitude to the realities of life than we had.

Many young intelligent Irish people have told me that censorship does not really impinge on their life to any serious extent: to show how much it does, I will tomorrow take the case of a young student growing up, trying to educate himself and beginning to work in this society which is dominated by a handful of authoritarian, dogmatic figures who do not feel that they have to answer to anyone for their activities.

THE GUARDIAN
Manchester
Thursday January 9 1964

Students in blinkers

by Peter Lennon

LONG before he begins to be directly affected by the work of the Censorship of Publications Board and the Government Film Censor, the Irish youth is a victim of a general climate of suppression of information and pressures which make it difficult for him to become an independent-minded individual. To illustrate this we will take a young Irish student quickly through school and university.

Unless his parents can afford to pay the fees the boy cannot go on to secondary school. The absence of free secondary education in Ireland ensures the foundation of the first layer of intellectually docile people on the society.

Presuming he does go on to secondary school he will continue to be inculcated with the kind of simple-minded religious instruction and biased history of his country which will seriously impair his ability for objective thinking. Dr Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, of Trinity College, said last October: "The Irish system of education must be described as the most successful in the world. This is because it has succeeded in its aim, which is to prevent children from thinking for themselves."

Students ending their studies without the benefit of higher education are potentially citizens willing to believe that intellectuals and expatriates who criticise the management of the country do so for dishonourable or insulting reasons. They help to make the work of the censors easy.

But our student happens to belong to the small number of families who can afford to pay university fees (increased by 25 per cent last year) and to support a potential wage-earner in "digs" for a number of years. So he goes on to what he fondly believes to be a seat of culture and learning—University College, Dublin, the largest university in the country. He finds it dominated by one of the group of despotic figures who throw their shadow over Irish life: Dr Michael Tierney, president of the College.

Our student will learn that the president is capable of openly disregarding the college charter and making his own appointments to the university. When it was revealed three years ago that this had been going on for 10 years, Dr Noel Browne, a member of the Dail, charged that these temporary appointments of "college lecturers" and "assistant lecturers," made without notice or advertisement, were an attempt by Dr Tierney to dominate the university and that in order to suppress any opposition he had instituted a reign of fear arising out of the insecurity of these temporary appointments.

When strongly censured by the Convocation of the National University of Ireland, Dr Tierney's retort was to refuse the convocation the right to meet in the university where it had been meeting for 50 years. A Government inquiry resulted not as one might have expected in a thorough reformation but in a quick shuffle to legalise temporarily the existing state of affairs. But then Dr Tierney has powerful supporters: the Archbishop of Dublin, to mention one.

THIS iron rule extends to all aspects of student life. The president, seriously discontented with some of the foreign films shown by a young student film society and resenting in particular "Hiroshima, Mon Amour," withdrew support two years ago and the film society collapsed. At this point our hero could possibly transfer to Trinity, which has a fully supported film society; but knowing the Archbishop's feelings on this matter, his parents would be extremely hesitant about supporting such a move.

Instead of finding himself in an atmosphere where young people make brave, even if occasionally inept or misguided, attempts to express themselves, everywhere our student turns he finds himself under constraint. Speakers invited to debates of the Literary and Historical Society have to be approved by the college authorities, and this largely eliminates the possibility of controversial debates.

Student councils are discouraged from airing their views on the decrepit educational system they have been subjected to, and those who do write letters to the newspapers or manage to place an occasional article mildly criticising university life always use a pseudonym out of an apparently well-founded fear of reprisals. About three months ago a student dance hall which also housed the theatre was closed down without any notice being given to the student body. In October university officials seized the student newspaper "Awake" simply because it advertised dances organised by students outside the college precincts.

No independent action of whatever nature is encouraged at UCD. The official policy seems to be to use the university as a factory for turning out unintellectual professional men who will have a limited use in the community. In this they are succeeding to an alarming extent: the majority of the 6,000 students are indifferent to culture.

When he takes a look at the outside world it does not surprise our hero that the managing director of the Abbey, Mr Ernest Blythe (a former Minister for Finance)—in spite of the fact that he is one of the few despots in Irish cultural life who does come in for severe public criticism—has seriously debased the Abbey's standards, mainly by refusing to accept criticism of his curious taste for third-rate theatre.

He is not even surprised to find that the organisers of our national games express themselves with autocratic fervour. Members of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which has an enormous following in the country, are forbidden under pain of suspension to not only abstain from playing "foreign games" but to even as much as watch a friend play a game of soccer. He might wonder what such a ban has to do with modern Irish life. The truth is it has nothing whatever to do with modern Irish life; it is a legacy of the fervent and hysterical attempts of our revolutionary fathers to force the people to take sides publicly against the foreign invader in all spheres of their activities.

How could he then be surprised that the Censorship of Publications Board bans an anti-militarist book like "Catch 22"? But he may, if he follows closely the activities of the board over a few months (which he is not likely to do), be innocently amazed at the speed with which these people—three out of five of whom also have other occupations—can read books.

Forty-eight books banned on September 22 last year; 31 more by September 26, and a further 14 by October 19. Could it be that the censors read only the "dirty passages" marked out for them by vigilant citizens? This is practically certain, since it was for this reason an Irish writer, the late Lynn Doyle, resigned from the board some years ago.

FILM censorship is even simpler: every year the censor, a civil servant, refuses certificates to a number of films (20 last year) which he knows would not be tolerated, even heavily mutilated. His superiors in the Department of Justice do not feel they should disclose the titles of the films. But outside this activity censoring has become such a widely-practised national sport that local cinema managers, operating out of heaven-knows-what motivation, now top the good work of the censor by refusing to allow children under 18 to see an already censored version of a film like "Term of Trial." A former film censor used to complain that he was caught "between the Devil and the Holy See," but in fact most of his trouble would come from enthusiastic local watchdogs, before whose activities Rome stands baffled.

Is there any intelligent opposition to this state of affairs? It will be found surprisingly among a section of the clergy.

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Manchester
Friday January 10, 1964

CENSORSHIP IN IRELAND: the third of four articles

Turbulent Priests by Peter Lennon

OUR young student growing up in Ireland in a climate of censorship and suppression in art, in politics and even in sport, would like to free himself to some extent. He does not really want to advocate free love; he certainly would not eulogise abortion; married, he would prefer to accept the Church's rulings on birth control.

What he finds most irksome is that the restrictions to which he is expected to conform seem to have little basis in a genuine moral philosophy. The film censor will cut a decorative semi-nude out of a film, but he will leave in a scene of violence in which a woman is beaten with clear sexual implications. Censorship will allow heavy doses of vulgarity and sadistry, but it will shy at an honest and discreet portrayal of childbirth.

The student will find that almost everybody will readily agree that our systems of censorship are largely idiotic, but he will notice that very few people can bring themselves to realise they are *abnormal*. People in Ireland feel vaguely that since some kind of censorship exists in all countries, the excessive interference with their efforts at social and cultural development exists to a somewhat similar extent everywhere. And since the vigorous opposition of the late forties has disappeared, even if they feel that something should be done, they don't know where to start.

An occasional Antonioni or Bergman film—a rare liberal article written by a priest, and though the films are censored and the ideas in the article, published in a quarterly, may take 20 years to percolate through the society, people in Ireland take these signs of hope for a future climate of liberality as a reality of the present. "Ireland has improved beyond all measure!" they will say with satisfaction—and remain inert.

But if there is no consistent support for the limited liberal elements which do exist, it is much more likely that they will not flourish but will be snuffed out. There is no longer any support: the old fighters like Sean O'Faolain and Peader O'Donnell have mostly fallen silent. Young intellectuals have resigned themselves to supplying their need for books or films as best they can; they form the majority of the one five-hundredth part of the population of Dublin who can see eight uncensored films a year at the film society.

THE situation would be utterly hopeless were it not for the existence of a tiny minority of educated people, who, because they are educated, know the value of cultural freedom, and because they are genuine Christians, cannot support such a climate of oppression. Since they happen to be priests, they also enjoy an invaluable immunity to many of the pressures. A limited number of the young clergy are showing great courage in attempting to bring Ireland to its senses; they seem to be the only consistently active intellectual force left in Ireland.

The ideas which a Maynooth Jesuit quarterly, "Studies," and a monthly magazine, "The Furrow," are trying to diffuse are—for crookedly puritanical Ireland—genuinely revolutionary. I will have to limit myself to the writings of Father Peter Connolly and Father John Kelly on the cinema.

As far back as January, 1960, Father Connolly, Professor of English at Maynooth Training College for priests, and a graduate of Oxford went to London to look over the British "X" films. He reported casually on "Dolls of Vice" and "Girl of Shame." He decided that while all the horrific elements were there—"drink, drugs, prostitution, and white slave traffic"—they were "embodied in the simplest stereotypes, organised with a quite naïve sentiment and a straight didactic morality." His conclusion was: "morally quite harmless." Father Connolly also displayed very positive attitudes to "unbeliever" Sartre's "Huis Clos," and he felt that the central stream of "X" films was "largely intelligent and responsible."

All these attitudes are in dramatic contrast to those behind film censorship in Ireland: but Father Connolly takes the cinema seriously and believes in its "ability to explore and renew the human vision," while the censors simply pander to the local vigilantes.

Father John Kelly, a Jesuit, created a mild sensation by going to England recently and reviewing "Viridiana" with enthusiasm. But what is more important is that he can take a film like "L'Avventura" and share his experience of this fine description of desolation and isolation in love without a trace of any "clerical" attitude. We feel that we can have complete confidence in his intellectual honesty.

It is vitally important that we have people writing like this because the trouble is we do get plenty of films; too many. Notably films dedicated to distorting our understanding of the reality of love relationships and of marriage. Ireland with its shamefully low marriage rate (with all its implications of widespread immaturity and poverty) is in desperate need of a sane attitude to sex. Not to make people more cultured; simply to help them to be less lonely.

One Saturday evening in October Father Kelly created a sensation at a debate in University College, Dublin, speaking to a motion "Irish Catholicism is hostile to genius." He attacked the editor of the "Irish Catholic," a layman whose opinions on the subject he publicly declared to be "appalling."

Father Kelly admitted that what we were up against was "terrifying"; that an organised Church was full of danger, particularly when a Church founded by Christ on charity became juridical. He said that the only solution was the development of public opinion in the laity which was a matter of great urgency and one which required great courage. Only one of the three Sunday newspapers reported this unprecedented outburst from a priest.

These priests need support from the intelligent laity, but it is almost impossible for a layman to find a platform to air his views. The Irish newspapers are never as obnoxious as the popular British press, but it is useless to expect them to give a lead in these matters; too many pressures, political, pseudo-religious, and commercial, can be brought to bear. At one time there was at least Myles nag Copaleen, who in his rôle of Court Jester in the "Irish Times," had licence to castigate the phoney moralists and the professional patriots. But he now writes only very occasionally.

A BEGINNING could be made with a literary magazine run on the lines of "The Bell," which flourished in the late forties, free of pressure groups since it got its support from intellectuals and American subscribers. What the newspapers could do is invite some of these priests to review controversial films and books so that people could gradually accustom themselves to more mature reactions to adult films, and to certain banned books. Students, too, could be given a corner in a newspaper.

But even the Jesuits, in spite of the fact that they are an "exempt" order, free of the direct control of the diocesan organisation, do come up against an obstacle when they wish to speak publicly about censorship—the Archbishop of Dublin.

Grey eminence by Peter Lennon

THE Most Reverend John Charles McQuaid, DD, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, reveals himself, curiously enough, in a row over a football match. In October, 1955, the Football Association of Ireland invited the Yugoslavian soccer team to play in Dublin. Their acceptance was a matter for great rejoicing; sheet music was flown over from Yugoslavia and the No. 1 Army Band began with innocent pleasure to practise the Yugoslavian national anthem.

Disaster! Dr McQuaid's Chancellor rang up the secretary of the Football Association and informed him that the Archbishop had "heard with regret" that the game was to be played. The Chancellor also confessed himself pained by the fact that the association "had not had the courtesy to obtain the views of the Archbishop on the proposed game."

The stricken secretary, chided by such an illustrious football fan, appealed to his committee. Was Yugoslavia, strictly speaking, behind the Iron Curtain? Perhaps the players were Roman Catholic? (Many of them were in fact.) But the signal had been given. The No. 1 Army Band withdrew in disorder; a radio commentator announced publicly that if the national network asked him to broadcast a commentary on the match (which he did not think likely) he would refuse. The Department of Justice regretted that it was too late to stop the visas.

And the guilds and the knights came streaming out. . . . The Guilds of Regnum Christi, the Knights of Columbanus and the League of the Kingship of Christ added a powerful chorus to the muddled uproar.

The match did in fact go on. It was too late to back down. But if the decision had been in the hands of the kind of people who run the Gaelic Athletic Association which, as we saw, forbids members to as much as look at a foreign game, never mind play with foreigners, Ireland would have perpetrated another farce of intolerance. This time courage and desperation gave us a shaky victory.

This incident is invaluable because it is one of the very few occasions in which the methods employed by the Archbishop were exposed publicly. One can see what a television official or a Dublin editor might have to face if he did not consider the Archbishop's feelings in handling a controversial issue and what he would certainly have to face if he openly defied the Archbishop. A quick vote among the members of his board, mostly Dublin business men, and he might well find himself out of a job.

We will suppose that the young student whose education we have been following gets a job in a newspaper office. He will realise that rumours he has heard about the pressures exerted by the Archbishop's House are only too true. The Archbishop himself rarely presents himself in these matters to the human gaze; his secretary handles the matter. But with discretion.

He will see to it that editors are in no danger of forgetting what might be "regrettable" to the Archbishop, and he will often telephone to provide the Archbishop's views on delicate matters and even suggest how they should be handled in print. The responses vary from those who hurry to obtain the Archbishop's views, and even outstrip him in zeal, to those who will occasionally handle a controversial subject (sex, religion, social welfare) with some courage but with extreme tact. The Archbishop, unfortunately, has very little to regret about what he sees in print in Ireland these days.

Our hero wonders what are the qualities which have made this man such a powerful influence in Ireland, and what are the factors which have kept him in power? Has he the support of the majority of the people? Or even of the majority of the clergy?

Dr McQuaid is a former headmaster. He is a classical scholar appointed Archbishop in 1940 without ever, as a commentator pointed out at the time, "having been exposed to the rough and tumble of parochial life." He is austere in his approach to human problems, and deliberately chooses to be aloof and inaccessible to the public. Rather than confront the people openly with his views on social problems he will more readily choose the method of successful authoritarians: pressure on the or'ans of communication. Because of this he cannot lay claim to a reputation for frankness.

It was he who was largely responsible for the collapse of Dr Noel Browne's proposed mother-and-child social welfare scheme some years ago. His record shows that he is generally on the side of the obscurantists, and his concern with keeping what he considers to be troublesome information from the people, or ideas which he might admit to being intrinsically valid and worthy but of a rather too subtle nature, reveals less a concern for the wellbeing of his flock than a most unchurchman-like contempt for their intelligence.

One of his most celebrated pastoral letters deals with death; in another he insists that the problem of suffering is best solved not by theoretical discussions but "by the loving acceptance of our pain." When we listen to his bland reports, read out at mass, on the number of hot meals served to young mothers in food centres (meals which he also seems to think relieves them of "anxiety") we feel that he would not raise too much objection to substituting the word "poverty" for "pain."

SOME of his flock regard him with awe; many more with a reluctant respect tinged with resentment. But he exasperates some of the young or intellectually mature members of the clergy who would like to see Ireland lifted out of its intellectual swamp.

One of the factors which contributes to his continued influence (apart from the fact that a priest does not retire) is the blind respect of the greater majority of the people for the cloth. It would never occur to them to ask, as they would in the case of a politician, if their Archbishop had, classical scholarship apart, any practical talents. And if so were they desirable ones? Does he show more ability as a leader than some of the other noted Irish churchmen? Is the work he is doing genuinely valuable? Or even Christian?

Working with Coutard
By Peter Lennon
July 2005

One day in 1967, in the second week of shooting ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN, as we stood shoulder to shoulder at an urnial, Coutard said to me, “Peter, did you ever think how much a camera weighs?” (he used a 16mm Éclair, mostly hand-held) Amazingly I had an instant retort, “Did you ever work out how much a head weighs?” It was the only reporach Coutard ever made about my shameless slave-driving. With the two shoots, one of six and another of ten days, we covered not only the sixteen or so segments we use but four others which I decided did not work.

We filmed a horse race at Leopardstown and another singing pub on the Kildare Road – an unsuitable and untypical barn for the petit bourgeoisie, in my eye. I wanted some student night life and the Trinity students sut up a party for us. Be we arrived to find it in a castle with friends from Oxbridge flown in. The atmosphere and clientele were all wrong and I told Coutard not to bother to shoot – but he did it for his own amusement. I never used any of it. We also got the future President of Ireland, Paddy Hillary, then a minister. A very low-key man, he gave a rambling speech to a bunch of civil servants. But there was a leak in the camera which beheaded this policitian with a shaft of light. As an illustration of the absence of mental capacity, I was tempted to use it. But I did not like to labour points too curdely. Equally I did not use the remard of one of the gravediggers as Fr. Cleary walks out of the graveyard. We have clearly on sound, “That man becomes more of an eejit every day.” I felt I did not need to stab in the back.

I had got Coutard, as we tell in THE MAKING OF ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN, simply by going to Tours where he was shooting a film by Jacques Perrin and pitching a fairly incoherent and certainly ungrammatical tale of Ireland’s tribulations back to 1916 and the need to record them on film. Which was nonsense since the past was not my target. I waffled on for a considerable time and then, panicked by his silence, I went back to the 1845-47 Famine. Finally I asked him outright, “Would you work with me?” “Oui,” he said – or rather a laconic, “Ouah.” And that was it. But to my consternation he said he would be free in five weeks and then not for six months. Never having shot a foot of film, I had to turn into a film director in five weeks.

The relationship was hugely aided by Coutard’s attitude toward his craft – he believed that it was not the cameraman’s place to help make the film. The director had to know what he wanted and then, like the craftsmen of old, he would deliver work of a high quality. Also, he had no professional vanity – often a greater problem in film making than actors’ vanity since the DoP can legitimately hold up shooting for hours, often simply to justify their handsome fees. Even more important, having started life as a stills photographer with the French paratroopers in Indo China, Coutard never accepted there were any conditions under which he could not shoot. I doubt there was a Director of Photography in the world then who would have been willing to work in the conditions in which we shot the Singing Pub sequences.

I had booked the back room of the Widda Donohue’s in the quiet morning but, when we came back that evening, the tiny room was packed to the rafters. Any other Director of Photography would have demanded to have the room cleared – this is what our Irish electricians expected. Coutard simply told them to get up on chairs and ring the room with what he called, “pinces Americans” – little Christmas-tree-like bulbs. Then he stepped into the crowd and started shooting, elbow to face, chin to foreheads in the crowd. By this time the two electricians’ attitude toward him was close to idolatry.

Nobody took us very seriously since we did not come in like an army as was usual then. The full unit, including me, was eight – only six when we did not need lights. Coutard had a loyal gang – assistant Georges Liron, a kindly and rather tender man who had lost a leg on a naval job some years before; Jeannot, the joker focus puller; and Monique Herran, the continuity girl. We could

not afford all four but we got Monique – a feisty Basque with a droll dry humour who later became Coutard's wife – and Georges, and I realised that I had a kind of family behind me.

I still break into a sweat when I recall Coutard's story about why he never worked with François Truffaut after *The Bride Wore Black* (1967) – Coutard had tried to give up smoking and was in such a foul mood with everyone, including Truffaut, that Truffaut would never use him again. This happened between our first shoot and our second shoot in August. If he had chosen August for the deadly deprivation and had been in that kind of mood with me, I would certainly have translated it as contempt for my work – it could have sabotaged the whole operation. Fortunately he was back on the fags by August.

At that time, Irish electricians serving American and British projects were notooriously bloddy-minded. That they were so helpful and generaous with me was no doubt due largely to their delight in working with Coutard. But it was not entirely due to Coutard – professionals like to be involved from time to time in enterprises not driven by commercial imperatives and they like to co-operate generously (for a time, at least). Tom Curran – a senior sound man at Ardmore – was also willing to make sacrifices.

At times, the pressue of keeping an enterprise going, for which I had no previous experience, got to me. It was the graveyard scene and Fr. Cleary began his chat. Then I heard Coutard ask in a very pleasant voice, "Say, Peter, is this going to be a silent film?" I had forgotten to tell Tom Curran we needed him, as we did not when cruising around Dublin. He lived twelve miles out in Bray and needed notice to take time off from his job in Ardmore Studios. I frantically ran to a public phone box outside the graveyard (no mobiles in those days) and told Tom that he would have to come in. "I'm having a bath," he said indignantly, "and I have to get to work." "You'll just have to come," I wheedled. And he did. Abandonning his bath and Ardmore, he raced the tweleve miles from Bray and we got our Alas Poor Yorick scene. It was typical of Coutard's attitude of non-interference in matters which did not directly concern the cameraman that he waited until the last minute to point out the blunder (it was testing my mettle too, of course).

A couple of years later, on French television, a Paris critic asked John Huston, "Is there any French person you would have liked to work with?" "I would like to have worked with Raoul Coutard," Huston replied. "But you have worked with Raoul Coutard," the scholarly tv interviewer told the startled Huston, "In ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN." Huston had no idea that the toughie toting a 16mm camera was Coutard. I imagine most cameramen wouldn't have passed up the opportunity to introduce themselves to one of Hollywood's most famous directors. Coutard just squatted in the Wicklow forest, waiting for the sun to come out. He would not have thought a personal approach to Huston appropriate – his attitude would have been that he was working for me and it would not have been right to turn a short shoot to a professional advantage for himself. I think now that I really should have introduced them but I could not afford any distractions.

ON EDITING:

Fate was again on my side in giving me our editor, Lila Biro, of Franco-Indian origin. She had been an assistant editor with Godard. While this might begin to sound like an Oscar speech, our finances were so fragile, our time so restricted, that there had to be harmony and loyalty. One disruptive person would have fatally damaged the enterprise. (Although there was one I fired early – no need to say whom.) I needed a skilled editor but one who shared Coutard's view that the director was in charge. That was Lila's professional relationship – she cut and I wove. The other advantage was that both Coutard and Lila had a cool – if intrigued – atttude toward the material. I have no doubt that, with an Irish editor, there would have been some wearisome clashes.

The other crucial advantage was that I was not answerable to an Front Office. My producer, Victor Herbert, was a good friend whose support did not falter – even when it looked at times as if

the enterprise might sink. Wonderfully, these friendships survive to this day – including Lila's assistant Philipped Delesalle, a great film buff.

Editing is, of course, the glorious part of film making. I often railed against the chunks of totally avoidable technical mess. That Lila had to clean up, extending the editing time by weeks. Since we could not afford to pay for rushes – which had to be sent to London and back – we did not realise there was a leak in one of the cameras. Some segments were as much reconstructed as edited. That is why we linger too long on Fr. Cleary's legs singing the Chattanooga Shoeshine. I had to have enough useable images to allow him to complete the song. But all we had were legs. There was hardly two feet of spare film left when the sequence was complete.

Secretly, I would have loved to have continued weaving and creating for another three months. While our frindship has lasted to this day, I have never had the nerve to make an adequate apology to Coutard for the visual defects which were none of his making.

ON WHY THIS WAS THE ONLY FILM:

I never made another film. *The Guardian*, under economic pressure, was laying off staff (as usual at the most vulnerable end). But, to be fair, it is possible that my year-long distraction with the film and the Cannes adventure made them feel that they were no longer getting good value for their miniscule retainer. They fired me. (19 years later they forgot that they fired me and hired me again.)

My life as a journalist was comfortably saved by Harry Evans hiring me to come to London with my family for the *Sunday Times*, then at the height of its fame. But it dealt a fatal blow to my film making. If France had been a vineyard for film making, England was a cemetery. I was back in a country where all the obstacles to independent film making were still rigidly in place – professional snobbery, distribution and exhibition sewn up, union rules virtually impenetrable. An outsider with no track record had no chance. But there was a deeper problem – to create a truly independent film requres enormous stamina and maybe even a taste for chornic poverty. You can do it only if the subject inhabits you passionately. My subject was Ireland. This was the early seventies – internment without trail in Northern Ireland in 1971, Bloody Sunday in 1972. No British company or tv channel would touch Ireland as a subject. By the eighties, they were using Northern Ireland as a flavour for gangster films. In that decade – during which I tried intermittently to raise money – there was zero support. The consolation was that – as well as feature-writing – I was also, from 1972, for four years the tv critic of the *Sunday Times*. This was undoubtedly the golden age of the British tv – in current affairs, comedy, costume drama, and documentary. That satisfied my lust for the visual. (Not to mention that I had a couple of children to bring up.)

I think that my experience with ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN had already disqualified me from entering the real film making world. It was almost unthinkable to allow someone to write, direct, and control the editing of a film, but equally, the idea of shooting someone else's script or allowing someone else a say in the content or to take over the editing was, for me, unthinkable.

I went back, not without pleasure and modest profit, to being a print journalist and later a photographer.

Credits

Rocky Road to Dublin was preserved by the Irish Film Archive and was restored by the Irish Film Board. The restoration of the film was produced by Se Merry Doyle at Loopline Film.

Director:
Peter Lennon

Producer:
Victor Herbert

Photography:
Raoul Coutard

Editing:
Lila Biro
Philippe Delesalle
Guy Delooz

Sound:
Tom Curran

Sound Engineer:
Antoine Bonfant

Lighting:
Mole Richardson (Ireland)

Background Music:
The Dubliners with Luke Kelly
Transatlantic Record Ltd.

Production Manager:
Anthony Lennon

Commentary:
Peter Lennon

A Film by Peter Lennon

an ICARUS FILMS release