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Introduction

Rocky Road to Dublin was certainly one of the first, if not the very first Irish film ever selected for inclusion in the worldwide famous Cannes festival. Unfortunately, this was in 1968 and Jean-Luc Godard, along with other *nouvelle vague* filmmakers, insisted on closing down the festival after only a few days. We will examine the exchanges that occurred between Irish and French culture in the making of this independent documentary film, how it was received, and the film's notoriety in Ireland and in France from 1968 until today. We will question Lennon's 'personal attempt to reconstruct with a camera the plight of an island community which survived more than 700 years of English occupation, and then nearly sank under the weight of its own heroes and clergy.'[1] The film's aesthetics will be examined as Lennon's voice-over and comments are related to Coutard's visual style. Two major excerpts from the film will be highlighted before we move on to the film's relevance in the last two decades.

Back to the Past

The history of Irish cinema has been quite chaotic. It is true that films were produced in Ireland as early as the end of the nineteenth century, but, by the 1960s, the country still had difficulty in developing a film culture of its own. The desire for more public commitment to an Irish film industry emerged on a regular basis, but few films were made in Ireland and even fewer Irish films were shown to an Irish audience. The Dáil had instituted a repressive ideological apparatus and passed the Censorship of Films Act in 1923, an act followed by the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929. Ardmore studios opened in this context in 1958 and it is no wonder that they faced many difficulties over the years, and that very few Irish films were made; just as few Irish books were published. Indeed, as a result of the Censorship of Publications Act, many of the greatest contemporary writers in the English language, as well as Irish writers, had their books censored in Ireland. In the 1960s controversies over the banning of books by John McGahern and Edna O'Brien progressively brought an end to the censorship of Irish writers. But the cultural climate was such that many outstanding artists like Frank O'Connor, James Stephens, Sean O'Casey, and George Russell chose to live abroad. Others, like Liam O'Flaherty and Seán Ó Faoláin preferred to travel extensively.

1 Quoted from *Rocky Road to Dublin.*

It was in this context that Peter Lennon, an evidently unsatisfied young Irish man of the nineteen sixties, decided to go and live abroad in order to free himself of the bondages of his country. It is quite difficult to find information on Peter Lennon, other than that furnished by himself. Described as a restless young man, Lennon probably took a job as a teacher[2] in a secondary school in Paris before he became a correspondent for the British paper the *Guardian*, where he contributed features for the Arts and Cinema pages. The first exchange between Ireland and France concerning *Rocky Road to Dublin* most likely came from Lennon's excitement at living in Paris and getting involved in the cultural life there.

The cinema movement named 'La nouvelle vague' by Françoise Giroud in 1958 found a great fan in Lennon. It must be remembered that the *nouvelle vague* was not a formally organised movement. The expression first designated a survey made of French young people's new ways of life, and the first film that epitomised the attitude of this new generation was *Et Dieu … créa la femme* by Roger Vadim in 1956. France was at that time governed politically and culturally in a high-handed way. But the young film directors who would become the *nouvelle vague française* benefited from the help of influential figures post-World War II. Henri Langlois, 'an ample-bellied man of deep-seated irascibility' (Lennon, 1994: 185) was one of them. He co-founded the French Cinémathèque in 1936 with Georges Franju and Jean Mitry, and helped to save many films during the Nazi occupation of France. He served as a key influence; his famous film screenings in Paris in the 1950s providing the ideas that later led to the development of auteur theory.

Alexandre Astruc also had a major influence on film studies and criticism in France in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His article 'The birth of a new avant-garde: La camera-stylo', was published in *L'Écran français* in 1948. Astruc argued in a provocative tone that cinema had gradually become a language, a personal way of expressing thought. A filmmaker could thus write with his camera in the same way as a writer wrote with his pen. Alexandre Astruc praised certain filmmakers like Jean Renoir, Orson Welles and Robert Bresson, whom he believed established the foundations of a new future for the cinema. Astruc later moved from film criticism to film directing.

At the same time (in 1947), André Bazin founded *La revue du Cinéma*, which was to become the film review periodical *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1950. Bazin was a major film critic, influenced by Italian neorealism and classic Hollywood cinema. A four-volume collection of his writings entitled *What is Cinema?* was published posthumously between 1958 and 1962. Bazin believed that a film should represent a director's personal vision. His ideas were of the foremost importance in the elaboration of the auteur theory that François Truffaut developed in 'A certain tendency of the French cinema' published in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1954.

La Nouvelle Vague was officially born at the Cannes film festival in 1959 with the release of *Les 400 Coups* by François Truffaut, *A Bout de Souffle* by Jean-Luc Godard and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* by Alain Resnais. The pioneers among the group: the directors François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, and Jean-Louis Comolli, had all begun as critics for *Les Cahiers du Cinema*. According to Michel Marie (1998), the experience of writing film criticism

2 http://www.irishmeninparis.org/framesets/framesetpeterlennon.htm

was one of the major concepts that defined the movement. Godard confirmed this prevailing concept in an interview:

> At *Les Cahiers* we all consider ourselves as future film directors. To frequent film theatres and film libraries is thinking cinema as well as thinking about cinema. Writing is making films, because between writing and shooting there is a mere difference of quantity, no difference of quality (Les *Cahiers du Cinéma*, December 1962).[3]

All these young people were well-versed in film history and had precise knowledge of *mise en scene* based on aesthetics. They also had moral opinions, and specific tastes and distastes that they discussed formally in their papers. They attacked straight narrative cinema, and particularly the classic style of some French films, but praised films with a personal signature visible from one film to another. The theory spread among younger critics abroad, particularly in magazines like *Movie* in Great Britain and *Film Culture* in America. In short, it was believed that the greatest films were dominated by the personal vision of the director, and therefore that films should be judged on the basis of *how*, not *what*, since the subject mattered less than its stylistic treatment. New methods of expression such as hand-held cameras, long takes, rapid scene changes, jump cuts, synchronous sound, improvised dialogues and shots going beyond the common 360° axis were also used.

Lennon had, indeed, good reasons to identify with the movement. He was, first of all, a film critic and a film fan. Secondly, he was angry with his people and frustrated with the sense of conformity that prevailed in Irish society. Lennon's fascination for the *nouvelle vague* directors and for their films gave him the desire to imitate them. He thought it normal for people to take a camera to express themselves:

> First of all I was a great film fan. I was in Paris at that time and that is the importance of an environment on the possibility of making films. You know people thought that making films was like building a block of flats and it more or less was with a crew of 150 with all kinds of expenses but I was in Paris at the right time where it was normal for people to take a camera to express themselves as it was for Italians to sing or something. I thought that since I was a great film buff and going to the cinematheque all the time, it would be a bit of an adventure and a great and satisfying way to stretch myself.[4]

The 'camera-stylo'[5] became Lennon's leitmotif even before he had ever handled a camera. Following in the footsteps of the French New Left, Lennon began his work examining the social and political upheavals in Ireland. In his own words, he persuaded the *Guardian* to let him stay in Dublin to investigate, and he managed the coup of hiring the world-renowned French cameraman Raoul Coutard. Coutard worked with famous directors such as Pierre Schoendoerffer, François Truffaut, Jacques Demy and Jean-Luc Godard at the time. This second interchange between Ireland and France is

3 Translated by the author.
4 'Peter Lennon's Rocky Road', available http://www.filmireland.net/exclusives/rockyroadtodublin.htm
5 Alexandre Astruc's expression

certainly quite astounding. Raoul Coutard had never set foot on the island before, and he spoke very little English. In the making of *Rocky Road to Dublin,* Lennon insisted that Coutard was 'the only person who could do that sort of informal work' that he wanted his film to have. He added that he 'very simply used (his) position as a journalist' to hire Coutard whose only answer when asked to do the job was 'oui':

> I dived into a desperate account of Ireland and its tragical-comical-demoniacal history, leaping verbally like a goosed goat from one pinnacle of Irish political disaster to another, often becoming bafflingly entangled in my own impetuous French. Then in a tone of despair I asked him if he would work with me.
>
> 'Oui', said Coutard (Lennon, 1994: 200).

One may add that the fee probably influenced Coutard's decision, as Lennon suggested in an interview:[6] 'Coutard was quite expensive in the sense that he was highly paid but he would give you more usable stuff in half an hour than most people would give you in a week.' Lennon raised the funds (£20,000) from his friend Victor Herbert.

Making such a film in Ireland in the 1960s was exceptional. One must keep in mind that Ireland had practically no independent documentary film industry at the time, and that the government had no commitment to small-scale projects. The exceptions in the 1960s were tourist and industrial promotion films for foreign distribution. The only previous independent documentary, Liam O'Leary's *Our Country*, had been released in 1948, 20 years before *Rocky Road to Dublin*. However Lennon slightly exaggerated the lack of indigenous films when he said 'Ireland had not made a feature length film in twenty years, and maybe for ten years afterwards'.[7] His film may well have been the first 'independent documentary' made in twenty years, but the amount of documentary work done by the end of the 1950s was significant enough to prove its engagement in Irish culture and the creation of a cinematic image of Ireland. Patrick Carey's films, *Yeats Country* (1965), *Oisin* (1970), and *Errigal* (1970) should not be ignored, nor should 1970s filmmakers like Thaddeus O'Sullivan, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black, Pat Murphy or Bob Quinn be forgotten.

Rocky Road to France

A further exchange between Ireland and France occurred with the selection of the film for the Cannes film festival in 1968. It had previously been shown to a tiny group of twenty people in Dublin, but getting *Rocky Road* onto Irish screens was not easy. The journalist Fergus Linehan had defended the film in the *Irish Times* with the following words:

> (It) introduces a breath of fresh air into an area too often concerned with the glossy Bord Fáilte advertisement image of Ireland. This, one would hope, is one of the kinds of picture which would emerge from a native film industry … owing nothing to any establishment ideas about how this country should be projected (*Irish Times*, 13 May 1968).

6 'Peter Lennon's Rocky Road', available http://www.filmireland.net/exclusives/rockyroadtodublin.htm
7 Peter Lennon in *The Making of Rocky Road to Dublin*, DVD, Soda Pictures Ltd, 2005.

Photo 1:

The film was, however, firmly rejected by the Irish establishment for its critical tone. But was it really aimed at the Irish audience of the late 1960s? A closer examination of the first part of the film makes it obvious that Lennon's highly critical discourse addressed foreigners rather than his fellow Irish citizens. Following the opening credits, Lennon's voice-over accompanies a panning high angle shot of Dublin.

As we get a general overview of the city and of the river Liffey, we are told of Ireland's past in a peremptory tone. The camera movement slowly brings the spectator from a view of Dublin to archive photographs of the city, the pan shot bringing unity to the disparate still photographs while the voiceover leaves the audience no choice but to listen to a report of Ireland's past. The excerpt is structured according to the argument that 'Ireland survived more than 700 years of English occupation and nearly sank under the weight of its own heroes and clergy.' Such a condensed account of contemporary Irish history can hardly have been aimed at an Irish audience. Lennon's harsh tone reveals his anger and impatience with his motherland. The 'poets and socialists', these 'idealists' who were executed for the sake of their country, are opposed to a 'lethargic and indifferent Irish population'. In fact Lennon makes it clear that the Irish population has always been passive, and that a mere handful of men changed the destiny of the country. As Ruth Barton has noted (2004: 86), the form of the film recalls the earlier independent documentary Irish film *Our Country*. Through the device of the voiceover, Lennon expresses his angered disappointment in a form that might remind the spectator that he was a journalist used to words over anything else. One may find a noteworthy contradiction between his wish to 'reconstruct with a camera the plight of an Irish community' and his commanding voiceover.

The film is composed of interviews with well-known artists like Irish writer Seán Ó Faoláin, the famous filmmaker John Huston, and representatives of Irish institu-

tions like the politician Conor Cruise O'Brien and the priest Father Michael Cleary. Alongside the planned interviews, there are various scenes of Dublin in the late 1960s, among which are a hurling match, a session in a local pub, a dance at a students' club, a debate between students, and an outside street scene in which laughing children chase the camera. The structure clearly differs from that of French *nouvelle vague* films. In Paul Duane's *Making of …*, we witness Raoul Coutard recalling how surprised he was the first time he saw the film: 'When you showed me the film the first time, I did not expect it at all … in addition it was also, how can I say it, very Irish in fabrication-not fabrication-conception.'[8]

The cameraman's reputation might have helped in *Rocky Road*'s selection for the Cannes festival in 1968. In any case it was one of the eight films selected at the 'quinzaine de la critique', and Lennon insisted on the fact that the success was not Ireland's: 'Ireland had nothing to do with this success. We had entered the film independently, unknown to the Irish authorities.'[9] He, on the contrary, took advantage of the opportunity to insist on the director's name: 'It was one of eight films out of sixty-four entries selected for the Critic's Week, alongside directors such as Jean-Marie Straub and Werner Herzog.'[10] Several reviews of the film were published in France. They praised the quality of the enquiry led by Lennon on the grounds that he would be banned from his country after making such a film. In *Positif,* Louis Marcorelles was fascinated by the clandestine nature of the film and its being prohibited in Ireland. The film was also immediately connected with well-known clichés of the country like 'Emerald island', 'purest country in the world' and with well-known Irish names like Joyce and Beckett. But Raoul Coutard's camerawork was totally left unnoticed. The French critics failed to sense any aesthetic commonality between the two countries in *Rocky Road*. However the events that occurred in Cannes that year made up for such an oversight.

It was May 1968. The 'bunch of young guys' that Lennon had watched and admired, 'the new wave directors (who had) dismantled all the barriers to independent film making',[11] – Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Claude Lelouch – invaded the auditorium at the end of the projection of *Rocky Road* and announced that they wanted the festival to be over. They had not seen the film, had no precise knowledge of the situation in Ireland and even less of the difficulties in making Irish films. They showed no particular consideration for their admirer and merely wanted to stop all projections in solidarity with the student and workers' movement. The meeting between the Irish director and the French *nouvelle vague* filmmakers was purely coincidental, but it did occur and the footage of the exchange is inserted in the *Making of Rocky Road to Dublin*. As Lennon proudly says, 'We were the last film projected at that festival.'[12] Godard and Truffaut had momentarily annihilated Lennon's hopes of glory, but his film could serve a new cause as screenings were organised in the amphitheatres of the Sorbonne, then under siege. Lennon was convinced that it tackled the French students' demands:

8 Raoul Coutard, in *The Making of Rocky Road to Dublin*, ibidem.
9 Peter Lennon, ibid.
10 Peter Lennon, ibid.
11 Peter Lennon, ibid.
12 Peter Lennon, ibid.

> Totally by chance, I had focused on the very issue that now feverishly preoccupied French students: what do you do with your revolution once you've got it? The answer is, of course, you give it back to the bourgeoisie and the clergy.[13]

'The eye-stinging perfume of CS gas was the sweetest fragrance of the time'[14] to Lennon. In the *Making of* …, which is not a 'making of' in the classic sense of the word but a story of the film produced in 2004,[15] there is archival footage of students demonstrating in Paris; the on-location sounds of the scene are juxtaposed with Lennon's voiceover. The editing gives the impression that the students are actually demonstrating in favour of the film as if it were their new banner. As they are chanting 'Nous sommes avec vous,' ('We are with you') Lennon comments: '*Rocky Road*, crippled in Ireland, began to bounce happily in the May turmoil.' The voiceover being the same as in *Rocky Road to Dublin*, it blends the film and its making of, as if the making of provided the second stage of one single fight, the fight for freedom. In addition it also works as a comparison with footage of Trinity College students at 27'31 to 30'19 in the *Making of* … The scene begins with a shot of the façade of Trinity College, and it is followed by a conversation between students in a pub. They will eventually make us aware that they are not allowed to have proper debates at university. The group is made up of six men and one woman, and even though the scene lasts for almost three minutes, the young woman will not be able to pronounce a single word. Men have the power in Ireland and women must remain silent and obedient, the viewer is being told. However a comparison with France could also be made to France's disadvantage here. Not all French women marched along with the Parisian students in May 1968. And the clergy still played a significant part in many people's lives in the late 1960s in different parts of France, just as they did in Ireland.

In addition, the footage of the Cannes debate clearly shows that few women expressed themselves. Apart from Agnès Varda, the *nouvelle vague* directors were all men; the French cultural traditions simply implying the exclusion of women. Geneviève Sellier (2005: 59) even insists that many of the male film critics had difficulties allowing a woman filmmaker the same rights to innovation as afforded to a male filmmaker. If the stylistic devices and the inventive camera work in *La Pointe Courte*, 1956 and in *Cleo de 5 à 7,* 1962, confirmed that Agnès Varda did fit in *la nouvelle vague*, she was to remain the one and only woman of the movement in France. She came from the Left Bank movement, a group that was tied to the Nouveau Roman movement in literature and politically positioned to the left. A trained photographer before she got involved in cinema, she had not started her career as a critic for *Les cahiers du Cinema*. However, her first films bridged the gap between documentary and fiction and carried on the spirit of the Italian neorealists. Like all the *nouvelle vague* directors during this era of authorship and personal expression, she also contributed valuable critical insights into her own films.

13 Peter Lennon, ibid.
14 Peter Lennon, ibid.
15 Paul Duane directed it but Lennon declared that he was the one who got financial assistance from the Irish Film Board to restore *Rocky Road* and to tell its story in a new documentary.

The Luck of the Irish

The Cannes episode of *Rocky Road* was exceptional and Lennon insisted that his film be selected at the Cork film festival on the grounds that it had previously been selected at a large-scale international festival. The legend of the film was sustained in a *mise en abyme*. The film listed the writers who had had a publication banned in Ireland; a list that included William Faulkner, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Hemingway, Brendan Behan, Sean O'Casey, John McGahern and George Bernard Shaw.

According to Lennon, the film could not be censored because he had been careful 'not to have any sex' in it (Lennon, 2005). And since the film could not be censored it was buried:

> After tight negotiations, Cork gave us a lunchtime slot, but on a day when all the critics and journalists were invited to free oysters and Guinness in Kenmare,[16] 30 miles away. Virtually no one turned up … The scandal encouraged a cinema manager to run it in Dublin for a few weeks, then it was buried again (Lennon, 2005).

Irish society did not need formal censorship to ban the film, and it took nearly four decades for *Rocky Road to Dublin* to be restored and programmed on Irish television. One of the major targets in Lennon's *Rocky Road* had been the Church, and its hold on education as well as on sexuality. At Lennon's request, the archbishop of Dublin had pointed him in the direction of a priest, Father Michael Cleary, probably on the grounds that he was a modern priest who would give a progressive image of the Irish clergy. In the film he is shown singing to female patients in a hospital, and later on at a wedding reception. We watch him speak, sing and dance. He also insists in an interview on the fact that the clergy is not against sex, but that not getting married is the sacrifice he chose to make as a priest. Lennon later pointed at the excessive moral power of the priests that Cleary epitomised:

> Father Cleary gave a perfect illustration of how Ireland's KGB-the clergy-operated. They were your father, your brother, your non-drinking pal; they would sing the Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy for you if you were dying in hospital. They were there to remind you, in the friendliest way, of your inherent tendency to evil and to extol the virtues of celibacy (Lennon, 2004).

Father Cleary was not, however, the person he pretended to be on screen. He died in 1993 and his secret life with his housekeeper was revealed a month after his death, along with the fact that he had fathered a son. The scandal revived *Rocky Road* and the footage of Father Cleary dancing and singing to female patients in a hospital. *At Home with the Clearys*, a documentary by Alison Millar, was then released by RTÉ in 2008. It counterbalanced Lennon's ironic opinion of the man and according to Pat Brereton (2007) it placed Cleary as the most enigmatic of post-Vatican II Irish Catholic figures. The voiceover in *Rocky Road to Dublin* is undoubtedly acerbic towards the Church, but if we pay particular attention to the hospital scene and Father Cleary's performance, it becomes almost impossible to detect anger or even

16 Other versions of the same story mention Kinsale instead of Kenmare

Photo 2

Photo 3

irony in the visuals or sounds. Lennon's voiceover does not operate in this particular scene. The direct sound is synchronous with the visuals and determines the length of the scene. The priest is shown among women listening to his song and clapping their hands. Exactly as in the story of the boy from the song he is singing, 'people gather round him and they clap their hands. He's a great big bundle o'joy', and 'he makes you feel like you want to dance when he gets through'. The scene lasts 1.17 minutes; the camera travels from one female patient to another, and lingers over the singer whose body gets into the rhythm of the song. A close-up of the priest's crotch, with white flowers in the foreground, (photo 2) symbolically suggests his sex. Another close-up of his feet (photo 3) separates the dancing feet from the priest's body, thus symbolising the man's inner struggle through the division of his body. His desire to be recorded by the camera at which he occasionally glances also reveals his strong will to exist on screen and, possibly, to distinguish himself from the other Irish priests.

Lennon's voiceover diverges from Coutard's visuals on several occasions, and the richness of the film may well originate from the discrepancy between the two. As Lennon later said, he had a clear idea of what he wanted to do in order to answer the question 'What happens to a revolution once the revolution is attained?' He knew precisely where he wanted his cameraman to shoot scenes. And his familiarity with the *nouvelle vague* films possibly influenced his choice of settings. Indeed, the opening scene is set in a classroom, where a schoolboy answers questions about religion. The setting immediately reminds the spectator of François Truffaut's feature film *The 400 Blows*. Both films are in black and white and the schoolboys are approximately the same age. However, instead of discussing and passing a photograph of a pin-up as they do in *The 400 Blows*, the Irish boys obediently discuss Adam and Eve and the effects of original sin.

Coutard, in all probability, knew too little about Ireland to share Lennon's anger and impatience with his country. However I would like to insist on two specific sequences that epitomise the success of the partnership between Lennon and Coutard. The first sequence is the pub session.[17] Lennon's voiceover precedes it with

17 *The Making of the Rocky Road to Dublin*, 13'50 to 19'27.

these words: 'Too often, the solution to social problems is to go out and have a few drinks. The pubs were for so long masculine prerogatives but now that women are allowed in, things have begun to cheer up.' A soundtrack by The Dubliners performs both as narrative impetus and as a structuring device in the whole film. Yet this sequence offers a live recording of a music session in a pub. The camera brings the spectator inside the pub and progressively reveals the musical art that provides the link between Irish people, men and women. Close-ups on women's faces combine with close-ups on men's faces but also on hands on a glass, pints on a tray, lips smoking or hands handling coins. All bodies are aesthetically made part of a single performance as they are most significantly shot in their details. The sequence contains two pieces of music. The first song lasts for nearly three minutes and its duration determines the length of the scene as well as the title of the film, since it is called 'Rocky road to Dublin'. People sing in unison while the main singer closes his eyes, and beats the rhythm with the movement of his shoulders while sweat drips on his face. Ireland's richness may well be embodied in these voices and physical expressions. We then hear the entirety of the next piece of music while the camera captures the rapid movement of spoons on the musician's lap. Again, as we listen to the piece of music, the camera captures expressions and details that give a strong sense of belonging to the Irish atmosphere of the period. The sequence ends on a very intimate moment, when a woman congratulates the musician. They kiss and his beaming smile illuminates the scene. Music brings to life the specificity of the Irish. Whereas the pub sequence is defined by Harvey O'Brien (2004: 172) as 'a lengthy sequence of people drinking and singing in a pub … inordinately long and (consisting) largely of a recitation of "The Rocky Road to Dublin" by one of the drinkers', I would argue that its length discloses the core of the film, the synchronous soundtrack prevailing over the visuals, and the spectators experiencing Irish people's freedom in music as if they had themselves attended the pub session. One may also draw a parallel between the pub sequence and the hospital scene with Father Cleary; where the synchronous soundtrack also prevails over the visuals. The priest in the singing scene is possibly just as eager to express the rhythm of the music and his inner desire to free himself from different forms of Irish bondage as his fellow citizens in the pub session.

It took Ireland another 20 years to have the scandals of abusive priests in religious institutions revealed, in television documentaries and docu-dramas like *Dear Daughter* (Lenten, RTÉ, 1996), *States of Fear* (Raftery, RTÉ, 1999), and feature films like *Hush-A-Bye Baby* (Harkin, 1989), *The Butcher Boy* (Jordan, 1997), *Last of the High Kings* (Keatings, 1996) and *A Love Divided* (McCartney, 1999). Irish cinema had remained dependent on the Catholic nationalist ideology and setting for decades, and it was one of the main reasons why so few Irish films were made in Dublin. Martin McLoone (2008: 43) claims that 'In Catholic nationalist ideology, the real Ireland was rural Ireland and the purest sense of Irish identity was to be found the further away one moved from the city.' Peter Mullan's fiction film *The Magdalene Sisters*, released in 2002, reiterates the traditional representation of a rural Catholic Ireland. It originated from the documentary, *Sex in a Cold Climate* (Humphries, 1997), but one could argue that it is also highly indebted to *Rocky Road* in its aesthetics and contents. The opening sequence of *The Magdalene Sisters*, a wedding scene where the song 'The Well Below the Valley' is being played could be read as a combination of

the pub sequence, the hospital scene and the wedding scene of *Rocky Road*. Like Father Cleary in *Rocky Road*, the priest in the feature film does not only celebrate the union of the couple in Church, he is also present at their wedding party, where he performs both as musician and singer. While we listen to the song and watch him sweat like the musician in the pub scene of *Rocky Road*, the editing focuses on several close-ups of women's faces. There is no doubt that they are all subdued under the priest's authority. He will decide to take the young woman who has been sexually abused by her cousin away from her family, because, according to the young schoolboy's recitation of the story of Adam and Eve, she has sinned.

The final part of *Rocky Road* constitutes another major sequence, the film becoming a document on the documentary. At a crucial moment, it invites the viewer to reconsider the unflattering picture of Ireland and of its 'brainwashed' children. While the camera seems to be withdrawing, the children run after it with extraordinary liveliness, energy and enthusiasm. As a child imitates Charlie Chaplin, one is left to wonder at the endless influences of cinema on a people. The camera does not merely capture a situation; it produces events that may never have occurred had the film not been made. According to the famous *nouvelle vague* director Jean-Louis Comolli, what the documentary film achieves may well be best symbolised by the experience of the people filmed. Coutard might have improvised the sequence as he saw the children running after their van, but the shot is undoubtedly reminiscent of the poetic end of *The 400 Blows*, when the young boy (Jean-Pierre Léaud) runs in hope of a better future. The final freeze frame of a child standing on a beach is another clear methodological tribute to Truffaut's masterpiece.

Peter Lennon died in March 2011, aged 81. He remained a one-film director, but his contribution to Irish film was essential. He combined his Irish culture and knowledge with his personal enthusiasm for the French *nouvelle vague*. Having no experience as a director, he made a film that was at once 'a direct descendant of *Our Country*, an angry and rhetorical attack upon the institutions and attitudes which have (…) brought the country to a social and cultural standstill' (O'Brien, 2004: 170), and an Irish documentary film with new methods of expression and a stylistic treatment originating from the French *nouvelle vague*.

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