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The Quiet Girl (12)
Dir: Colm Bairéad
Starring: Catherine Clinch, Carrie Crowley, Andrew Bennett

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Synopsis: Caít, a young girl living in a money-stretched Irish home in 1981, is sent to live with distant relatives for the summer while her parents prepare for the arrival of another baby. The nurturing older couple treat Caít like their own, but cannot hide the lingering secret that hangs over their household.

Nothing puts the fear of God into a classroom full of raucous Irish children like the sound of an exasperated, nerve shot teacher shouting ‘*Ciunas!*’ (the Irish word for silence). It’s a command that has the power to turn rosy cheeks porcelain, and transform small smiling faces into contorted masks of worry.

The terror that follows a call for *ciunas!* is one that Caít, the young girl at the centre of Colm Bairéad’s Irish language film, appears to carry at all times. It’s as though she’s been told to be quiet so often (or worse, ignored), she’s learned there is little point in making any noise at all. Instead she wanders off into the long grass, stashes herself under her bed away from the clamour of her many siblings, and waits silently in the pub as her father sinks another “liquid Lunch”. But what Caít lacks in loquaciousness she makes up for in curiosity – a trait Bairéad underscores by keeping the camera on her almost constantly. When Caít’s parents argue over plans to send her away for the summer and leave the family with one less mouth to feed, she is right there on the landing, absorbing every unguarded word: “How long should they keep her, until after the baby?” the mother asks the father, who swats away the thought like a nuisance fly: “They can keep her as long as they like.” These words are spoken in English, making the growing schism between Caít and her family feel even greater.

An Cailín Ciúin - which made history this year as the first Irish language feature to show at Berlinale - was adapted from the 2010 story *Foster* by Claire Keegan and the film takes much of the dialogue from Keegan’s sparse but melodic prose verbatim. It’s a book that runs on feelings – making it a perfect fit for *Gaeilge*, a language that can put the heavy physicality of emotions into words (‘I’m sad’ in Irish - *tá brón orm* - translates literally as ‘I have sadness upon me’). Without the help



of the first-person internal monologue that Keegan used, Bairéad has managed to transmit Caít’s every move through the crystallising performance of 12 year-old Catherine Clinch, who had never acted in front of a camera before.

When Caít’s father dropped her off at the home of Eibhlín and Seán Cinnsealach, an older farming couple she has not seen since she was in a pram, we feel her unease through every eyebrow twitch and forced, slanted smile. Shooting in full frame Academy ratio, director of photography Kate McCullough captures Caít moving between pale yellow doorways, squaring the difference between this place, her home and the discomfort that lies in-between.

Here food is brought to the table without anxiety; a nurturing love is shown through cut tomatoes and ridged slices of beetroot - all of which her father treats with mild disdain as he gibes about how Caít will eat them “out of house and home”. It’s what Keegan called “the way men have of not talking”, men who instead “kick a divot out of the grass with a boot heel”. To have brought the child here at all is an admission of a struggle, and so he amps up the cruelty to give the illusion of choice. “Try not to fall into the fire, you,” he tells Caít as he drives off with her suitcase still in the car.

And so they dress her up in a plaid shirt and 2 long jeans, with Eibhlín (Carrie Crowley) orienting her in her new home through instant maternal affection. This is a house without secrets, she tells her, those Sean’s initial standoffishness and the child’s wallpaper in Caít’s new room suggest they’re living with more than one.

Through a shimmering near montage of moments - onion chopping, hair brushing, trips to a spring well, slow-mo runs through an arch of trees - we watch Caít move organically from awkward interloper to daughter figure. At times, the crisp shots and liquidy use of light can feel close to a Kerrygold ad, but the film’s sharp emotional intelligence stops it tipping into the realm of commercial sentimentality. This is seen in Caít’s

wretched encounter with a busybody neighbour, who dishes out more questions about the Cinnsealachs than nettles have stings. Her nosey, venomous chatter lets out that household secret. but instead of shattering the foundation they've built, honesty gives way to a greater connection between Sean and Kate. "You don't have to say anything," he tells her in the light of the pearly moon. "Many's the person that missed the opportunity to say nothing, and lost much because of it." By the end, Caít chooses silence not out of fear, but because she has found a new sense of self - someone who understands all that can be gained in the simplicity of silence.

Credits

Caít	Catherine Clinch
Eibhlin Cinnsealach	Carrie Crowley
Sean Cinnsealach	Andrew Bennett
Máthair Cháit	Kate Nic Chonaonaigh
Áthair Cháit	Michael Patric
Neighbour	Carolyn Bracken
Múnteoir Deirdre	Norette Leahy
Úna	Joan Sheehy
Director	Colm Baíread
Screenplay	Colm Baíread
Director of Photography	Kate McCullough
Editor	John Murphy
Production design	Emma Lowney
Music	Stephen Rennicks
Based on <i>Foster</i> by Claire Keegan	Ireland 2022. 94 mins

Another view

The Quiet Girl, a warmhearted Irish drama of superior quality, chews over love and care, enhancing their positive effects on the development of a young girl. The film is a mark of extraordinary promise from Colm Bairéad, a debutant filmmaker whose future works we want to keep an eye on.

Employing a powerful simplicity in the process, Bairéad tells the story of Cáit (Catherine Clinch), a restrained and sensitive 9-year-old girl who tries to hide from everybody. Both her mood and behaviour change completely during the summer of 1981, when she leaves her impoverished, dysfunctional family to spend a couple of months on a farm with estranged relatives (Carrie Crowley and Andrew Bennett).

Generating empathy and honesty at every second, The Quiet Girl is a memorable film, not only for the way it's mounted, but for going against the trendy themes of pessimism, hatred, dystopia, and chaos that consume most of the movies made today. The frames are captured with a rare sensitivity that makes you read and feel the protagonists' emotions. For this particularity, much contributed the impeccable performances from all members of the cast, a surefooted direction, and an outstanding cinematography.

As subtle and delicate as an affectionate embrace, this is a beautiful film, whose story provides a heartbreaking insight into the different roles people may have in one's life. The medium is love, and you always feel when it's present or not. The exceptionally controlled storytelling avoids excessive pathos, but don't feel surprised if the gracious, bittersweet finale moves you to tears.

Felipe Freitas: Always Good Movies

Our spring season

We're pleased to confirm the dates and titles of the films - subject to their availability - for the spring season. All films will be shown at the Terry O'Toole theatre, beginning at 7.30pm.

February 10th - Hit the Road (Iran 2021, Cert 12)

Directed by Panar Panahi (son of Jafar Panahi), Hit the Road follows middle-aged couple and their two sons on a road trip across the Iranian countryside. During the journey, they bond over memories of the past, grapple with fears of the unknown and fuss over their sick dog.

February 24th - The Cordillera of Dreams (Chile 2019. Cert 12a)

The third film is his trilogy of documentaries on the state of his native country in the aftermath of the Pinochet dictatorship, Patricio Guzmán reflects on the brutality and legacy of the 1973 coup which brought Pinochet's military junta to power in Chile.

March 10th - Compartment No 6 (Finland 2022. Cert 15)

Compartment No 6 is a drama in which a Finnish woman finds herself travelling alongside an unconventional man on a train journey to the Arctic Circle. Very strong language.

March 24th - Balloon (Tibet 2019. Cert 12)

Pema Tsenden's latest portrait of Tibetan pastoral life explores the consequences for a rural couple when their children use two blown-up condoms for a game, believing them to be balloons. The story is set in the context of China's imposed policy on its citizens.

Important date

We are planning an Extraordinary General Meeting of the society and its members for January 20th, at the St John's Church Hall, Laughton Way, starting at 7.30pm

This will be an opportunity for the committee to update the members on the way our return to film screenings has gone and discuss the future of the Society once the current programme of screenings comes to an end.

Please check our Facebook page and website for further details and announcements over the holiday period.