

Film casts cold eye on Tiger in 3 languages

By Frieda Klotz
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Irish poet and writer Celia de Fréine didn't like the Celtic Tiger because it was a time of haste and extravagance. So why did she write a screenplay about it? "There was this kind of atmosphere of rush," she said recently over a cup of tea near Wall Street in New York. "While the boom years were going on it was difficult to get a theater ticket or a cinema ticket or get into a restaurant if you hadn't booked in advance. Everyone was rushing around. Because there was all this money there - or people thought there was all this money there - there were different values."

De Fréine is a quiet, elegant woman, who divides her time between Dublin and Connemara. She was in the U.S. because her new short film, "Rian / Trace," premiered this month at the Village East Cinemas as part of the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival ("rian" means "trace" in Irish). It explores a different angle of the boom - that of an emigrant who failed to make it and returns to his former home in Connemara. It's a universal story, she said, adding that she was inspired to write it partly after hearing of charities that were bringing elderly emigrants back to Ireland. Many Irish find success when

they go abroad but all do not. De Fréine's film is about those who think they have failed and are too ashamed to go home. It shows us Peadar, an elderly man who returns to Connemara years after leaving it. At the bed-and-breakfast where he stays he meets Eva, a young Polish immigrant who is bored by her menial job and lies to her father in Poland, telling him that she works at an IT firm. "So many people were exported, and now we have imported people," de Fréine explained. She wanted to show what happened to emigrants, both Irish and from other countries, who, she said, "haven't got on. When you haven't built a new life for yourself."

"Rian / Trace" is set in Carraroe, an Irish-speaking town that looks peaceful and unpopulated in the film. The seaside setting and stark open fields create a sense of loneliness and beauty. Even though three languages feature in the film — Irish, English and Polish (there are English subtitles) — dialogue is sparse.

Language fascinates de Fréine, who writes both in Irish and in English. It has always been a complex, shifting thing in Irish-language regions: de Fréine recalled Irish-speakers who left the country with hardly a word of English, which went against them when they tried to get jobs. She also knows of fami-



A still from "Rian / Trace."

lies who came back to Ireland from Britain, and whose children learnt the language at Irish-speaking schools; yet when they spoke English they had broad, and sometimes Cockney, accents.

It was at school that de Fréine herself learnt Irish. She was born in Newtownards in County Down in 1948, and her family moved to Dublin when she was young; the lack of access to Irish in her early upbringing made her even more curious about it. She went to an Irish-language school, and said it was in high school she first began to dream and think in the language.

De Fréine studied at University College Dublin and worked as a teacher and a civil

servant. She also wrote for television and wrote plays, which have been performed at Dublin's Abbey Theatre and elsewhere; another screenplay, "Marathon," won awards for best screenplay and best cinematography at the New York Film and Video Festival of 2009. She has published four collections of poems and in 1994 won the Patrick Kavanagh Award for Poetry.

Although English is formally her first language, de Fréine said she finds it easier to access her imagination in Irish. "The type of poetry I write tends to be surreal, and I think that Irish is better suited to the surreal," she said. "I just think that Irish poetry has the edge, it's that bit more imaginative."

Surrealism is easy to detect in "Rian / Trace." The film's title comes from a handprint a child leaves on a window, peering in at Peadar during one of his darkest moments. But the film is also about "the trace you leave after you," de Fréine said. At its end, Peadar decides to look for his daughter, whom he hasn't seen in years.

Urban Ireland and its economic woes seem a far cry from this rural vision. What is it like living in Dublin now? "Things have definitely slowed down a bit," de Fréine said. "You go into the shops and there's nothing doing. In the shops, too, they're more friendly and more helpful because they're not rushed and they're not under pressure."



Celia De Freine

Boston pub lets patrons pull their own pints

By Jim Smith
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BOSTON - A popular Irish pub in Boston recently became the first bar in Massachusetts to feature an innovative two-tap self-service beer bar that allows customers to pour their own drafts.

Known as the Draft Master, the tabletop tap system was installed two weeks ago at the Littlest Bar in the city's financial district, where owner Paddy Grace of Kilkenny has noticed a steady stream of customers making beelines to the unique set-up when they walk in the door.

"People come in, and they're curious to see what it's all about," Grace told the Echo on a recent weekend evening at the pub, where a half-dozen thirsty patrons had gathered at the table.

The system was introduced to pubs in Ireland in November 2009 and came to the U.S. in May 2010, with eventual installations in Baltimore, Philadelphia and other major cities.

The Draft Master, which costs \$10,000, is marketed by Diageo, the parent company of Guinness,



under a contract with Ellickson International.

The table has twin taps coming out of the top to dispense Guinness and Smithwicks. A digital read-out allows customers and staff to measure consumption.

A computer behind the bar controls the taps and runs the tabs, which are settled by a waitress.

Bartender Eugene Hoan, a Galway native, said that the unit is drawing a lot of attention. "Drawing their own pints is a unique experience for the customers, and it gives them a bit of fun," he said.

Woman calls for Mass boycott

A defiant senior citizen is rallying Irish women to boycott Sunday Mass for one day because she feels the hierarchy is treating them like second-class citizens, according to the Press Association.

Jennifer Sleeman, from Clonkilty, Co. Cork, said she wants to concentrate the anger felt by women nationwide towards the Catholic Church in one strong action.

The 80-year-old is urging fellow Mass-goers to mark Sept. 26 as a day when they collectively shun services across the country.

"I have felt that a lot of women are angry," Sleeman said.

"They have been doing their own way of protesting. It all seems so spread around and it would be great if we could concentrate all this so it just came to me. I'm beginning to wonder is there a holy spirit and did it put the idea into my head?"

The pensioner, who turns 81 three days before the planned day of protest next month, said there were a range of issues angering women, including the church's failure to ordain female priests.

Sleeman, who converted to Catholicism from Presbyterianism 54 years ago, is a former farmer and marriage counselor. Her son Simon is a member of the Benedictine order based in Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick, and is supportive of her stance.