The earliest surviving fictional film image of Irish people is of a group of workers harvesting turf on a bog. The shot is so composed that four figures are easily distinguishable: three men in the foreground cutting the sods and an elderly woman who moves around the men, throwing cut sods over her shoulder into a basket on her back. A donkey stands somewhat behind these figures and a whitewashed cottage is visible in the distance. Of the three men, the two who stand beside each other on the left-hand side of the frame, like the woman, are clearly practiced in their task and work steadily throughout the single-shot scene. The third man, on the right, however, disrupts this idyllic image of rural labour. He draws the eye because he is slightly nearer the camera than the other men, because he is closer to the edge of frame than harmony of composition would seem to demand, and because his agitation is tangible as he works fitfully and ends the scene by throwing down his spade and appealing to the heavens.

This man is also differentiated from his companions by the fact that, while they remain anonymous, anyone who seeks out this film, *The Lad from Old Ireland*, is likely to know his name. He is Sidney Olcott, the Canadian-Irish film director and actor. Born John Sidney Alcott of Irish parents in Toronto in 1874, Olcott was the premier director with the New York-based Kalem Film Company. His companions in the scene are likely to be farmworkers from County Cork, staging an everyday occurrence for the camera.

In 1910, Olcott made a pioneering trip to Ireland with scenarist and actress Gene Gauntier, and cameraman George Hollister. On their voyage to Queenstown, they began filming *The Lad from Old Ireland*, the first surviving fiction film shot substantially in Ireland. This film shows how Terry (Olcott), unhappy with his lot in rural Ireland, emigrates to New York, where after ten years, he has worked himself up from a job on a building site to success in public office and high society. Learning of the desperate plight of Aileen (Gauntier), his half-forgotten sweetheart, Terry returns to Ireland to save her from eviction and marry her.

Luke Gibbons has pointed out the importance of the Irish landscape to the films made by the Kalem filmmakers in Ireland (the O’Kalems), particularly in the films they made when they returned in greater numbers to Killarney in the summer of 1911 and in subsequent years until 1914. The above account of *The Lad from Old Ireland* indicates some of the wider contextual relevance of tourism to the O’Kalem project. The film’s myth of the triumphant return of the emigrant as a kind of tourist is directed primarily at the diasporic Irish in the United States, whom it constructs as virtual tourists. Its counterpart, the solving of Ireland’s problems by tourist wealth, dovetails nicely with the turn-of-the-century Irish discourse on tourism as a panacea of Ireland’s ills. Furthermore, as represented in the travel writing produced by the O’Kalems themselves, the filmmaking process emerges as a kind of tourism.

The writings of the sociologists John Urry and Dean MacCannell are useful when discussing the touristic aspects of the O’Kalem films. Urry’s concept of the tourist
gaze seems particularly appropriate when dealing with virtual tourists, cinematic spectators viewing a filmic tour.\textsuperscript{6} Urry argues that the visual technology of photography extended to every remote part of the globe the new modes of visual perception involving seeing and being seen that developed in the metropolitan centres in the second half of the nineteenth century (drawing on Marshall Berman, his example is Paris).\textsuperscript{7} This restructuring of the tourist gaze paralleled the growth of mass tourism. Quoting Jonathan Culler, he describes how

\[\text{...}
\]

\textit{The Lad from Old Ireland}'s turf-cutting scene is not only a typical sign of Irishness, but also the first of many portrayals of work in the O'Kalem films. In his book \textit{The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class}, sociologist Dean MacCannell uses the term 'work display' to describe the way in which the work of others has become an object of fascination for the tourist gaze.\textsuperscript{9} MacCannell contends that the internal differentiation of modern societies means that their members are unable, by virtue of the limiting perspective of their own social role, to grasp the totality of the workings of the society in which they are embedded and so seek insight into the workings of modernity in the course of tourist travel to other societies. ‘The act of sightseeing,’ he writes,

\begin{quote}

is uniquely well-suited among leisure alternatives to draw the tourist into a relationship with the modern social totality... As a tourist, the individual may step out into the universal drama of modernity. As a tourist, the individual may attempt to grasp the division of labor as a phenomenon \textit{sui generis} and become a moral witness to its masterpieces of violence and viciousness.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

The concern with the display of work in \textit{The Lad from Old Ireland} and subsequent O’Kalem films is striking at a time when the types of film narrative that were to become the dominant paradigm, were attempting to erase traces of their own ideological work, to make filmic storytelling appear natural and seamless. Tensions between maintaining competitive advantage based on the appeal to the virtual tourist and conforming to an emerging aesthetic of narrative absorption are perceptible in the surviving O’Kalem films. They became particularly clear when, in 1911, the gaze of the O’Kalem virtual tourist was directed at Killarney.

Kalem was one of the smallest of the ten companies admitted to the U.S. Motion Picture Patents Company, a cartel established by Edison that attempted to regulate the burgeoning film industry during the nickelodeon era for its members’ advantage by pooling the patents on film production and exhibition technology and licensing all who wished to use them. As Gauntier’s autobiography reveals, Kalem made a virtue of its lack of studios by focusing on action films in real outdoor locations rather than in front of painted sets.\textsuperscript{11} The company took its focus on location filming a stage further by gambling on the expense of sending a small film crew overseas in 1910. By promoting the pictures made in Ireland, England, and Germany, on the basis of their authentic locations, the company succeeded in distinguishing its products in the marketplace. The use of the two-part landscape titles in the 1911 films serves to reinforce this message, to foreground the background.

References to the landscape in which the O’Kalem films were shot are made in four of their six surviving films. These are \textit{Rory O’More} (principal photography Ireland 1911; U.S. release 4/9/1911\textsuperscript{12}), \textit{The Colleen Bawn} (1911; 16/10/1911), \textit{For Ireland’s
For Ireland’s Sake (1913; 12/1/1914), and Bold Emmett, Ireland’s Martyr (1914; 11/8/1915). The landscape intertitles that are a particular feature of Rory O’More and The Colleen Bawn, however, represent something of an anomaly if, as Eileen Bowser argues, ‘[b]y 1911 some producers were trying to tell stories with an absolute minimum of words, and this was thought of as the artistic ideal.’ The O’Kalems disrupted coherent film narrative such as it existed before 1914 and eschewed the artistic ideal of employing the fewest words to explain that narrative in order to address the virtual tourist. Reference to Irish landscape and tourist sights was the raison d’être of O’Kalem travelogues such as the fictionalized Irish Honeymoon (1910; 8/3/1911) and the nonfiction O’Kalems’ Visit to Killarney (1911; 5/1/1912). The shallow fiction Irish Honeymoon motivates its virtual tourism by offering a honeymooning couple, tourists, as its viewpoint characters. Fiction films that could not justify breaks in the narrative illusion, however, risked alienating their spectators. ‘Audiences were fascinated with the details of how movies were made,’ asserts Bowser, ‘… [b]ut for the duration of the film, the spectator wanted to be able to suspend disbelief.’ The Kalem Company must have felt that the competitive advantage that references to the Irish landscape conferred outweighed concerns over loss of narrative illusion, and the popularity of the O’Kalem films would seem to confirm that feeling.

The nature of the titles varies in the four surviving films with references to the landscape. The Colleen Bawn, For Ireland’s Sake, and Bold Emmett, Ireland’s Martyr indicate that they were shot in Ireland in their opening titles. There is a reference to Muckross Abbey in the course of For Ireland’s Sake, but it is integrated in such a way that it does not serve to distance the spectator from the narrative. The two-part format of a number of the intertitles in Rory O’More and The Colleen Bawn, however, directs the spectator’s gaze first to the narrative action and second, and distinctly, to the landscape in which this action takes place. These 1911 films draw particular attention to the conditions of their own production, reminding their spectators that Kalem sent a company to Ireland to capture authentic Irish locations.

The two landscape intertitles in Rory O’More establish a format that is followed in The Colleen Bawn. Loosely adapted from Samuel Lover’s novel, play, and ballad of the same name, Rory O’More is a single reel, approximately nine-minute drama concerning the escape from the British authorities to exile in America of the eponymous, fictional 1798 rebel. It is while Rory is chased through the countryside by the redcoats, that the landscape intertitles appear. These two titles relate to the two locations in which the chase occurs: the Gap of Dunloe and the Lakes of Killarney. The chase sequence opens with the first landscape intertitle, which begins: ‘LEARNING OF THE INTENDED CAPTURE, KATHLEEN WARNS RORY’. This continues below a line in a smaller font size: ‘NEAR THE GAP OF DUNLOE’. The second title occurs at the climax of the chase. It announces that ‘RORY RESCUES THE DROWNING SOLDIER’ and continues, as before, beneath a dividing line in a smaller font, ‘LAKES OF KILLARNEY’.

Of all their surviving films, it is the O’Kalem adaptation of Dion Boucicault’s Colleen Bawn that contains the most references to the Killarney landscape. Among the film’s opening titles is an ‘explanatory title’ that reads: ‘Every scene, including interiors, in this Irish production was made in Ireland, and in the exact location described in the original play.’ The more extensive material in brackets in The Colleen Bawn gives a fuller picture of how the Kalem Company viewed the
spectators of the O’Kalem films. Three kinds of information are provided: that relating to the landscape, that relating to Boucicault’s play, and that relating to Daniel O’Connell’s furniture. The titles relating to the landscape of Killarney not only indicate scenes taken at such spectacular tourist sights as the Gap of Dunloe and Muckross Head but also at such wholly mundane locations as ‘A PEAT BOG NEAR THE KILLARNEY LAKES’. Here it seems that virtual tourists must, like their actual counterparts, endure the ordinary in contrast to which the extraordinary gains its special character. The title also helps explain to the uninitiated what the Colleen Bawn (Gauntier) is doing at the opening of the scene when she bends to pick up sods and throw them over her shoulder into a basket on her back.

The information on Boucicault’s drama and the single title referring to Daniel O’Connell more directly relate to how the O’Kalem films construct their audience. The concern with the faithfulness to the play of such titles as ‘SHOWING THE IDENTITICAL LANDING DESCRIBED BY BOUCICAULT IN HIS PLAY’ and ‘EXACT REPRODUCTION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE ORIGINAL DANNY MANN COTTAGE’ indicates an audience intimately familiar with the stage version. The unmotivated reference to the Irish Liberator in the title ‘THE BED USED IN THIS SCENE BELONGED TO DANIEL O’CONNELL AND WAS OCCUPIED BY HIM’ reveals that the intended audience is Irish and Irish American. It is only such audiences who, without further explanation, would have been aware of the implications of this title.

The Irish in Ireland remained largely unaware of U.S. filmmakers in their midst. The local press in Killarney, which the O’Kalems visited in 1910 and where they based themselves from 1911 on, saw the impact for Ireland of the activities of the filmmakers in 1910 primarily in the context not of the entertainment industry but of tourism. A rare article on the O’Kalems in Kerry appeared in the issue of the weekly Killarney Echo and South Kerry Chronicle (the Echo) dated August 27, 1910. It reports that

[r]epresentatives of the Kalem Motion Picture Company, New York are at present engaged in a tour of Ireland for the purpose of securing a series of ‘motion’ pictures for exhibition before American audiences. Already they have secured a number of excellent views in and around Cork. Harvesting operations yesterday formed the object of their attention. Scenes at Blarney Castle, Queenstown, and other places of interest were also taken. Of course, places like Killarney and Glengariffe [sic] will come in for special attention. The pictures, in addition to being full of interest for the American audiences, will at the same time contribute a splendid advertising medium for the tourist resorts of this country.15

This account of the activities of the O’Kalem filmmakers during their first exploratory trip outside the United States and the scarcity of such accounts in the period up to World War I tells us much about the contemporary state of knowledge about filmmaking in Ireland. Its title, ‘Cinematographing Ireland: Motion Pictures for America,’ nicely conveys the sense in which scenic views of Ireland, including, significantly, the agricultural work of harvesting, were to be captured for consumption by U.S. cinema audiences. This circuit was to be closed to some extent by the payoff for Ireland that the films would advertise Irish tourist resorts and, hopefully, so bring American tourists to those resorts to consume the authentic sights themselves.
It is notable, however, that there is no sense here that the films have a role as cultural products in Ireland. This is curious because film shows by travelling companies in Kerry were well publicized and played to good houses. In 1910, however, the film portion of these shows apparently consisted mainly of nonfiction actualities, and the article reflects this in identifying the filming of Irish scenic views. Indeed, by the time Olcott, Gauntier, and Hollister came to Killarney, they were filming scenic views, but this was for the fictionalized travelogue *An Irish Honeymoon*, in which Olcott and Gauntier play a newly married couple visiting tourist sights in Ireland and London. This gives a sense of the movement away from actuality genres to fiction films, some of which were barely fictionalized forms of the actuality genres that they were supposedly superceding. On its release ‘for Patrick’s week’ 1911, the *Moving Picture World* (hereafter *MPW*) described *An Irish Honeymoon* as consisting of a ‘little comedy mingled with scenes that have made the land of the Shamrock famous.’ It was released by British distributors, and so available for exhibition in Ireland, on May 25, 1911.

It has frequently been observed that Queen Victoria’s visit to Killarney in August 1861 was instrumental in raising the profile of the area as a tourist destination. The press reporting on the royal visit sent accounts and images of Killarney all over the empire and beyond it. This international media event had been preceded by the less-sensational visit of the Prince of Wales to Killarney in 1858. If the royal visits made Killarney ‘the place where every self respecting Victorian visited,’ improvements in the transport infrastructure that were happening around the same time, most notably the opening of the Great Southern and Western Railway line to Killarney in July 1853, ensured that this could be done in large numbers and in relative comfort.

For the reporter announcing the arrival of the O’Kalems to Killarney in 1910, an important precedent existed for the reception of cultural works as phenomena with effects on what was then generally called the tourist traffic in the area. That precedent is Boucicault’s 1860 melodrama *The Colleen Bawn*. Boucicault’s *Colleen Bawn*, and the works it spawned, particularly Julius Benedict’s opera *The Lily of Killarney*, served as another means by which Killarney was promoted. This is, in fact, the closing of a circle of influence. While a literary work, Gerald Griffin’s novel, *The Collegians*, provided the main inspiration for the dramatic incidents of Boucicault’s play, it was the tourist sights in Killarney that provided the main inspiration for its scenic paintings. Boucicault used a set of steel engravings of the sights of Killarney, images that show how developed tourism in the region was by the mid-nineteenth century, as the basis of the scenes of his play. Tourist views of, for example, the lakes, the Gap of Dunloe, Muckross Head, and the Old Weir Bridge, were reproduced in a play that had record runs in New York in 1860, in London and provincial cities in Britain from September 1860, in Dublin in early 1861, and thereafter, all over the English-speaking world and beyond. Queen Victoria was an enthusiastic patron of *The Colleen Bawn*, attending the play three times between its London opening in September 1860 and the death of Prince Albert in December 1861, which put an end to her theatregoing.

The publicity created by the royal visit and theatrical representation created new opportunities for those involved in the tourist industry in Killarney to exploit local resources. Late-nineteenth-century visitors could pay to be taken on the Royal Route and view the sights as the queen has seen them. One could also visit the Colleen
Bawn Rock, an outcrop on Muckross Lake chosen to be the actual site of the attempted drowning of Boucicault’s heroine in the play’s most sensational scene. In an alleged letter to her brother that was published in MPW, Agnes Mapes, the actress who would soon be seen in the part of Mrs. Cregan in the O’Kalem adaptation of The Colleen Bawn, acknowledges this rock as the place ‘where she really lost her life.’

Like Gauntier’s later ‘Blazing the Trail,’ Mapes’s letter and articles by the O’Kalem actor J. P. McGowan in 1912 reveal a concern with work and travel that illuminates the handling of these issues in the O’Kalem films. ‘To [Olcott, the Kalem executives] handed a map of the world,’ writes McGowan, ‘with the remarks, “There is your territory – Your company is ready – You had better sail on Saturday.”’ Nominally concerned with the O’Kalem productions in Ireland and the Middle East, his articles focus on the logistics of travel between the various locations. Travelling at high speed between Jerusalem and Tiberias, the O’Kalems ‘established a record for this road that will stand for many a long day to come, and one that has caused no little wonder amongst the people here.’ For this reason, the rail strike in Ireland in 1911 was of particular concern to him, briefly slowing the progress of what seems at times like a latter day Around the World in Eighty Days. Mapes’s article is less frenetic. While sightseeing on the lakes, she extols the scenic virtues of Killarney, a place that ‘still holds its old look … without a sign of the new world marring the picture.’ The primitiveness of the accommodation that the filmmakers have to endure in the hotel in Beaufort, however, seems to be connected with the poor work ethic of the locals in comparison to the visitors. ‘We are certainly making the Irish open their eyes,’ she states. ‘We have done in two days what they would have taken months to do.’

While these articles presented filmmaking as a kind of sightseeing tour, this process also involved a kind of missionary work on behalf of modernity. These tourists, like all of their type, were nostalgic for the less developed ‘old world’ but wanted an efficient transport infrastructure to get them there, favoured accommodation with modern conveniences, and were not above exposing what they saw as the leisurely pace of the local workforce.

Given the lack of publicity that the O’Kalems received while in Ireland, it is questionable how effectively they spread their message through personal contact. In any case, the notion of spreading modernity through tourism already had powerful and articulate advocates in Ireland. The theme of tourism as a panacea for the economic ills of Ireland had played a prominent part in the discourse of tourism at least since the 1890s, becoming the main ideological current in F. W. Crossley’s trade journal The Irish Tourist (1894-1908). This publication was also concerned with how representations of Ireland and the Irish impacted on the tourist traffic, particularly that from Britain. In the editorial introduction to the first issue, it announces that

[...] the mission of THE IRISH TOURIST is to make better known to the world this country’s charm and beauty and to attract multitudinous visitors to annually sojourn at our health and pleasure resorts and thus leave with us that historic ‘plethora of wealth,’ which might act as the panacea for Ireland’s ills.

If it is a little coy here, but only a little, about the way in which it presents the economic potential of tourism, it was soon to show practically how the introduction of a rationalized industrial tourism could cure distress in economically depressed areas of the West. Noting the poverty of Achill, Co. Mayo, an article in the second issue argues that
although scenery will not feed a starving cotter at Dooagh or Dooega, we put forward the natural beauties of the ‘Isle of the Eagles’ as an available and valuable asset in the administration of its affairs that has been undertaken by the Congested Districts Board. Achill island, in our opinion, might be developed as a health and pleasure resort into a place of comparative prosperity. Its relief will certainly never be found in grain-growing; but by well-directed enterprise in the direction stated a considerable amount of ‘hard cash’ might be forced annually into that district. … A sanatorium established on the site proposed would prove a commercial success, and would also prove the pioneer project for the development of the island’s natural resources. … During the winter months the establishment might be utilized as a training school for the girls of the district as hotel and housemaids. The euphemistic ‘leave with us that historic “plethora of wealth”’ is here replaced by the frank ‘a considerable amount of “hard cash” might be forced annually into that district.’ The impression is that the exploitable natural resource of the region is not an extractable mineral or fertile soil but scenic landscape, which in providential fashion, is the given when other resources are lacking. By drawing the attention of the inhabitants in picturesque but poor regions of the West to the marketable value of the landscape (and in this case, by advocating the establishment of a kind of tourism factory), the promoters of tourism attempted to redirect their energies from agricultural production to another seasonal harvest, the tourist.

Other, more concentrated measures were advanced from other quarters. There is a synchrony between the activities of Francis J. Kilkenny’s Irish Homegoing Association in 1910 and the arrival in the country of the first wave of O’Kalems. In March 1910, The Kerryman reprinted the text of an ‘invitation note’ that the Irish Homegoing Association had ‘sent broadcast through America’:

We appeal to your patriotism and your love of country, and urge to make the trip in 1910 … We feel confident that all who go will be amply repaid and in addition many will become interested in the industries of Ireland and lend them a helping hand, and in this way assist in the great industrial movement which is now well under weigh [sic] in Ireland. The co-operation of a number of prominent Americans has been secured, and they have accomplished wonders in the way of bringing the movement to the attention of the public. Much can be done in the way of investing American money in the infant industries of Ireland. Will you be a soldier of the peaceful invasion of Ireland, or will you be one who turns a deaf ear to the cry of the motherland?

Writing from Queenstown, The Kerryman’s reporter reveals that the diasporic homecoming ‘has been arranged between May 1st and October 31st, and argues that the ‘year should mark a memorable connection between America and Ireland.’

On the SS Baltic, aboard which they departed New York for Queenstown on August 6, 1910, Olcott, Gauntier, and Hollister set about filming The Lad from Old Ireland. Like the Irish Homegoing Association, The Lad from Old Ireland imagines successful emigrants returning as tourists to help solve a crisis in what the report in The Kerryman calls ‘their real home.’ The crisis is figured dramatically in the film and metaphorically in the Homegoing Association’s invitation as a woman weeping over a familial distress: in the former case, it is Aileen’s grief at the death of her grandmother, seemingly her only family; and in the latter, it is the cry of the motherland for her infant industry.

For the diasporic Irish among the nickelodeon audiences in the United States at whom the O’Kalem films were primarily targeted, The Lad from Old Ireland offers a particularly appealing myth. Not only does it show the Irish immigrant achieving success and integrating himself into high society, it also shows him returning to
Ireland and righting the wrongs that have been left behind. Part of the power of this myth is its accessibility, and it is here that parallelism between it and the project of the Homegoing Association ends. For if for five cents at the local nickelodeon the immigrant can become absorbed by the O’Kalem myth of the power of the Irish in America and enjoy the tourist sights of Ireland, it is specifically those Irish in America who have achieved some of Terry’s financial success that are addressed by the Homegoing Association’s invitation to be tourists in Ireland. The infant industry that would benefit most directly from the arrival of large numbers of Irish Americans would, of course, be tourism.

**Notes**

1. Research for this essay was made possible by funding from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.
4. The U.S. trade press term ‘O’Kalem’ can only accurately designate the films made by Olcott, Gauntier, and their colleagues in the years 1910-12. Olcott and Gauntier left Kalem at the end of 1912 to found the Gene Gauntier Feature Players and returned to Ireland under that banner in 1913. When Olcott made his last films in Ireland in 1914, however, it was without Gauntier and for his own production company, the Sid Olcott International Feature Players. Once this is borne in mind, however, the term does provide a useful shorthand for referring to these films and filmmakers and distinguishing them from the other Kalem stock companies that were formed during this period.
12. Subsequent references to films will follow this format, placing the year the film was shot in Ireland before the U.S. release date.
18. Supplement to *The Bioscope*, 25 May 1911, p. xxv.
21. Barrington, p. 108, notes that the ‘practice of making prints – elegant but often wildly inaccurate – views of Killarney and its surroundings began about this time [1770s]. The first artist of note seems to have been Jonathan Fisher, a Dublin draper, who published six copper plate engravings of Killarney in 1770.’

Filmography

*The Lad from Old Ireland* (United States, 1910)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
Scenarist: Gene Gauntier
B/W, 824 ft.

*An Irish Honeymoon* (United States, 1911)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
Scenarist: Gene Gauntier
B/W, 950 ft.

*Rory O'More* (United States, 1911)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
Scenarist: Gene Gauntier
B/W, 761 ft.

*The Colleen Bawn* (United States, 1911)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
Scenarist: Gene Gauntier, based on Dion Boucicault’s play
B/W; 2,817 ft.
"The O’Kalems’ Visit to Killarney" (United States, 1912)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
B/W, 480 ft.

‘You Remember Ellen’ (United States, 1912)
Kalem
Director: Sidney Olcott
Scenarist: Gene Gauntier, based on Thomas Moore’s poem
B/W; 1,028 ft.

"For Ireland’s Sake" (United States, 1914)
Gene Gauntier Feature Players
Director, Scenarist: Sidney Olcott
B/W; 3,000 ft.

"Bold Emmett, Ireland’s Martyr" (United States, 1915)
Lubin
Director, Scenarist: Sidney Olcott
B/W; 3,000 ft.