

Cinema North-West and the Irish Film Institute present

*Adaptation 3*  
Edna O'Brien on Screen

28 – 30 September 2007  
Dromahair, County Leitrim

the arts  
council  
= chomhairle  
ealaíon

# Oil and Water

Now in its third year, Adaptation is delighted to welcome Edna O'Brien as this year's featured writer. Most authors who make their work available for adaptation take the arm's length approach. With good reason. While a literary work has one author, a film may have producers, financiers, screenwriter(s), not to mention the recognised author of the film - the director - all having their say. A satisfying adaptation is the product of a strange and difficult alchemy with many hands stirring the pot. In the end, it may come down to the success or otherwise of the central performances.

In this light, we not only welcome Edna O'Brien, we commend her openness in agreeing to attend this year's Adaptation. Her participation marks an important departure for the festival.

The event comes at an exciting time for this mobile cinema project. Formerly known as Leitrim Cinemobile, we are now re-launching as Cinema-North West, an initiative which will be dedicated to the provision of world cinema in the Leitrim and Sligo region. In addition to weekly screenings in Manorhamilton and Carrick-on-Shannon, the south Sligo town of Tubbercurry will host this weekly programme from October, the first fruits of Sligo County Council's five year commitment to the mobile cinema. This evolution could only have occurred through the generous commitment of Leitrim County Council in maintaining its financial support while opening up to partnership.

The cinema re-design by Donegal-based Carton Levert has been made possible by Green Box, the north-west's sustainable tourism initiative, who have responded supportively to our decision to operate the cinema on bio-energy. What, you may ask, have cinema and bio-energy got to do with each other. The answer is not so obtuse. The provision of cinema has become increasingly concentrated in large, drive-to, multi-plex establishments. The tradition - as we had in Leitrim up to the 1950s - of having a local town cinema has been dispensed with. The aim of Cinema North-West is to bring the best of world cinema to where people are. If the revitalisation of small towns and rural communities is to succeed, access to the arts will be imperative. In the years to come, Cinema North-West will be looking at further innovations to achieve this vision of a local cinema.

In the meantime enjoy the festival organised in conjunction with the Irish Film Institute. Many thanks to Alice Black for sourcing and compiling the programme of films with collaboration from Sunniva O'Flynn at the Institute's Irish Film Archive. Thanks also to the Board of Cinema North-West and in particular Joe Gilhooly, Director of Community and Enterprise at Leitrim County Council. As outgoing Company Secretary and Chairperson we leave the cinema in able hands.

**Johnny Gogan**

Board of Directors:

Lelia Doolan, Paul Kirkpatrick, Sunniva O'Flynn, Tom Walsh, Tom Weir, Hans Wieland

Thanks: Desmond Davis, Dromahair Book Club, Stanfords & Joe Fowley

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**cinema·north·west**

# Discovering Edna O'Brien on Screen

The Irish Film Institute is delighted to once again be working with Cinema North-West in organising the third Adaption festival in County Leitrim. This is the kind of collaboration all arts organisations aspire to – working as partners, with each of us bringing to the table a unique set of expertise. Key to the success of this festival is that it is very much about discovery – discovering films and television programmes long forgotten or rarely seen, discovering familiar stories and characters cast in a new light and, for those of us not fortunate enough to live there, discovering the beauty and vitality of Leitrim and the people who live there.

When we decided with Cinema North-West to celebrate the work of Edna O'Brien on screen, an initial search of her filmography revealed a treasure trove of interesting material. Ground-breaking and controversial in print, Edna O'Brien has also been very much ahead of her time as a screenwriter. Early on in her career she had begun to adapt her words for screen as well as write specifically for television and film.

Our excitement at finding out that she had worked on some of the most well-respected and innovative early television dramas quickly turned to frustration when we discovered that so many of these early programmes are now missing, lost forever. The earliest broadcasts were live, those that followed were sometimes imperfectly copied to film and subsequently junked. Later programmes were pre-recorded on early videotape. These were expensive items so the tapes were re-used by wiping the programme and replacing with another. Indeed, knowing that a considerable amount of programme material made during the first 50 years of television is simply no longer available, makes the material which we have been able to source for this programme even more precious and valuable. We are reminded again of how important film and television archives are in preserving our collective moving image heritage.

I would like to acknowledge the help and advice we had in putting this programme together from the following archives and institutions: Veronica Taylor (BFI Southbank), Kay Ward (ITV) Brid Dooley (RTÉ), Guy Worsick (BBC Motion Gallery), Dr David Rolinson (University of Hull), Ian Taylor (Sony Pictures Archive) and of course my own colleagues, Sunniva O'Flynn and Kasandra O'Connell (Irish Film Archive) and Sarah Bannan (Head of Education and Access).

The idea of gathering this rare material together has been that elements of it would be available for audiences nationwide. While the Adaption festival originates in Leitrim every year, it is important to note that each series has a life beyond its initial airing. The John McGahern programme from 2005 has in the past year shown in Dublin, Kilkenny and will soon be shown in Galway, while the William Trevor programme from 2006 will screen in County Cork next year.

I am looking forward to sharing this unique collection of television and film adaptations with the local audience in County Leitrim and it will be a great privilege to do so in the company of Edna O'Brien herself.

Please join us.

**Alice Black**  
Regional Development Manager  
Irish Film Institute



**Irish Film Institute**



# Girl with Green Eyes

Year	1964
Length	91 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Woodfall Film Productions
Director	Desmond Davis
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Cast	Rita Tushingham, Peter Finch, Lynn Redgrave

## Synopsis

Still riding high on the success of *A Taste of Honey* (1961), Rita Tushingham confirmed her status as British cinema's favourite quirky ingenue in this adaptation by Edna O'Brien of her autobiographical novel *The Lonely Girl*.

Shot on location in Dublin and Wicklow, *Girl with Green Eyes* details the exploits of a shy County Clare girl (Tushingham) and her exuberant flatmate (Lynn Redgrave) as they explore the temptations of city life.

Peter Finch gives solid support as the middle-aged writer with whom Redgrave embarks on a doomed affair. By turns sweet, sensitive and grim in the manner of much realist British cinema of the 1960s, director Desmond Davis' picture also makes stunning use of Dublin locations. Watch out for some especially poignant scenes of afternoon tea and sticky buns in Bewley's.



# The Television Playhouse: The Wedding Dress

Year	1963
Length	60 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Granada Television
Director	John McGrath
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Cast	Cyril Cusack, Hazel Hughes, Avril Elgar
Synopsis	<p>In the early days of television drama, the 'teleplay' was the jewel in television's crown. Because TV drama of this period was so dependent on stage actors, Sundays, when the theatres were closed, became its natural home.</p> <p><i>The Television Playhouse</i> series was part of the ITV's efforts to prove that commercial television could also produce drama of a high standard.</p> <p>In <i>The Wedding Dress</i>, veteran actor Cyril Cusack plays stay-at-home retired husband Mr. Berry. He puts up a notice in a local shop to sell his 'late' wife's clothes. But his wife, not being dead, starts to suspect something isn't right as her belongings disappear, one by one from the wardrobe.</p>

# A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers




Year	1975
Length	50 minutes
Country	Ireland
Production Company	Radio Telefís Éireann / RTE
Producer	Shelah Richards
Cast	Siobhan McKenna, Eoin O'Suilleabhain, Marie Kean, Eileen Murphy, Edward Byrne, Harry Brogan, Amber Bourne.
Synopsis	<p><i>A Cheap Bunch Of Nice Flowers</i> was Edna O'Brien's first play published in 1963 and explores O'Brien's common theme of personal loneliness, loss and frustration in the lives of Irish women. This adaptation, directed by Shelah Richards for RTÉ tells the story of a feminist woman who is dying of cancer. Her unmarried daughter, delusional, fantasises that she has become pregnant by her mother's lover and refuses to accept her mother's illness.</p>



# Public Interview - Edna O'Brien

4.30pm | Ballroom | Abbey Manor Hotel | Dromahair

Edna O'Brien in conversation with broadcaster  
and film-maker Lelia Doolan



*"It angered a lot of people, including my own family. It was banned; it was called a smear on Irish womanhood. A priest in our parish asked from the altar if anyone who had bought copies would bring them to the chapel grounds. That evening there was a little burning. My mother said women fainted, and I said maybe it was the smoke. When I wrote my second book 'The Lonely Girls', the opinion was the first was a prayer book by comparison. My mother had gone though the book and inked out any offending words.*

*So I was made to feel ashamed, made to feel I had done something wrong. It's hard enough to write a book at all; you have to dig and dig and dig into your unconscious, come up with some kind of story, and language, emotion, music. And you'd like a small amount of support from someone you knew. So if you have any degree of self-protection at all, you get out of that place, if you're going to keep writing."*

City Arts, San Francisco



Year	1971
Length	110 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Columbia Pictures
Director	Brian G. Hutton
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Cast	Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Caine, Susannah York
Synopsis	<p>An upper-crust couple living the high-life in post-60s London, Zee (Elizabeth Taylor) and Robert Blakely's (Michael Caine) love-hate relationship is beginning to leave Robert longing for something more. Setting his sights on unassuming country girl Stella (Susannah York), Zee soon catches on and quickly begins scheming to bring the newfound romance crashing to the ground.</p> <p>Elizabeth Taylor gives her fans their money's worth with her all-out, often vulgar, but totally committed performance. Edna O'Brien's screenplay - which the writer has said was mauled in the filming and editing - has much more than the requisite number of zingers in its excellently bitchy dialogue; at times, it also has something to say about the emptiness of contemporary life and the difficulties people have really relating to each other.</p>





# I Was Happy Here

Year	1965
Length	91 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Partisan Productions / The Rank Organisation
Director	Desmond Davis
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Cast	Sarah Miles, Julian Glover, Cyril Cusack, Sean Caffrey, Marie Kean
Synopsis	<p>A young Irishwoman, Cass, escapes from an arid marriage to her doctor husband Matthew in London and returns to her fishing-port home of Lahinch in the West of Ireland. Little has changed in Lahinch, and Cass soon encounters Colin, her old sweetheart who failed to follow her when she left for London years before. When Matthew turns up in Lahinch, however, it seems Cass's attempts to capture her past and her old love will prove more difficult than she thought.</p> <p><i>I Was Happy Here</i> was scripted by Edna O'Brien from her own short story, 'A Woman by the Seaside', and was directed by Desmond Davis. Irish regulars Cyril Cusack and Marie Kean both provide striking cameos as the hotel proprietor and the barmaid.</p>

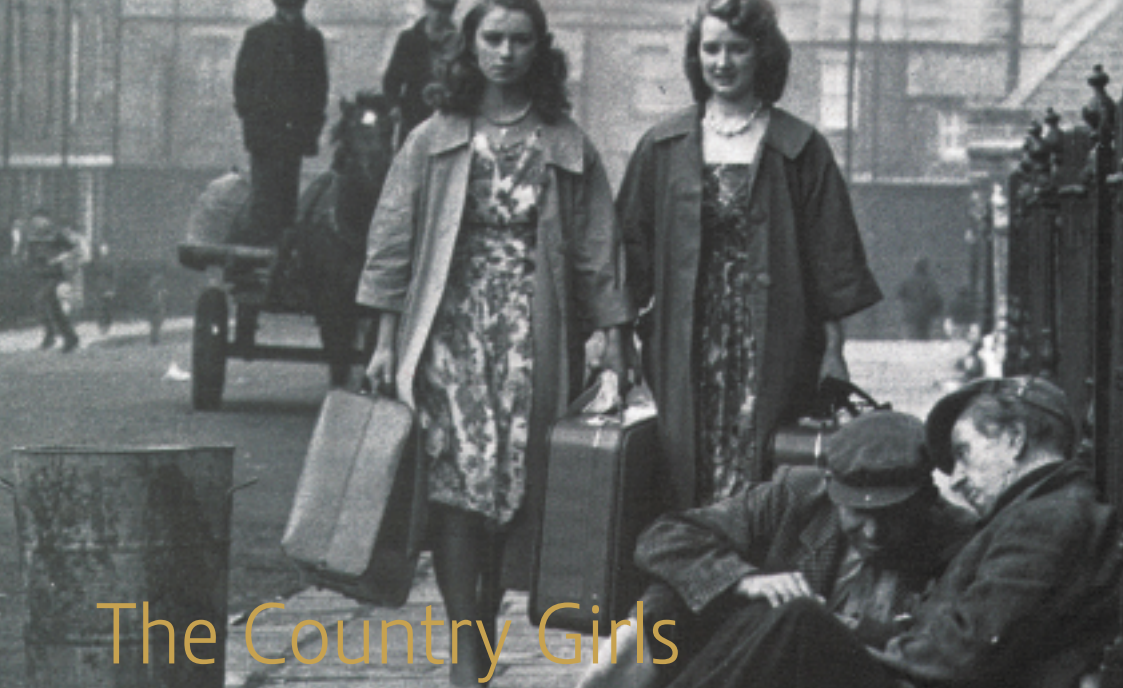


# Aquarius: Mother Ireland

Year	1976
Length	50 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	LWT
Director	Derek Bailey
Interviewee	Edna O'Brien
Synopsis	Edna O'Brien revisits her childhood home town of Scariff in County Clare, where she reads from her first non-fiction book <i>Mother Ireland</i> and talks to Russell Harty about growing up in the west of Ireland: her schooling, experience of religion, music, drinking and the difference between life then and her current existence as a novelist living in London.

# The Dazzle

Year	1981
Length	30 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Granada Television
Director	June Wyndham-Davies
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Synopsis	A short story for children written and read by Edna O'Brien, with graphics by Valerie Pye and Michael Richardson and illustrations by Peter Stevenson. This is the beautiful story of Tim and how his new found friend Mattie, a mouse, teaches him to overcome his fear of everyday objects.



# The Country Girls

Year	1984
Length	108 minutes
Country	U.K.
Production Company	Channel 4 / London Film Productions
Director	Desmond Davis
Screenplay	Edna O'Brien
Cast	Sam Neil, Maeve Germaine, Jill Doyle, John Kavanagh, Niall Tobin
Synopsis	<p>The prequel to <i>Girl with Green Eyes</i> sees Maeve Germaine and Jill Boyle take the roles of schoolgirl friends Kate and Baba. Both girls yearn to escape lives of mediocrity and routine and their boisterous antics lead to their expulsion from their convent school. Sam Neill plays the solicitor Mr Gentleman who introduces the teenage Kate to the world of adult relationships.</p> <p>Edna O'Brien's tale of life in rural '50s Ireland is both charming and witty, poignantly exploring friendship, first love and hope.</p>

*The Country Girls* will be introduced by Marian Quinn, whose *32A* won Best First Feature Award at this year's Galway Film Fleadh.

# Edna O'Brien

Edna O'Brien's rural Ireland is a place of limitations. The countryside, with its changing seasons, intrudes little on characters who drift through life in an aimless fashion, half-believing that somewhere out there things might be better. In the opening novel of what would become *The Country Girls* Trilogy, O'Brien invites us into a world that is determinedly de-romanticised. Although *The Country Girls* (written in 1960) opens in a traditional Irish farmhouse, with its smell of frying bacon and the dew lying on the lawn, we soon realise that the day that is dawning for the novel's protagonist, Caitheleen, is, like so many others, to be determined by the return or otherwise of her wandering, alcoholic father. Barely managing to put a brave face on things, Caitheleen's mother is weary, old before her time and indeed will soon be carried off, again before her time, as she drowns in the river that was supposed to enable her brief escape from home.

Caitheleen's friendship with the spiteful, limited Baba is defined by income, as are so many relationships in this world. So often it is through the small details that the real truths emerge: watching Baba's mother, herself a drinker, dish out the trifle, with its slice of peach, glacé cherry and cut banana sliding among the uneven lumps of sponge cake, Caitheleen is reminded of her own mother making do with a small portion while she helps the food to her menfolk and daughter; her mouth waters - only to hear Baba tell her own mother that their guest won't eat trifle. Later, during their first meal at the convent, Caitheleen is revolted to find a slug in her cabbage. Nothing improves after that. As Caitheleen's body develops – what does it mean to be Rubenesque? she wonders – so does her romantic attachment to the sad, elegant and remote Mr Gentleman. His real name is du Maurier, a hint perhaps that we should consider him little more than a fictional off-shoot of other elegant debonairs.

Removing her country girls to sixties Dublin brings a change in the novel's tempo. 'I knew now that this was the place I wanted to be,' Caitheleen realises, 'For evermore I would be restless for crowds and lights and noise. I had gone from the sad noises, the lonely rain pelting on the galvanized roof of the chicken-house; the moans of a cow in the night, when her calf was being born under a tree.' O'Brien's Dublin pulsates with the liberation of the new era; it offers work and money, strangers and temptations, dance music and ice-cream parlours. Caitheleen and Baba are instantly at home.

By the time her novels had been made into films, Edna O'Brien was an internationally recognised author; in her home country she was just as notorious.

Ultimately, the whole *The Country Girls* Trilogy was banned in Ireland as were most of O'Brien's novels in the sixties. O'Brien has said of *The Country Girls* that it was in part autobiographical and that Caitheleen and Baba reflected two sides of her own youthful self. Like their creator, the two girls move to London (which is where *Girl with Green Eyes* ends) and in another mirroring, they marry but unhappily. In the summer of 1954, O'Brien moved with her husband, the Czech/Irish writer Ernest Gébler, and two sons to London from where, in 1964, they were divorced. London too is the setting of her early excursion into writing for cinema, *Zee & Co* (aka *X, Y, & Zee*), directed in 1971 by Brian Hutton and starring Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Caine and Susannah York. Displaying a chameleon-like ability to absorb the mores of her adopted culture, O'Brien turned her anthropologist's eye to the bitter role-playing that structures the marriages and loves of her swinging London characters.

Since then she has lived in London but has continued to write about and comment on the changes in Ireland as the country moved swiftly from the Catholic state in which her early novels were set into the present.

'They used to ban my books,' O'Brien told an interviewer in 1986, 'but now when I go there, people are courteous to my face, though rather slanderous behind my back. Then again, Ireland has changed. There are a lot of young people who are irreligious, or less religious. Ironically, they wouldn't be interested in my early books - they would think them gauche. They are aping English and American mores. If I went to a dance hall in Dublin now I would feel as alien as in a disco in Oklahoma.'

O'Brien has remained fascinated, above all, by human relationships, whether amongst her Irish characters or those of her adoptive England. She alternates between novels, non-fiction (a study of James Joyce and Nora Barnacle's marriage – *James and Nora* – followed by a biography of Joyce), essays – the autobiographical collection, *Mother Ireland* written in 1976 - and plays and screenplays. *I Was Happy Here* was written as a screenplay; *Zee & Co* was adapted by O'Brien from her own novel while the screenplay for *Three Into Two Won't Go*, directed by Peter Hall in 1968, was adapted from a novel by Andrea Newman. O'Brien also worked on another adapted screenplay for the film, *Il Sorriso del Grande Tentatore*, directed by Damiano Damiani in 1973.

The best-known screen adaptations of O'Brien's novels are: *Girl with Green Eyes* (from the novel *The Lonely Girl*) in 1963 and *The Country Girls* in 1983. These, with *I Was Happy Here*, made in 1965, were all directed by English director, Desmond Davis. Davis was born in London in 1926 and cut his teeth in film working with Tony Richardson on three of the key 'kitchen sink' dramas of the 1960s – *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *Tom Jones* (1963). *Girl with Green Eyes* was made for Richardson's Woodfall company and is evidently influenced by the new realism of the decade, particularly with its fondness for location and its intense awareness of the pleasures of city life. The casting of iconic British actor, Rita Tushingham, cements this connection as does the leisurely performance of Peter Finch as the louche writer, Eugene. Yet, this and Davis' other films with O'Brien are strongly aware of their Irish themes. Aside from the main characters, all the smaller parts are played by the best-known of the Irish stage and screen names of the period, including Eileen Crowe and Harry Brogan, as well as rising stars such as Eamonn Morrissey in a small part. Davis continued this practice with *I Was Happy Here* in which Sarah Miles stars alongside Cyril Cusack and Marie Kean. If *Girl with Green Eyes* saw the country girls move to London, *I Was Happy Here* imagines what might have happened had O'Brien returned to their lives one more time.

In the story, Cass comes back home to Ireland after an unhappy marriage and is pursued by her bully of a husband, Matthew Langdon, played by Julian Glover. Where Dublin once provided a happy counterpoint to the dreary Irish countryside, now London is the lonely home of the naïve Irish girl who left believing her lover would follow her.

*The Country Girls* was one of the first feature films funded and distributed by Channel 4 and returned Davis to Irish themes after a stint working on television programmes ranging from *The New Avengers* to Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure* in 1979. In this Sam Neill takes the role of



Mr Gentleman, the original of O'Brien's self-absorbed older seducers and although Maeve Germaine appeared in little else, the secondary roles are once more a 'who's who' of acting talent, including Des Nealon and John Kavanagh, as well as Agnes Bernelle as the stout Joanna. Davis is a sympathetic director of women and his sensitivities to O'Brien's work are evident in the trilogy of films. His heroines are always carefully shown to be at best misguided but always innocent and the camera treats them with some respect while making sure that they hold the narratives together. Whether it is the faded seaside setting of *I Was Happy Here* or the Dublin of the 1960s in *Girl with Green Eyes*, with its dance bands, corner shops, glimpses of the Pepper Cannister Church and the Liffey running through the city's heart, or the lost meadows of *The Country Girls*, Davis pulls the background into the foreground, making it part of the story. One of the pleasures of these films for contemporary audiences is their use of Irish locations, many of them now so altered as to be unrecognisable.

Given their intimacy and their modest settings, Edna O'Brien's stories seem tailor-made for television and she has indeed been widely adapted. Some of these productions have come from surprising sources, notably *Which Of These Two Ladies Is He Married To?* (1967) and *Nothing's Ever Over* (1968), both made for television by the hard-hitting British director, Alan Clarke, now best remembered for *Scum* (1979) and *Made in Britain* (1983). In 1975, an adaptation of *A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers* was produced by actress, Sheelagh Richards for RTÉ, again boasting the riches of the Irish acting community in its cast, and in the same year, O'Brien's *Irish Revel* was adapted for RTÉ's *Thursday Play Date* slot.

Edna O'Brien wrote and then, in 1979, adapted the story, *The Hard Way*, a film about a mercenary assassin who retires home to Ireland but is asked to carry out one last job. On this occasion, she was tempted into taking a performing role in the production, her only to date. In 1981 Helen Mirren starred in a BBC Playhouse version of *Mrs Reinhardt* directed by Piers Haggard. Although not all of these productions have been preserved, audiences for this festival are lucky that a copy of Edna O'Brien's early television play, *The Wedding Dress*, from 1963 is available for viewing. With a characteristically guileless performance from Cyril Cusack at its centre, this is a real rediscovered treasure.

Edna O'Brien has remained a controversial writer, causing something of a furore most recently with her publication of *In the Forest* in 2002. A dramatisation of the Brendan O'Donnell murders of 1994 when Imelda Riney and her son Liam were murdered, along with Father Joe Walsh, the book was met with some hostility by those who felt that her treatment was inappropriate.

She has received several literary awards, including the Kingsley Amis Award for fiction in 1962, the Yorkshire Post Novel Award in 1971, and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 1990 for *Lantern Slides*, a collection of short stories, set primarily in Ireland.

**Ruth Barton**

# Edna O'Brien on Screen

**The Country Girls** (1984) TV

**Love - 'Julia'** (1982)

**BBC2 Playhouse: Mrs. Reinhardt** (1981) TV

**A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers** (1975) TV

**Them and Now** (1973) TV

**Il Sorriso del Grande Tentatore** (1973)

**Zee & Co.** (1972)

**Three Into Two Won't Go** (1969)

**Half Hour Story: Nothing's ever over** (1968) TV

**Which of These Two Ladies Is He Married To?** (1967) TV

**I Was Happy Here** (1965)

**Armchair Theatre: The Keys of the Cafè** (1965) TV

**Girl with Green Eyes** (1964)

**Love Story: Three Piece Suite** (1964) TV

**The Television Playhouse: The Wedding Dress** (1963) TV

# Programme

## Friday 28 September, Main Street, Dromahair

20:00 Festival launch followed by screening of  
*Girl with Green Eyes* | Desmond Davis | 1964 | 91 minutes

## Saturday 29 September, Main Street, Dromahair

14:00 *The Television Playhouse: The Wedding Dress*  
John McGrath | 1963 | 60 minutes | Free Admission

15:00 *A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers*  
1975 | Shelah Richards | 50 minutes

16:30 Public Interview with Edna O'Brien at the Abbey Manor Hotel

19:00 *I Was Happy Here* | Desmond Davis | 1965 | 91 minutes

21:00 *Zee and Co.* | Brian G. Hutton | 1971 | 110 minutes

## Sunday 30 September, Main Street, Dromahair

14:00 *The Dazzle* | June Wyndham-Davies | 1981 | 30 minutes | Free Admission

*Aquarius: Mother Ireland* | Derek Bailey | 1976 | 50 minutes | Free Admission

18:00 *The Country Girls* | Desmond Davis | 1984 | 108 minutes

## Children's Programme

Sat 16:00 *Charlotte's Web* | 2 hrs

Sun 16:00 *Pirates of the Carribean: At World's End* | 2 hrs

All Tickets: €5 Festival Ticket: €30 Collection before screening  
Booking: 086-3173075/086-8221139 or Online at [www.irishfilm.ie](http://www.irishfilm.ie)



The advertisement features a scenic background of a green landscape under a blue sky. On the left, there are three overlapping photographs: the top one shows two people hiking with backpacks on a grassy hill; the middle one is a close-up of a small bird perched on a branch; the bottom one shows a group of people in a red canoe on a body of water. On the right, the 'Greenbox' logo is displayed, consisting of a stylized green and red leaf above the word 'Greenbox' in a large, sans-serif font, with 'Ireland's Ecotourism Destination' in a smaller font below it. Further down, text mentions being shortlisted for the World Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2007 and highly commended in the Best Destination Category of the First Choice Responsible Tourism Awards 2006. The website 'www.greenbox.ie' is listed, followed by a description of the holidays as 'Small scale, low impact, culturally sensitive and community orientated eco holidays.'

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