

Colm Bairéad about THE QUIET GIRL

“Compassion, attention and love, ultimately”

Cáit, a 9 year old girl from an overcrowded, dysfunctional family in rural Ireland, is sent for the summer to live with distant relatives when her pregnant mother’s due date approaches. Cáit has learnt to hide in plain sight from those around her, but in the care of her foster parents, she blossoms... until she discovers a painful truth.

One of the best films at this year’s Berlinale was Colm Bairéad’s debut THE QUIET GIRL, which won the Grand Prize of the Generation Kplus Int’l Jury and an Honourable Mention of the Children’s Jury. One month later this touching coming-of-age drama was awarded a total of 8 prizes at the Irish Film & Television Festival.

Colm Bairéad: The film is quite a faithful adaptation of Claire Keegan’s much beloved short story FOSTER (2009) in which she is constantly showing how beauty and ugliness coexist in very close proximity. I immediately fell in love with it. Two years prior to having read the book I became a father myself for the first time and I got a

kind of new understanding of what it is that a child needs and deserves in life: compassion, attention and love, ultimately. The most attractive thing to me as a filmmaker was the strong sense of point of view. The story is written in the present tense with a first person narrator – all is seen through the eyes of the girl – and I longed to bring her to life as it were. I was immediately drawn to Cáit’s sensual character and wanted to see if I could translate her particular point of view into the language of film. For me, the old question ‘Whose story is this?’ is the starting point for all filmmaking. I was particularly drawn to the smallness of the story; the lack of plot felt like an intriguing challenge to me.

Up from the beginning till the bittersweet end, when Cáit is shouting “Dad” – meaning not her own father – every one of your wonderful visuals seems to contain a little secret. Like in the opening shot, when we finally discover the small figure of a girl who’s not responding



to the loud calls. She might as well be dead... Until she rises and starts moving.

Bairéad: The opening shot is an estimation of the theme of the film, which is the story of a young girl coming to life when discovering a new way of living. We decided the camera should never leave Cáit, always be with her. For instance when father drives her to her aunt’s place we don’t see anything outside the backseat of the car.

How did you come to your profession?

Bairéad: With my father being a German language teacher, I grew up with German television. We used to watch lots of early classics, like silent films by Fritz Lang, Chaplin’s CITY LIGHTS or John Huston’s THE MALTESE FALCON. As a teenager I made some short films

myself, or with a friend. Later I studied Film & Broadcasting at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Dublin was the place to be?

Bairéad: That is where I was born and raised bilingually in both Irish and English. The Irish language, spoken by a minority in rural parts of the country, is close to my heart. My wife and I also raised our children bilingually. In 2012 we both founded the Irish production company Inscéal. For us, the success of THE QUIET GIRL, with Irish as the main spoken language, is truly a gift.

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Uta Beth