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University of Dayton

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ST. PATRICK'S DAY IMAGES OF IRISH ARE FUN BUT FLAWED, SAYS UD EXPERT

They aren't just the Irish who are Irish on St. Patrick's Day, says Jim Farrelly, professor of English at the University of Dayton. Each year on March 17, the Irish population soars as people — regardless of heritage — become Irish for a day in what Farrelly calls the “St. Patrick's Day syndrome.”

“There are a lot of generally accepted stereotypes about the Irish, and one of them is that the Irish are a happy group of people who love to celebrate and love to drink,” he said. “And we all want to be a part of that. Did you ever notice that everybody is Irish on St. Patrick's Day? They wear green and put on their 'kiss me, I'm Irish' buttons and go out and drink. It's a great excuse to celebrate and have fun.

“The problem is that the stereotypes aren't true.” he said. “There are many sides to the Irish legacy, and some of them aren't so happy and aren't so pretty. But people don’t want to know the true Irish. They don't want to know the cost of (foreign) occupation or the impact of the famine on the country and its people. They just want to hold on to the imaginary view.”

Farrelly, whose parents were both born in Ireland, is currently exploring Irish heritage and identity as seen and presented by filmmakers in “Irish on Film,” a first-time English undergraduate offering at UD. Although the films are all fairly new — the oldest is John Huston's The Dead, released in 1987 — they are based on a mix of classic and contemporary texts. By exploring and discussing the films with his students, Farrelly hopes to “launch a war on stereotypes,” he said.

Those who want to more deeply explore issues of Irish identity on their own can start with a quick read of Thomas Cahill's How the Irish Saved Civilization and build to Paddy Logue’s collection, Being Irish: Personal Reflections on Irish Identity Today, Farrelly said. Other good texts include Fintan O'Toole’s The Lie of the Land: Irish Identity and James Charles Roy’s disturbing The Back of Beyond: A Search for the Soul of Ireland, he said.

“Films to watch and enjoy include John Ford’s classics, The Informer (1935) and The Quiet Man (1952), David Lean’s Ryan’s Daughter (1970), Jim Sheridan’s The Field (1990), and Alan Parker’s The Commitments (1991).”

For those who prefer surfing the Web, two good places to start are http://www.hoganstand.com/general identity and http://www.acisweb.com/irlink.html.

Farrelly will also teach an abbreviated version of “Irish on Film” to adults age 50 and older through the University's Institute for Learning in Retirement spring program, which will run March 21 through May 9. To register or for fee and other information, call (937) 229-2347.

For more information, call Jim Farrelly at (937) 229-3435.