

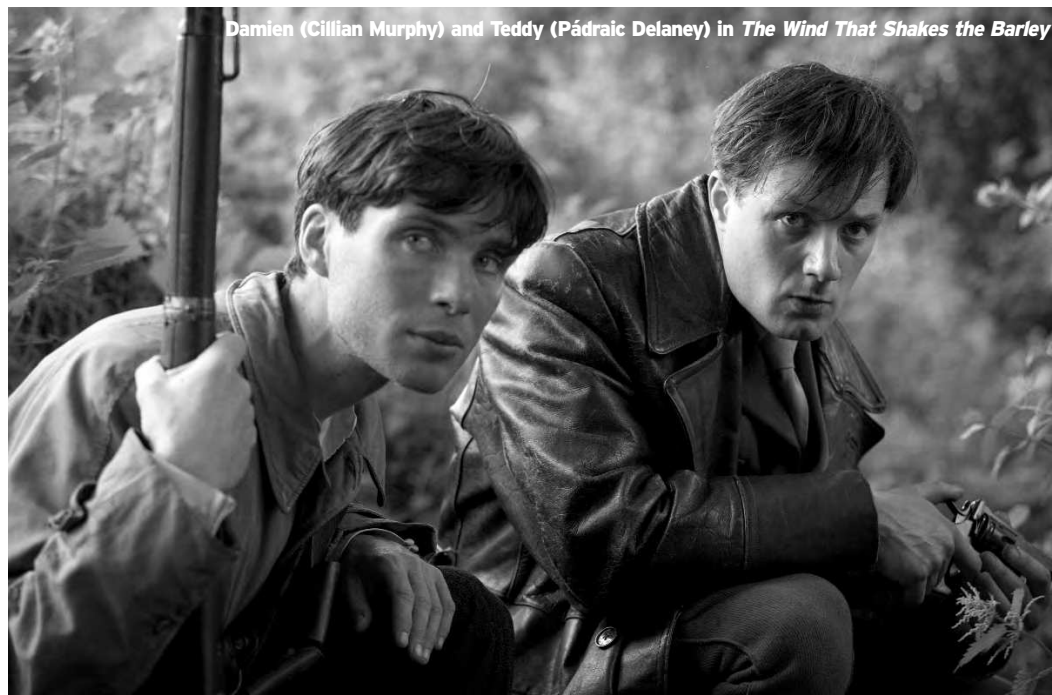
Winds of Change

Hardly a moment to mourn

THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY: Directed by Ken Loach. Screenplay by Paul Laverty. Cinematography, Barry Ackroyd. Music, George Fenton. Starring Cillian Murphy, Pádraic Delaney, Liam Cunningham and Orla Fitzgerald. IFC First Take, 2007. Not rated. 124 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

The *Wind that Shakes the Barley*, the latest film from acclaimed and highly political director Ken Loach, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival last year. A well-crafted film that's anchored by a nicely understated performance from the Cillian Murphy (you've seen his unearthly cheekbones in *Batman Begins* and *28 Days Later*), *Barley* is visually rich within its dark, damp palette of greens, browns and grays. It's a look at a period that may have more than a few viewers reaching for their history books (or at least clicking over to Wikipedia): the Irish War of Independence.

Yet *Barley* is, despite all this, a peculiarly distant film that wears purpose on its sleeve in a slightly offputting manner, directing the viewer's attention toward the filmmaker's intent and away from the film's slight characters and its occasionally jumpy storytelling. Like Clint Eastwood's *Letters From Iwo Jima*, it gives little sense of the broader scope of the conflict, focusing solely on a small group of men who are shocked into joining the fight against British rule after a brutal murder. In one sense, this works well, emphasizing the film's verité aspects. But while *Barley* limits its perspective to these dozen or so fighters, it



Damien (Cillian Murphy) and Teddy (Pádraic Delaney) in *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*

only fleshes out two of them: brothers Damien and Teddy O'Donovan (Murphy and Pádraic Delaney).

Gradually, it becomes clear that Loach and screenwriter Paul Laverty are leaving the other men blank as a means of illustrating the experience of soldiers in a war, and the way death becomes something to accept swiftly, with hardly a moment to mourn. This, along with the eventual fighting among the Irish, who disagree forcefully about a treaty signed with the Brits, underscores Loach's timeliness: He clearly made this film at this moment for a reason. As we almost never see the bigger picture, the war depicted in *Barley* feels both small and universal, intimate and detached. Maybe, as with the formless characters, this is Loach's intent — to remind us that a war, no matter how far away it is in time or space, is still right in front of us, its violence breeding retribution. But without a sense of connection to the characters, or to a truly compelling narrative arc, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* remains solid and remote, a slice of history that's forgotten some piece of its heart. **EW**

The Wind That Shakes the Barley opens Friday, June 8, at the Bijou.

Down to the Earth

NORTHWEST PASSAGE: The Birth of Portland's D.I.Y Culture: Directed by Mike Lastra. Featuring Poison Idea, Smegma, Wipers, Dead Kennedys and more. Independently released, 2006. Not rated. 88 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Mike Lastra's *Northwest Passage* feels a bit like an accidental film. Lastra is dubbed a "video pioneer" on the DVD case, and this shows in the arty effects that appear in his footage from live shows in the late 1970s through early 1980s. But though *Passage* is filled out with interviews and montages, in large part it's a concert film. Lastra includes entire songs performed live by a host of bands that combined to form a musical movement in Portland. The problem with this is simple: If you weren't there — weren't one of those people picking up an instrument because it didn't seem that hard — you likely won't find much to appreciate in Lastra's nostalgic, music-heavy film.

Passage is a well-meant piece, and the musicians interviewed (including Jello Biafra, Tom Roberts of Poison Idea and, very briefly, Kurt Cobain) seem happy to talk about the period. News clips add some humor as anchors in deliciously bad glasses talk about the "punks" and interview fans. But late in the film, one of Lastra's interviewees points out a truth of the era that explains why *Passage* doesn't feel like a vital piece of music history: The punk movement was happening everywhere, and on a large scale it was hugely important. But a great number of the individual bands were forgettable. (When the Dead Kennedys take the stage at the Earth Tavern, the setting for much of the live footage, you can see in an instant why they weren't forgettable.) As it doesn't satisfyingly connect Portland to the larger punk movement, or locate punk on a larger musical landscape, *Northwest Passage* is more memento than portrait. (Opening Friday at the Bijou.) — *Molly Templeton*

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