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LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland, by Páraic Kerrigan. Routledge, 2021, 192 pp.

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22 May 2015, when the Irish people overwhelmingly voted to enshrine the right to marry for same sex couples in their country's constitution, is a nodal point in modern Irish history and a key date for the larger, international LGBTQ rights movement. Internationally, this made Ireland the first country to enact such reforms by popular vote. Domestically, the 62% Yes vote has now come to be viewed as the turning of a historical page and the end of any feeling, among the LGBTQ community, of cultural or national exclusion (Bird; Murphy). This keystone event was followed by other markers of progressive modernity. Two months after the referendum, in July 2015, the Irish government passed the "Gender Recognition Act 2015", which meant that the law no longer required any medical intervention for anyone wishing to legally change their gender. Two years later, Ireland would become the fourth country in the world to have an openly gay leader, when Leo Varadkar was voted in as Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) by his party, Fine Gael.

The heady period of progress to which these events belong are seen by many as proof positive that the era of the old, oppressive, near total influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish society had well and truly passed (Ferriter; Kirby et al.). It is, however, this past era that is the site of study for Páraic Kerrigan in *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland*, a monograph that charts the uneven process of attaining visibility for LGBTQ people in Irish-produced television over a period of thirty-four years, from 1974 to 2008. Kerrigan studies what he terms the "tug of war" dynamics (4)—between a varied multitude of social actors and influences from the media, political, religious and LGBTQ activism spheres—which lay behind the mottled evolution of LGBTQ visibility on Irish-produced television.

Kerrigan's intervention with this book fits well into a larger and growing corpus of scholarly study that is concerned—to varying degrees—with LGBTQ visibility in Irish media. Allison MacLeod's and Fintan Walsh's respective work on LGBTQ visibility is concerned primarily with cinema whereas Patrick McDonagh's comprehensive *Gay and Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973–1993* is an excellent primer but one which is squarely concerned with activism and its focus is on a larger arena than the media alone. Kerrigan's monograph neatly occupies a gap in the literature, focusing almost exclusively on the representation of Irish LGBTQ identity on television produced in Ireland.

Another nodal point in Irish gay history, one that stands in counterpoint to the 2015 triumph of the Marriage Equality referendum, is 19 September 1982, when a 31-year-old gay man, Declan Flynn, was set upon and murdered at nighttime by a gang of five youths in a Dublin park. The murder and the ensuing trial, which failed to send the killers to prison, is

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widely credited as being a catalyst that emboldened and further politicised the Irish gay rights movement. The first Gay Pride parade in Ireland was to happen in Dublin just three years later. The period covered in Kerrigan's book begins some seven years prior to the Flynn murder, extending back through the only three explicit representations of queer experience in Irish television to the point of utter invisibility in 1974.

From the first explicit instance of queer visibility produced by Irish television in 1975, Kerrigan's book approaches its subject with a methodology that combines textual analysis of televisual artefacts (and the contemporaneous press coverage of those artefacts) with a significant amount of oral history, gathering exclusive retrospective testimony from key actors of the day, in both the media and activist spheres, in a bid to uncover "the processes of decision-making around representation and visibility" (19). This process of uncovering reveals the contours of the previously mentioned "tug of war" nature of advances being made in LGBTQ visibility in Irish-produced television throughout the years, at the heart of which is a perpetual tension for LGBTQ activists between the gains made in visibility and the "cost" of those images, meaning the necessary respectability and mainstreaming that had to be adhered to and performed as a condition of representation. Kerrigan deconstructs that core tension very well and explicates the various strategies and impulses that undergirded or activated it: modes of representation (in addition to respectability politics and mainstreaming of queer identity) such as the confessional address; the use of televisual spectacle; and the generation of counterpublics such as the queer indie press, most specifically during the period when Irish mainstream media was struggling and failing to represent HIV/AIDS.

The arena of power in which LGBTQ visibility is perpetually negotiated and renegotiated tends to be presented here as an oppositional binary between the broadcasting orthodoxies of the Irish public service broadcaster (RTÉ) on one side and the various Irish LGBTQ activist organs on the other, which chipped away at and reshaped that orthodoxy. This binary, while useful as a basis to make various larger points, belies a far more complex landscape of interlinking power interests—ecclesiastical, governmental, economic—that shape, restrict and compel the broadcasting policy that the LGBTQ activists had to negotiate.

LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland subdivides the thirty-four years it takes as its focus into five periods of time, organised chronologically as chapters. In Chapter Two, Kerrigan looks at LGBTQ activism and queer visibility in Irish television from 1974 to 1980, a period of time which (as mentioned earlier) yielded just three explicit representations of queer experience on Irish-produced TV. Through close analysis of the three programmes in question—all of which belong to the category of current affairs—various strategies and consequences of queer visibility are established, including mainstreaming queerness as a tactic; the deployment of respectability politics as a means to trigger viewer sympathy; and the prevalence of the confessional mode of address—strategies and consequences that remained components of queer visibility on Irish television for the remainder of the years covered by the book. Chapter Three, which covers the 1980 to 1989 period, moves the focus onto *The Late Late Show*, RTÉ's flagship live talk show, which is widely considered to have been a key lever for progressive social change in Ireland (Ferriter; O'Brien). The chapter takes three instances of queer visibility in that decade: the first openly lesbian person on Irish TV in 1980; a pair of US-based, lesbian ex-nuns in 1985; and a panel debate on homosexuality in 1989, exploring the mechanics of queer visibility and LGBTQ activism on *The Late Late Show*, a televisual platform at the very heart of the Irish mainstream. Chapter Four deals with the violent shift in queer visibility and its coding that happened on Irish television with the arrival of the AIDS epidemic. Considering 1983 to 1994, Kerrigan explores the regression that occurred in the tone

and type of representation of LGBTQ visibility on Irish television but he also brings into focus certain structural changes, such as the creation of the Independent Production Unit (IPU) in RTÉ, which created the possibility for the commissioning of more sympathetic or queer-centred perspectives in HIV/AIDS-related documentaries by that unit.

1994, the year that homosexuality was legalised in Ireland, represents the central pivot in the book's overall period of coverage. Chapters Five and Six are concerned with the post-1994 landscape and leave the factual treatment of homosexuality behind to take the emerging LGBTQ visibility in Irish-produced fictional television as a focus. Chapter Five is concerned with Irish television's nervous and wobbly beginnings in representing same-sex attraction in sitcoms and soap operas; the main take-away being that while gay characters were now welcome, they were asked to leave their sex lives at the door. Chapter Six concludes the book's chronological close study by focusing on how radical and fundamental transformations—in both Ireland's economy and the global system of television production and distribution—fundamentally (re)shaped and evolved LGBTQ representations being produced by Irish television. Again, the focus here is on queer visibility in scripted, fictional output but now it is shown to be operating in a much more confident context of domestic legalisation and is in conscious, international dialogue with LGBTQ visibilities and representations eddying in from international markets.

While nominally a study of the evolution of LGBTQ visibility in Irish-produced television and the various mechanisms and strategies by which that visibility was occasioned, *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* is, in a larger sense, about social change in a fairly unique cultural and political context in western Europe: the gradual move of a small, once-colonised polity away from a protectionist, de facto theocratic sociopolitical context toward a secular, globalised, more capitalistic one. Kerrigan does an excellent job of keeping this ever-evolving macro-level backdrop in the picture as he moves his close analysis of Irish television from the 1970s through the decades to the early 2000s. The book achieves a keen blend of textual analysis (of televisual artefacts and their attendant, contemporary press coverage) as well as specific interviews undertaken by the author with key players in the media and LGBTQ-activist spheres who were active at various junctures in the period covered by the book. These interviews, which amount to a kind of oral history of LGBTQ television visibility, are all retrospective in nature and bring with them the richness of the interviewees' retrospective analyses, which Kerrigan deftly blends with his own.

The book's stated focus is on LGBTQ visibility in Irish-produced television and yet Irish language television is utterly absent from that focus. The aborted gay kiss of RTÉ's Soap Opera *Fair City*, so well analysed in Chapter Five, was aired in 1996, around the same time that Irish language public service broadcaster, Teilifís na Gaeilge (now called TG4), aired the first full, on-screen gay kiss, as part of its flagship soap opera, *Ros na Rún*. Irish language texts, going as far back (and beyond) the racy, sex-positive eighteenth-century dream vision poem, *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* ("The Midnight Court") by Brian Merriman, have often been able to achieve a level of sexual candour and explicitness because of their being expressed in a minoritised language which can "fly under the radar" of the mores and moral police of the cultural mainstream (Mac Risteaird 64).

Kerrigan's analyses of power and power negotiations between activists and television producers is excellent, particularly in the chapters covering the 1970s and 1980s; a rare and intimate look into a kind of expedience politics adopted by LGBTQ activists as a means to gain media visibility: a *realpolitik* of sorts, by which narrow, "palatable" versions of homosexual

existence ("respectable" middle class males; monogamous domesticated couples, etc.) were offered to the public broadcaster in exchange for a toehold of media visibility. Elsewhere, the book explores how media producers and LGBTQ activists found common ground through the use of the sensationalised "TV media event," and used it repeatedly for mutual benefit: the broadcaster for higher ratings and associated advertising revenue, the LGBTQ activists for larger platforming and mainstreaming of LGBTQ existence on television.

The "dual reception" nature of the pre-satellite/cable, analogue Irish television landscape (14)—whereby many Irish households received terrestrial TV channels from both Ireland and the neighbouring UK—is mentioned several times throughout the book. It may have been necessary, for the purposes of the research, to disengage with the "foreign" media texts coming from the UK via this "dual reception" context in order to focus solely on the Irish-produced texts. However, for many Irish TV viewers of the time, these British texts were circulating contemporaneously and in the same cultural ether as the specific Irish televisual texts this book has taken as case studies. Such an extraction and isolation of the Irish texts from the "dual reception" context in which they were originally broadcast, might risk skewing our perception of viewer consumption and understanding of those texts. In this regard, the predominance of American media theory and televisual texts leaned on in this book appears to represent a missed opportunity for the analysis to plumb the depths of this "dual reception" further and perhaps interrogate its potential for both intertextuality in media practice and cross-pollination of ideas in the Irish viewing public.

Despite this, *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* is seminal in that it squarely addresses an aspect of LGBTQ media visibility that has been thus far largely ignored, at least in any monographic form. It covers pivotal years in the development of a new, postcolonial republic as it disengages with religious authoritarianism and embraces modern, secular pluralism. This larger story is approached though complex and sustained analysis, by Kerrigan, of the "tug of war" of media visibility from the early 1970s to 2008. With such a comprehensive study of queer visibility on Irish-produced television now in existence, a similarly rigorous study of LGBTQ representation on Irish-produced radio—that medium still so widely consumed in Ireland—would be a welcome addition. Kerrigan's study stops short of the era of social media and self-produced user generated content (UGC), which is the latest shift in LGBTQ visibility. A study on that would make a similarly useful companion to this book.

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