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IRISH FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES PUBLICATIONS – 2021

Ciara Chambers (ed.)

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Introduction

Ciara Chambers

The good news for those of us teaching film and media on university courses is that employers *do* value the skills developed through academic study. Research skills, critical thinking and an awareness of the historical and contemporary media sphere are to be celebrated it seems. The *problem* is that students may not realise this until they are well into employment and it is too late to return to campus and engage with their studies more enthusiastically. This was just one of the findings from the illuminating *Media Graduates at Work: Irish Narratives on Policy, Education and Industry* (Anne O'Brien, Sarah Arnold and Páraic Kerrigan) reviewed by Stephen Boyd. This review joins four others in this year's section. The hefty *Companion to British and Irish Cinema* should have been included last year, but due to my oversight, it is featured here instead. Its reviewer, Loretta Goff, notes that it is "a volume that is sure to be heavily engaged with by scholars for years to come" so hopefully its esteemed editor and contributors will forgive its late appearance in these pages!

Páraic Kerrigan's *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland*, reviewed by Allison Macleod, explores the challenges faced by the growing LGBTQ community in Ireland to "claim space in the public sphere" from 1974-2007. The book explores activism, the interconnection of national identities and globalisation and, crucially, considers the previously underscrutinised medium of television. Michael Lydon reviews *The Commitments: Youth, Music and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland*. Nessa Johnston's monograph explains the enduring fascination with Alan Parker's classic film and contextualises its broader cultural significance in Ireland and beyond. It offers a significant intervention into the field of Irish film by examining *The Commitments* as an "event" that marked the transformation of a country awakening from an insular and repressive past.

Eileen Culloty's review of the third volume of *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* (edited by Martin Convoy and Adrian Bingham) extends this section's focus on screen production to consider the press's integral status as central to public media consumption. Print journalism (from hard news to magazine articles) has increasingly converged with other sources of audiovisual "infotainment". This evolution is directly linked to the ways in which big-tech conglomerates now shape our view of the world across many platforms. The collection, which explores news production in Britain and Ireland from 1900-2017, focuses on text, image and context, raising issues of gender, ethnicity, suffrage, identity and propaganda.

The books included here testify to a vibrant and diverse culture in Irish film and media. The research landscape for 2022 is promising amidst a flurry of commemorative activity as the decade of centenaries enters the final stretch. There are several local events with a direct or indirect focus on Irish film and media that may, in time, produce published proceedings: Capturing Conflict – The Irish War of Independence and Civil War on Film at the Irish Film Institute; the annual Irish Screen Studies Seminar at Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Irish Civil War National Conference at University College Cork. As we finally return to in-person events and a more traditional sharing of research ideas, it is hoped that robust discussions on the place of media representation at the heart of Irish culture over the past hundred years will continue to develop.

While archives have been badly affected by the pandemic, they too are opening up again, and many researchers are returning to abandoned projects. It is heartening that Irish film and television heritage is now easier to view than before through a number of pioneering digitisation initiatives. The IFI archive player, available to view across the world, is a rich repository of short, feature and information films, television, newsreels, advertisements, animation and amateur cinema. The Irish Independence Film Collection in particular, has added

a significant dimension to academic and public discourse on the Irish revolutionary period. Northern Ireland Screen continues to develop its Digital Film Archive with a current initiative funded by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Department of Communities seeing a range of programming from the archives of Ulster Television appearing online; much of this material has not been seen by the general public since it was originally broadcast.

Northern Ireland Screen and Screen Ireland both issued impressive reports this year charting their recent achievements and plans for the future. NI Screen's "Adding Value Vol. 3" and Screen Ireland's "Building For a Creative Future 2024" showcase prestigious work In storytelling for local and global audiences, as well as demonstrating the cultural and educational value of activity in the growing screen sector. As this sector continues to thrive north and south, it offers us a wealth of new material to research, teach, and write about.

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Reviewer: Stephen Boyd (Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire)

This short monograph is an essential read for all Irish 3rd level educators in the fields of film studies, media studies, communications, and new media. A tacit problem in film and media education in Ireland over the last thirty years has been a perceived disconnect between national policy, 3rd level media education, and a direct path to employment in film or media industries. *Media Graduates at Work: Irish Narratives on Policy, Education and Industry,* written by Anne O'Brien, Sarah Arnold and Páraic Kerrigan, is a timely and illuminating book which critically contemplates this problem for the first time in a major Irish academic study, building on recent work by O'Brien and Kerrigan themselves (2020) and complimenting recent work by John O'Hagan, Denis Murphy, and Ruth Barton (2020).

Published as part of a new series from Palgrave which analyses "creative working lives" in the creative and cultural sectors, *Media Graduates at Work* exposes difficult home truths regarding State policy in Ireland and its relationship with media education, the jobs market, and the neo-liberal skills-focused economy. The aims of the authors are to "systematically examine various factors that shape media work which include the State and its policies, industrial and organizational practices and cultures of media education" (1). The central thesis examines "the extent to which there is an interrelation between policies, industry norms and educational practice for the worker" (2) whilst noting the "tensions between educators and industry, the ambivalence that media graduates have about media education, and the sometimes poor

alignment between each" (*ibid*). The book is structured across six short chapters, including a brief introduction and conclusion (which considers the already precarious nature of media employment in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic). The authors' methodology is based on data acquired through interviews with graduates, employers, and educators, alongside a discourse analysis of Irish state policy. The text provides well researched explorations of four key issues: an analysis of policy; an outline of the perspectives of media educators; the viewpoints of employers, and finally an overview of the outlook of recently graduated students.

Chapter two analyses Irish State policy relating to the creative industries and examines the consequences of the "education for industry" discourse and the "human capital" narrative of skills development that has emerged in Irish education over the last twenty years. This analysis is predicated by the central claim that "Irish audiovisual policy essentially disregards the reality of media work and fails to understand the function of the higher education sector" (10). The chapter analyses Irish audiovisual policy since the 1990s and the *Culture 2025* framework as case studies and attempts to understand how they have shaped education, training and media work. The authors argue that at the level of policy creation a narrative of inadequacy has developed surrounding Irish audiovisual education and they note that this perception has caused misalignments in policy which display little concern for sustainable media employment or the promotion of what they describe as "good work". In a damning verdict the authors state that "Irish audiovisual policy misrepresents the precarious nature of media work, fails to engage effectively with the higher education sector and simultaneously charges educators and workers with failing to meet the needs of industry" (8).

The authors highlight an influential 1995 finding by STATCOM (a statutory committee tasked with reporting on the audiovisual industry in Ireland) which stated that academically orientated education was of little value if it didn't meet the needs of industry (14). This report failed to see non-market private and social benefits of a liberal academic education and it stated that "conceptual thinking about film and television had no relation to the practice of film and television" (*ibid*). This problem now overshadows wider media education in Ireland, but also contradicts the evidence of potential employers, as the authors note in later chapters. The consequences of the shift of focus in media education towards skills-based learning has meant that "policy […] focuses on industry and not on worker precarity and vulnerability", or indeed a commitment to lifelong learning (25).

The book next turns the spotlight on those who work in media education. Chapter three assesses the value of media education and its relationship to industry from the perspective of educators. This took the form of 23 interviews with educators from across the Irish 3rd level sector, including Universities, Institutes of Technology, and Colleges of Further Education. The interviews show that many educators regard media education as fulfilling a broader role in the lives of students rather than simply as preparation for employment (although the authors do note considerable variation in response, from those who felt that media education should challenge social and political hierarchies to others who did regard employability as the goal). Educators felt that the development of critical thinking skills were as important as subject specific knowledge and this highlights the contested relationship between media education and media work; regarded by some as not academic enough and by others as not vocational enough. Some educators were frustrated with a lack of budget or infrastructure which would allow them to develop the goals of policy makers, and whilst some were happy for industry involvement, others were sceptical of the importance of industrial participation in education. It was also clear that there has been an erosion in the liberal education model of media studies, which is often not in the best interests of graduates, or indeed desirable for employers.

Some of the most interesting findings arise when the authors assess how media industries view graduates of media education. This research consists of 13 interviews with representatives of companies of varying size which were "selected for their salient position in

creative industries, that is, broadcasting, film, digital production or communications more broadly" (57). It was found that employers did see media graduates as possessing "work-relevant" skills and many underscored a commitment to recruiting media graduates with a 2.1 degree (still regarded as a basic entry requirement for work in creative industries). Storytelling and research skills (beyond the capacity of a google search) were regarded as core competencies and two of the most important skills that industry saw as relevant in a media education. Also regarded as relevant were "analytical skills" and a "broad sociological perspective on digital practice and its histories" (the authors point to a possible deficit on the part of universities to similarly regard these critical and analytical elements as key skills). In addition, a broad suite of technical skills were highlighted to fit a range of media industries such as radio, television, film, PR, and digital production. Significantly, the authors found that employers *did* value the skills acquired by graduates, which was a finding at odds with audiovisual policy documents. Some findings were beyond the control of educators: employers highly valued "taking initiative" which they did not regard as something that could be taught in college. It was also found that university qualifications still meant starting at the bottom within industry, but it is noteworthy that employers regarded internships as a path to potential employment. Internships were valued as a means for students to acquire industry-based training. Of great importance is the finding that the optimum outcome for employers was a balancing of the liberal education model with skills based industrial knowledge.

The final chapter focuses on the experiences of 20 recent media graduates and their attempts to negotiate careers in media characterised by "precariousness and uncertainty, where graduate trajectories are highly contingent and continually negotiated" (77). One of the problems for Irish media graduates is that they enter into an industry in which educational attainment is not necessarily valued in creative work and where practical experience often shapes entry routes (81). Some key points emerged, for example the gap between education and the actual transition to media work, and the fact that some felt short-changed by their degrees. Students also had to adapt their expectations of media work and quickly realised that portfolio work would facilitate them in gaining professional experience, and that career pathways could be further enhanced by support from industry for further training initiatives.

If a criticism could be made of the study it is that very little information and detail regarding the interviews and the questions put to participants is provided to the reader. As such, the authors could be accused of the subjective interpretation of data rather than a reliance on completely objective findings. This is however a minor point. O'Brien, Arnold and Kerrigan's book is an excellent analysis of one of the biggest "elephants in the room" for Irish media educators; the disconnect between media education and pathways to employment. Their study is of critical importance given that there are now over 200 media education programmes of varying levels in Ireland catering for only 7000 jobs (12). The authors conclude by emphasising that there is a current "mismatch between the stated priorities of national policy, educators, employers and students" (103). The mismatch begins with Irish audiovisual policy, which provides 3rd level institutions with conflicting recommendations of skills shortages without any clear articulation of what skills are required, or for which roles. The book actually underlines the importance of industry-based skills, but a key takeaway for both educators and policy makers is the essential role that critical thinking and research skills play in media employment. The aforementioned disconnect between policy, education and employment is reflected in the paradoxical situation highlighted by research in this book wherein employers valued the very skills that graduates and policy makers did not consider valuable. These are not unsolvable problems, and the authors note that a more coherent synthesis between education, policy and industry could be reached if all the actors involved were allowed to communicate to a greater extent (107). *Media Graduates at Work: Irish Narratives on Policy, Education and Industry* is a measured, informed and contemporarily relevant book which should be regarded as a future

starting point in any continued engagement between academia, policy creation, and media industries.

Works Cited

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The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press: Volume 3 Competition and Disruption, 1900–2017
Edited by Martin Conboy and Adrian Bingham
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 784 pp.
ISBN: 9781474424929

Reviewer: Eileen Culloty (Dublin City University)

The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press is an ambitious three-volume history covering a period from 1650 to the present day. Edited by Martin Conboy and Adrian Bingham, volume 3 examines a "long twentieth century" (xxvii) between 1900 and 2017. Across 33 chapters, the book covers a wide range of topics from the evolution of news production technologies to the characteristics of different genres and presses such as literary journalism and the LGBTQ press. With justification, Martin Conboy notes that the 43 contributing authors have provided "a more comprehensive review than has ever been compiled before in one volume" (662). From an Irish studies perspective, there are many interesting insights into the history and challenges of Irish journalism.

However, the volume is often frustrating. Individual contributions are engaging and relevant, but they collectively suffer from a lack of conceptual clarity and editorial curation. There is an overall failure to grapple with the geographic scope of the title and the complex identities it entails. In the preface, the editors state that contributors were asked to be "expansive in their coverage" (xxvii), but only 12 of the 33 chapters attempt to engage a history that includes both Britain and Ireland. Strangely, given his role as co-editor, Adrian Bingham's introduction has a singular focus on the "British press" and its relationship to "British politics, culture and public life" (4). Yet, the period in question is one in which Ireland became independent; devolved governments emerged in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; and the movement for Scottish independence has grown.

The editorial inattention to regional identity is exemplified by lack of precision in chapter titles and the selection of opening chapters to contextualise "the central features of the environment". Too many of these chapters are restricted to a narrow focus on England or the UK. For example, Tom O'Malley's chapter on "readership and readers" is specifically about "newspapers and their readers in the UK" (83) while Julian Petley's chapter on "regulation" is

exclusively about England and Wales. Readers seeking to understand the devolution of press regulation in Scotland and the history of Ireland's draconian libel and defamation laws will have to look elsewhere.

Across the remaining thematic chapters, it is hard to understand why the editors did not use cross-referencing to highlight overlaps and broader geographic coverage. For example, Maggie Andrews and Fan Carter's chapter on "women's magazines" concerns "women's political, economic and cultural position in British society" (299). In contrast, Kaitlynn Mendes and Jilly Boyce Kay's chapter on "feminism and the feminist press" focuses on both Britain and Ireland in order to "challenge what has been identified as a highly London-centric approach to the history of the women's suffrage movement" (468). In this and other cases, the lack of cross-referencing is a missed opportunity to acknowledge the regional scope of the contributions.

Notably, numerous contributors highlight the need to counterbalance histories that have, as Robert Campbell observes, neglected "the nations and regions of the British Isles" due to "the perceived hegemony of London's newspaper business" (69). Similarly, Simon Gwyn Roberts argues that the Welsh press has been neglected by media historians while the fragmentation of Welsh identity "is often not fully appreciated outside the nation" (316). The tricky issue of identity is also explored in Nora Moroney and Stephen O'Neill's chapter on the Belfast press. Elsewhere, many contributors invoke Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal thesis about the role of national print media in the formation of nation states. However, Simon J. Potter critiques Anderson's concept of an imagined community as "a radical simplification" if "useful shorthand" (434). It is regrettable that the editors did not pay more attention to the identity issues raised by their contributors or order the chapters in a way that highlights the historical contexts of the regions under consideration. Mark O'Brien's chapter on the metropolitan press highlights "the intricate web of connections within the press industry linking Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales" (626) including individual editors and "newspaper markets that operated on and between both islands" (627). This geographic contextualisation is left until the penultimate chapter.

The above criticisms do not imply that the volume lacks interest for scholars of Irish studies. In contrast to Scotland, Ireland is well served. Aside from specific chapters about Ireland, some contributors embraced the geographic scope of the volume's title. Jonathan Hardy's engaging chapter on economics successfully combines an analysis of Britain and Ireland by highlighting commonalities and differences between the two regions including the unique dynamics of an Irish market structured around the "religious affiliations of owners, readers and advertisers" (37). Olive Vassell's chapter on the black British and Irish press notably includes an Irish case study even though Ireland generally lacked "a critical mass of individuals and black scholars advocating for having a voice" (408). In the process, Vassell astutely comments on the class distinctions evident in Irish-African publications, which contrast with "the asylum seeker and immigrant narrative so popular in white Irish society" (409).

Mark Hampton's chapter on transatlantic exchanges charts the "shared cultural ideas and institutional practice" (164) that informed journalism on both sides of the Atlantic. He notes that Ireland has been "a significant contributor to the "Anglo-American' model of journalism" (155) given its relationship with Britain and history of emigration to the US. The chapter includes a case study of Niall O'Dowd, the Irish-born journalist who founded *Irish America* and *The Irish Voice*. Other chapters discuss news agency coverage of the Troubles; the merger of *An Phoblacht* and *Republican News* into *AP/RN*; news photography and Irish independence; and the reading cultures of literary and review journalism.

Perhaps one of the more intriguing chapters from an Irish studies perspective is Regina Uí Chollatáin's contribution on Irish language media. Contrary to the impression of animosity between Irish and English language media, she argues that "the English-language press [was]

a valuable ally" (334) to Irish-language writers through Gaelic columns and the serialisation of short stories. Uí Chollatáin puts emphasis on transnational exchanges by migrant writers and, citing Máire Ní Chinnéide, the role of Irish print journalism "as a medium for 'expansion of thought'" and "those important 'conversations'" (351) at the core of a public sphere. Nevertheless, she points to the marginal role of Irish-language print media in contrast to Irish-language broadcasting, which has "moved to the centre of the broader Irish mediascape" (336). The chapter makes an interesting companion to Robert Dunbar's analysis of the Scottish-language press.

There is much to value in the individual contributions to *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* including the chapters that investigate the media history of regions beyond Ireland. Unfortunately, readers may have to do the hard work of piecing together different histories and themes across the chapters.

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A Companion to British and Irish Cinema
Edited by John Hill
Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019. 608 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-118-47751-9

Reviewer: Loretta Goff (University College Cork, Ireland)

In the introduction to *A Companion to British and Irish Cinema*, John Hill notes the "upsurge in critical and historical writing" on both cinemas in the last few decades and goes on to situate this companion as one to the studies and interpretations of these cinemas rather than the cinemas themselves (2019: 1-2). As such, the companion, with contributions from leading scholars of British and Irish cinemas, links to larger theoretical debates across cinema studies, in particular regarding national cinemas and transnational influences, while also remaining specific to British and Irish contexts. The focus on metacritically engaging with analyses of these cinemas, examining how these have developed across a range of circumstances and frameworks, is evident across the contributions to this companion, and make it an ideal one for scholars of these disciplines, offering key critical perspectives and charting the development of the field for its readers.

The companion is organised into five parts that bring the reader through the histories of both cinemas to contemporary reconsiderations. Appropriately, a range of methodological approaches are employed – from historical to empirical, aesthetic, theoretical, and sociocultural – both evidencing and interrogating the breadth of perspective and critique encapsulated in the study of British and Irish cinemas over the years. It is important at this point to note the distinction between these two cinemas. While the pairing of the two could be simplified as the result of geographical proximity and positioning as the primary English-language cinemas outside of North America, it is much more nuanced, and this companion captures that. The

distinct contexts and qualities of each cinema are given proper attention, along with consideration of the English, Scottish, and Welsh film under the umbrella of British cinema, and the complicated colonial history of England and Ireland which has inevitably influenced the Irish film industry in particular, as elucidated in Kevin Rockett's contribution to the first part of this companion.

Part one of the companion, "Histories: Issues and Debates" brings the reader from silent cinema to the 1990s and sets up the pairing of British and Irish cinemas, usefully further illuminating one another in comparison. Jon Burrows comprehensively engages, from a contemporary perspective, with film scholarship on British silent film in pre- and post-war contexts which he organises across three periods (1894–1906, 1907–1918, and 1918–1929), noting both underdeveloped areas for future enquiry and methodologies and issues forming paradigms of study. Meanwhile, Kevin Rockett's contribution on Irish cinema covering the 1890s to the 1930s is framed against Ireland's anti-colonial struggle, in direct contrast to Britain, necessitating a differentiation of methodological approach. Further distinctions between the two cinemas are reflected in that British cinema is covered through the 1930s, the Second World War, and the 1950s and 1960s with new historical work by Lawrence Napper, James Chapman, and Melanie Williams respectively, who reflect on earlier scholarship through new lenses to deftly re-examine early audience engagement, "Golden Age" wartime cinema and the formation of a national canon, and the periodisation of post-war cinema (here newly tracked through school-set films). In contrast, there is the gap in the coverage of Irish cinema from the 1930s to the 1970s and 1980s, the notable "First Wave" of indigenous filmmaking. Maeve Connolly offers a new approach to these well-trodden decades, arguing that the legacy of the often political and experimental First Wave lies heavily in the development of exhibition practices intersecting with contemporary art, placing value on collective viewing and social architecture. Rounding out the first part, Geoff Eley weaves together the disciplines of history and film to provide a robust argument for film *producing* history in addition to being situated historically.

Part two, "Debating Film Texts", offers a range of critical approaches to this debate, including literary adaptation, genre, authorship, stardom, music, international screen culture, and accented cinema. A thread of nationhood continues to weave throughout this part, along with the companion as a whole, again further teased out through the pairing of British and Irish cinemas. Christine Geraghty argues against restrictive considerations of adaptation entwined in the British national cinema's reputation of literariness associated with the classics, instead calling for an expansion of this analysis allowing "adaptations to generate more open connections" for "creative comparisons" across media (2019: 155). Peter Hutchings goes on to interrogate the Britishness and genericity of British national cinema, illustrating ongoing negotiations between the national and international. Sheldon Hall and Jim Leach, in their respective pieces on authorship and stardom, caution against an over-reliance on national context dulling aesthetic analysis and falling into pitfalls of national myths that do not capture the diversity of the nation. K. J. Donnelly charts the trajectory of British and Irish film music alongside national musical traditions in classical and folk music giving way to pop, making a case for a heritage of film music in its own right. Rounding out this part, Martin McLoone and Luke Gibbons consider Irish cinema's positioning national and internationally. McLoone examines the role of funding in the development of the Irish (North and South) film industry, both inviting larger-scale projects from abroad and trying to foster an indigenous industry often influenced by a desire to combat dominant outside perspectives of Ireland, largely from Britain and Hollywood. This makes it difficult to pinpoint and define an Irish national cinema, but offers "a perfect example of the local in the global" and the binaries existing within this (2019: 257). Continuing in this line Gibbons uses Naficy's "accented cinema" to question specificity and locatedness of Irish cinema primarily using the landscape as a mode of enunciation to

demonstrate that while we may articulate within Irish film what we know, local or global, multiple articulations exist, grasped in different ways by different audiences.

Part three continues the debate with a focus on "Film Contexts", particularly in relation to industry, policy, technology, and television. While each of the contributors to this part – Duncan Petrie, Sarah Street, Roderick Flynn, and David Rolinson – focus primarily the scholarship of one or two of these topics, crossover between these elements in the formation and development of the industry nicely link their contributions which inevitably also bear comparisons to the American industry. Striking contrast between British and Irish cinemas, are once again made particularly evident in this part of the companion as highlighted through Flynn's political economy approach to the Irish film industry which reveals not only its much later development but also the heavy transnational influences and dependencies it faces at a production level. In addition to ongoing questions regarding national considerations, the continued use of the term "film" is questioned in this part, as new technologies and media reshape the industry (Petrie 2019: 294) – something which could perhaps be expanded upon to further consider the implications of ongoing debates about film industries and studies (British, Irish, and beyond) that are tending to expand towards the use of the term "screen" to incorporate additional mediums such as video games and online media.

Part four brings the reader's attention to "Representation and Identity", with contributors Niall Richardson, Paul Newland, Debbie Ging, Conn Holohan, Paul Dave, and Sarita Malik tackling broader debates around gender, sexuality, space and place, class, race, and ethnicity through specific lenses. In considering any criticism of this section, I would direct it towards what feels like a slight imbalance and specific lack rather than at any of the chapters, which are of a high quality and tie in nicely to the threads running throughout the companion. Four contributions focus on British cinema and only two on Irish, which do not include a focus on race, ethnicity, or class in Irish cinema, all of which are growing, and perhaps previously underrepresented, areas of scholarship that could have been richly explored and usefully framed in this companion. This is not to say that Ging or Holohan are missing this from their chapters, which offer comprehensive discussion of Irish feminisms, masculinities, sexuality, postcolonial positioning, and framing of the rural and urban, but that the inclusion of another chapter, or chapters, engaging with the representation of Travellers, class divides, and/or methods of representing race amidst Ireland's increasingly diverse population would have offered a fuller picture of contemporary representation in Irish film. All of these subjects have been covered in Irish films and scholarship, particularly over the last decade, and offer an important area for continued critical engagement. Malik ably demonstrates the need for this with her well-rounded analysis of representations of race and ethnicity in British cinema wherein she notes that "cinema continues as a significant cultural space through which critical race debates around authorship agency, representation, and genre usefully converge" (2019: 457), ultimately calling an approach that brings film and critical race studies together in what might be termed "Critical Race Film theory" (2019: 458).

Concluding the companion, part five, "Redefining 'British' and 'Irish' Cinema" returns our primary focus towards questioning the national. Importantly, Scottish, Welsh, and English cinemas are distinguished here, capturing the nuances of each both historically and in the contemporary context of Brexit. Julian Petley's chapter is well-positioned at the beginning of this part as he usefully interrogates the positioning of England within Great Britain, outlining the frequent obfuscation of "English" with "British" and situating more recent conceptualisations of Englishness as linked to a growing nationalism. Following on from this, Jonathan Murray and Daryl Perrins flesh out distinctions in Scottish and Welsh cinema respectively through the lenses of film criticism and defining national cinema in a nation with two languages – an area that might similarly be explored regarding Irish-language cinema. Transnational considerations of Irish and British cinema by Ruth Barton and James F. English

draw this companion to a close, reminding the reader that considerations of national specificity of cinema must also recognise the global influences on the nation's cinema, including the diaspora (Irish-American cinema hyphenating the national) and strategic market positioning as a result of economic competition.

While covering a range of topics and debates central to film studies, *A Companion to British and Irish Cinemas* remains an extremely cohesive collection, centred around interrogating the protean composition of these national cinemas and research on the same. Inevitably, as is almost always the case with volumes that address such expansive topics, there are some areas that are overlooked. However, not only does Hill's companion offer a wide-ranging state of the disciplines of British and Irish cinema (past, present, and future), it firmly takes its place amongst the scholarship analysed within it as a volume that is sure to be heavily engaged with by scholars for years to come. While the cost of this companion is likely to be prohibitive to many, particularly students and precarious academics, this does not detract from the excellent range of contributions on offer here which will hopefully be made more readily accessible through University libraries to inspire new scholarship on British and Irish cinemas for years to come.

Loretta Goff holds a PhD in Film and Screen Media from University College Cork, where her research focused on the hyphenation of Ireland and America across contemporary films, stardom, and industry. She has published articles in *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, Persona Studies*, and *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United* States, and she regularly reviews films for *Film Ireland*.

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The Commitments: Youth, Music, and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland
Nessa Johnston
London: Routledge, 2021. viii + 134 pp.
Series: Cinema and Youth Cultures
ISBN: 9780367273125

Reviewer: Michael Lydon (National University of Ireland, Galway)

Nessa Johnston's intriguing short monograph on Alan Parker's film *The Commitments* (1991) begins with an observation about the cover of Ruth Barton and Harvey O'Brien's edited collection *Keeping It Real: Irish Film and Television* (2004). The cover image of the collection is a still from *The Commitments,* featuring the Commitmentettes (Angeline Ball, Maria Doyle Kennedy and Bronagh Gallagher) and a crying baby being rocked in a buggy. Upon viewing the cover and title of the collection, one would assume that an assessment of *The Commitments* features prominently in the collection of essays. But as Johnston observes, this is far from the case, with no mention of the film in the collection at all. Barton acknowledges that "so determining of Irish cinema was *The Commitments* […] the publisher insisted on illustrating the volume with an image from it" (2019: 221). The film thus serves as a fitting visual representation of Irish film, or at least in the eyes of this specific publisher, albeit not deemed appropriate for academic consideration. Johnston uses this observation to enforce a central premise of her work; namely that academics have been reluctant to engage with Parker's *The Commitments,* more often treating the film as an "inferior adaptation" of Roddy Doyle's 1987 novel (2021: 2). Despite positioning Parker's film as under scrutinised, Johnston proceeds

throughout *The Commitments: Youth, Music, and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland* to outline pertinent academic assessment of the film. This illustrates the strengths and weaknesses in Johnston's monograph. It is a work expertly researched, albeit at times inconsistent and incomplete in its analysis.

Fundamental to Johnston's *The Commitments: Youth, Music, and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland* is an assertion that an appraisal of *The Commitments* should not solely view the film as text, "but also as a set of processes and shifting discursive formations" (2021: 4). Johnston notes: 'My approach not only treats the film as the primary object of enquiry, it embraces its broader popular cultural significance, and moves beyond the film text to explore *The Commitments* as an event in 1990s Ireland' (*ibid*.). In utilising Rick Altman's notion of "cinema as event" (1992: 2), Johnston proceeds to outline in detail the cultural significance of the film. Central to this event-focused analysis, is the idea that despite the film's British creative direction and American financial backing, it persists as "an *Irish* musical youth film" (Johnston 2021: 6). A point of analysis, Johnston insists is evident in the centrality of working-class Dublin youth culture to the film. She draws upon this point to position the film as a moment of Irish cultural awakening, made and released at a transformative period in Irish society, with the country on the cusp of the new European single market and the Celtic Tiger economic revival. Johnston writes: "the film reflects the reservations and aspirations of a young generation looking increasingly outward and beyond the social repression of the Catholic Church" (2021: 1). As an event-focused analysis, the chapters proceed to labour this central premise with primacy given to assessing the creation of the film; "investigating the extent that the process entered into dialogue with Dublin, its culture, and its inhabitants" (*ibid*. 3).

In Chapter One "A commitment to Dublin? From transnational co-production to locational specificity Beyond", Johnston explores *The Commitments* as a "case study of transnational film production", and the "marketability of the film's conspicuous localism" (2021: 17). Johnston achieves this by assessing the film from various academic viewpoints, all which filter her findings through the event-centred analysis. An example of this is seen with the use of ethnographic input provided with interviews with Doyle, Gallagher, Ball, and others. These interviews are inserted throughout, but in the opening chapter are used effectively alongside newspaper reports to outline the film's casting process and its significance to Dublin youth culture. Of particular interest in the assessment of the casting process, is the central role played by Ros and John Hubbard as casting agents. Johnston highlights the importance of the local knowledge the pair provided, as they worked closely with Parker to assure his vision of Dublin was brought to screen. The pair are shown to have found several of the cast from local music venues, providing the film with the "authentic" musical skillset required to play onscreen musicians. In another intriguing insight, Johnston uses her access to Parker's personal papers to reveal the late director's vision of Dublin, with Johnston observing a recurrent comment of "not our language" in the margins of early drafts of the script. While in a humorous comment, Parker insists that "a passing kid" mentioned in the script should be changed to kids as "It's never just one kid in Dublin" (27). In all, the opening chapter is a fascinating insight into an energised Dublin youth culture, and Parker's attempt to bring this energy to the screen.

In Chapter Two "'Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud': Intersections of race, class, gender, and youth on Screen and Soundtrack", Johnston both narrows and broadens her event-focused analysis. Initially, this entails a look at Jimmy Rabbitte's much quoted "I'm black an' I'm proud" speech, a point in the film that "articulates his choice of black soul music as a form that speaks to a universal urban working-class experience, regardless of race" (Johnston 2021: 36). In focusing on the speech, Johnston observes that it in "itself is an act of interpretation" (2021: 38), arguing that this point of interpretation has seen the speech continually been re-interpreted to align with shifting views. An example she gives is the caustic use of the speech by one the film's cast Michael Aherne at an anti- abortion rally: "Say it now, say it loud, I'm

anti-abortion and I'm proud!". Johnston's assessment of the speech is a specific highpoint of the book. Nevertheless, as with much of the analysis in this short monograph (134 pages including bibliography) it feels incomplete. The chapter also incorporates in the film-as-event analysis, its commercially successful soundtrack albums. Although, this feels like an unnecessary broadening of the initial analysis. In another notable section in the chapter, Johnston astutely observes that throughout the film: "Moments of privacy for individual characters are rare" (2021: 46). She argues this lack of privacy is befitting Dublin's social-economic environment at the time, with *The Commitments'* ensemble cast to be understood as an expression of unity and marginality (ibid.).

In Chapter Three, "Youth culture and music scenes in 1980s and 1990s Dublin", Johnston explores the "vibrant young music scenes of Dublin in the 1980s and 1990s and the influence of US and transnational musical subcultures" (2021: 58). As noted, Johnston's *The Commitments: Youth, Music, and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland* often feels incomplete in its assessment. This results in moments where real insight is offered, but only in passing. This is certainly the case in the third chapter, where Johnston looks to position the success of the film alongside Irish popular music's "embrace of African American music and blues-based rock" (2021: 59). Of specific interest in the chapter's broad assessment of Irish popular music is the films embrace of "retro" music, with Johnston's arguing that the film embraces "retro aspects" in the use of 1960s soul music; "the music is quite distinctly not of the young people's time" (2021: 68). This idea is certainly of interest, albeit the assessment would have benefited by a consideration of existing work on "retro" and youth culture – such as Jean Hogarty's *Retro Culture in the Digital Era*, a work which includes interviews with Dublin youth on their embrace of "retro" culture, and Simon Reynolds' often cited *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past.* In another interesting, yet incomplete, assessment, Johnston highlights the interesting gender politics evident in the band The Commitments. She writes that Doyle's original idea of the band covering "soul" music was it facilitated the inclusion of women in the band, as "rock" music (and other genres) of the era was almost exclusively male. Johnston writes: "If *The Commitments* had a female bass player or drummer, it would have been an interesting story, but a different one, perhaps not reflective of the unacknowledged male dominance of music scenes" (2021: 73). This fascinating assessment of the "problematic gender dynamic across music scenes" (*ibid.*) is reenforced with reference to existing work by Mavis Bayton, but again feels frustratingly incomplete with additional reference to Bayton's "Women and the Electric Guitar" and Mary Ann Clawson's "When Women Play the Bass: Instrument Specialization and Gender Interpretation in Alternative Rock Music" conspicuously absent. Nonetheless, the chapter continues to offer intriguing insight into the film-as-event, highlighting among other things a near cameo appearance by Van Morrison (2021: 64), and the appearance in the film of Peter Rowan as "Shy Skateboard Auditioner"; Rowan was the boy photographed for the covers of U2's albums *Boy* and *War* (*ibid.*).

Chapter Four, "Songs and sonic authenticity: Mediating musical performance" looks to the "processes of sonic mediation associated with *The Commitments*" and explores ideas concerning the essence of soul music, demonstrating the importance of voice and self-expression to "soul authenticity" (Johnston 2021: 81). Again, the chapter offers moments of real insight into the "event" that was *The Commitments*, but due to the limitations of the short monograph, fails to fully engage with a point of analysis to any great degree. Notable from this chapter is Johnston's consideration of the importance of technology in mediating people's reception of music and "a distrust of technology [that] permeates both the rock authenticity that dominates music criticism […] as well as within the narrative of the film itself" (2021: 86). Engrossing also is the chapter's look to Andrew Strong's casting, punctuated with an assessment of the sixteen-year-old actor/singer's raspy voice, which Johnston observes is often received as being an example of a voice indexed with "bad living" (2021: 94).

Johnston concludes her look at "Ireland's most culturally significant and commercially successful film of the early 1990s" (2021: 108), with an exploration of the fame and fortune narrative metatext at the film's centre (2021: 100). Specifically looking at Glen Hansard's subsequent success, while also positioning the film as providing a template for "a recurring Irish youth musical" (2021: 106). As noted, Johnston's short monograph is frustratingly just that, short. Although, this is probably more a reflection on the limitations imposed by Routledge's "Cinema and Youth Cultures" series than Johnston's critical ability. In summary, Johnston's *The Commitments: Youth, Music, and Authenticity in 1990s Ireland* is a skilfully produced body of research that situates *The Commitments* as an important "event" in the development of Irish, and specifically working-class Dublin, youth culture.

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Reviewer: Allison Macleod

The production and representation of queer identities in Irish media has been the subject of a growing focus in academic literature (Macleod 2018, Holohan 2009, Ging 2008, Walsh 2008, Pettitt 1997). Queer visibility has historically revealed tensions between constructions of nationalism and LGBTQ activism. Irish queerness has simultaneously operated in the service of reinforcing heteronormative boundaries, with non-normative sexuality positioned as

"Other," as well as offering a national re-imagining. Particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s with the Celtic Tiger economic boom, state-funded productions represented a modern Ireland by showing it as a space inclusive of queer identities, albeit those that confirm to heteronormative ideals around respectability and domesticity.

These tensions have also been evident in the struggle for visibility between independent film and television directors and producers, and state-funded production and distribution structures. Especially within film, independent filmmakers have focused on queer characters and narratives to connect sexual dissidence with other forms of non-normative identities and behaviours, and challenge homogenising narratives of the nation that exclude segments of the population in Ireland (Macleod 2018; Barton 2004, Pettitt 1997). At the same time, they have also had to contend with minimal funding available outside of state funding bodies and therefore have had to navigate such representation with institutional pressures.

Existing scholarship on the subject has tended to focus largely on film. Specifically addressing the gap that exists around queer visibility and Irish television, Páraic Kerrigan's *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* is thus a welcomed addition. Kerrigan contributes to these debates while demonstrating how the specificities of the television medium at once enabled and limited forms of queer visibility.

LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland is divided into six chapters, organised temporally beginning in 1974 and ending in 2007. This progression through time enables Kerrigan to effectively trace changing modes of production and reception practices in relation to key historical moments, including the emergence of the AIDS crisis in Ireland, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and the Celtic Tiger boom. In doing so, Kerrigan reinforces the importance, already firmly established in academic literature with regards to film, of understanding televisual representation as a reflection of lived society, shaped by the historical conditions in which it was both created and received.

In Chapter 1, Kerrigan sets out the book's scope. Opening with Declan Flynn's murder in 1982, and the resulting lenience paid by the court to Flynn's homophobic attackers, Kerrigan introduces the central tenet that he returns to throughout the book: namely the growing presence of a LGBTQ community in Ireland and the challenges faced by that community to claim space in the public sphere. *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* is situated at the intersection of identity politics and media production. While Kerrigan does focus on textual analysis of specific television broadcasts, he simultaneously focuses on the structures of televisual production and distribution to unpack how the creation and consumption of media content both shaped and challenged the forming of a visible LGBTQ community in Irish society.

The book focuses on queer visibility, encompassing all non-normative identities encompassed under the homogenous labels of "queer" or "LGBTQ". At the same, as Kerrigan acknowledges, there is a particularly strong focus on gay male material, which is reflective of the content of the archival material and the fact that most gay civil rights organisations have been dominated by men. It is true that images of queer men have tended to dominate representations of queerness in Irish media, largely due to the societal invisibility of other non-normative identities and narratives (Macleod 2018), and this is further reflected in the relative lack of attention paid to those identities and narratives in academic scholarship.

Despite the lack of archival content available, Kerrigan provides strong analysis into the differences in queer identity production looking at lesbian guests on *The Late Late Show* (*LLS*) in Chapter 3. It would have added an even more nuanced perspective to do so throughout the monograph; for instance, further unpacking the positioning of lesbian activist Fil Carson with her back to camera in a television broadcast about a queer disco that he examines in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2, Kerrigan sets out three key television moments that he argues became foundational for queer visibility in Ireland. Using mainstreaming and confessional politics as

frameworks for understanding how gay and lesbian activists collaborated with media institutions to represent queer identity on-screen, Kerrigan demonstrates how both the RTÉ, Ireland's National Television and Radio Broadcaster, and the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) actively sought to use the media to create a public image of respectability. He simultaneously differentiates what was happening in Ireland from the US, whereby many US activist groups that emerged during the post-Stonewall era were leaning more heavily into confrontation politics. The chapter also makes evident the role of specific key individuals, including David Norris, in helping to advance the IRGM's mission of normalising homosexuality for the broader Irish public.

Using *Last House* (1975) and *Tuesday Report* (1977) broadcasts, Kerrigan shows how the queer subjects in these programmes actively presented themselves as "ordinary", removed from generic stereotypes of queerness. Alternatively, a broadcast of *Week In* (1980) took a different approach by showing a gay couple in their home in Cork, simultaneously representing queerness in "safe," heterodomestic terms for the mass audience while also signifying to queer spectators the possibility of living an out life in Ireland rather than being forced to migrate elsewhere. Kerrigan effectively connects all three programmes together by their attempts to normalise queer identities for public consumption in order to drive a political agenda around assimilation.

Across film and television, Irish lesbianism has historically been subject to the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality, either rendered invisible on-screen, framed as a response to male rejection or sexual abuse, or produced as a male fantasy (Holohan 2009, Walshe 1997). In Chapter 3, Kerrigan focuses on how three specific broadcasts of the *LLS* in the 1980s offered queer visibility while simultaneously demonstrating the limitations of queer activists to control the terms of their on-screen representation. The first two broadcasts, one featuring activist Joni Crone and the other having two lesbian ex-nuns as guests, showcase how the *LLS* production team, and host Gay Byrne, used lesbian figures to generate controversy and ratings. Kerrigan further unpacks how the liveness aspect of the *LLS* put these guests into positions of vulnerability, as they were put on the spot with questions designed to insinuate they were gay by default.

Kerrigan then uses the third broadcast to demonstrate how those conditions of liveness simultaneously enabled activist Kieran Rose, in a televised debate with the leader of a right-wing group, to challenge his prejudiced views with regards to homosexuality. By keeping a calm and measured performance to offset his counterpart's increasingly emotional outbursts, Rose was able to position homosexuality as a human rights issue and frame the other man has harbouring an extreme prejudice. In this example, Kerrigan demonstrates how queer activists were increasingly learning how to use the televisual medium to further their political agenda and challenge dominant preconceptions of homosexuality.

Chapter 4 is arguably Kerrigan's strongest chapter. Here, Kerrigan effectively unpacks how the AIDS crisis disrupted earlier mainstreaming attempts where queer visibility was the primary goal. As the AIDS crisis, fuelled by misinformation and fear-mongering tactics, gathered growing media attention and drove increasing levels of societal panic, such visibility became contrary to a progress narrative. Kerrigan argues that the positioning of AIDS, and gay men, as threats to Ireland not only challenged earlier attempts at respectability via mainstreaming narratives but also presented a threat to the ongoing political efforts at decriminalising homosexuality in the European Court of Human Rights.

In response to the sensationalist and dooming AIDS narratives presented by Irish broadcasters, gay activist groups formed a collective resistance by focusing on AIDS education, presenting factual evidence and advice. These groups simultaneously had to battle against media representations of queer visibility as publics that were endangering greater Irish society. Chapter 4 not only reveals the strategies taken by these groups to protect the queer community,

but also reveals the limitations of applying a linear narrative of progress to queer history and visibility, as many of the perceived gains by LGBTQ activists prior were subsumed by an AIDs narrative that doomed and villanised in particular gay men.

Chapters 5 and 6 both investigate the impact of globalisation on Irish television and queer activism. Chapter 5 begins with the "gay moment" that was taking place across the USA and UK in the 1990s, represented by Ellen DeGeneres' coming-out moment on her television show and the coming-out of character Zoe Tate on the popular soap opera *Emmerdale*. The greater cultural visibility of queerness, coupled with the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland in 1993, suggested significant progress in the social and legal status of queer minorities. And yet, as others have noted, this period in Ireland has been characterised by an unease of how to negotiate the changing dynamics of Irish identity in relation to processes of globalisation. In film, these shifting identity politics resulted in greater visibility of non-normative identities, but the contours of this visibility were often shaped by conservative ideologies (Macleod 2018, Ging 2008).

Kerrigan argues for a similar trend in Irish television. While the post-decriminalisation climate resulted in the RTÉ bringing queer characters into its programming, specifically in the sitcom *Upwardly Mobile* and the soap opera *Fair City*, these characterisations presented queer identities in ambiguous and desexualised terms. For Kerrigan, this tension underscores the significance of these texts, as they simultaneously enabled a new form of queer visibility within mainstream fictional programming while demonstrating the "tug-of-war dynamics" of queer identity politics.

Chapter 6 extends on arguments put forth in the previous chapter to investigate queer visibility in the era of the Celtic Tiger in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this era Irish queer visibility became subsumed within an international media environment, engendering new forms of queer visibility that not only reflected global media trends but also spoke to an international audience. Kerrigan argues that as the RTÉ faced growing domestic competition for viewers, it focused on incorporating and mainstreaming queer identities and narratives into their programming.

There is a large body of existing work that explores how Celtic Tiger discourses of consumerism and globalisation shaped queer cinematic representation, by either presenting non-normative identities as global citizens encompassing a form of "hip hedonism" or else using queerness to highlight fissures within the Celtic Tiger narrative of success (Macleod 2018, Holohan 2009, Ging 2008, McLoone 2007). Kerrigan's work dovetails with this trend, with his case studies *The Clinic* and *Proof* each representing one end of this spectrum.

Throughout *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* Kerrigan effectively reveals how Irish media has been both a facilitator and regulator of queer visibility in Ireland. While it has at once allowed queer identities and narratives to become visible to Irish audiences, it has simultaneously sought to control the framing of such representation to varying degrees.

Kerrigan also brings attention to key cultural texts that have in many cases been overlooked in academia and, in doing so, further enriches the body of work that exists on Irish queer scholarship. It might have been beneficial to also include texts beyond 2008; given the changing role and format of television over the past 14 years, as well as the significant political milestones (for instance, the 2015 Marriage Equality Act and the 2015 Gender Recognition Act), there was an opportunity to examine how the politics of visibility have evolved as traditional televisual structures have become increasingly complicated by streaming services and social media.

However, overall *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* is a strong, and welcomed, addition to scholarship on queer Irish media. It would be a useful addition to courses on Irish film and television as well as Irish queer studies.

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