

Arts & Books

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Not waving but sinking – in a deluge of pomp and ceremony

BERNICE HARRISON
TV REVIEW

MEMORIES OF LAST weekend's Late Late 50th Anniversary Special (RTÉ One) prevented this column taking quite so much pleasure in the bags the BBC made of Queen Elizabeth's jubilee coverage. Someone decided that the showpiece event, the Diamond Jubilee Thames Pageant (BBC One, Sunday), would be much better if celebrities were dotted at random around the flotilla, so Maureen Lipman was peering out from a barge, Richard E Grant was on a bridge talking about underpants and Clare Balding was trying to get a rowing crew to say something interesting.



It rained on one's parade: Queen Elizabeth with Prince Harry and the duke and duchess of Cambridge on her jubilee barge

And the commentary, which laid on the hyperbole (inevitably, I suppose), talked up how happy the queen looked (which she didn't) and how much she was enjoying herself (she looked bored), even though no sensible person could be having a good time bobbing around in a boat in a downpour.

And you couldn't hear the music or even see much of the boats, what with the cutting back and forth between wittering celebs. But the real problem that's exercising them over in Blighty is the BBC presenters and their lapses in gravitas. Culled from the more excitable youth wing of the broadcaster, they frequently didn't quite know who they were (though with all those stoney gold epaulettes and people dressed like soldiers, who could blame them?) and kept doing fantastically inappropriate things. Fearne Cotton and Paloma Faith discussed the jubilee memorabilia and how useful the sick bag with the queen's face on it might be.

BEACHED ON the sofa for a rainy weekend, watching the jubilee coverage because nothing much else was on, there should have been some pleasure in seeing that the Beeb can get it wrong – that's if I hadn't been wondering whether scrubbing my eyeballs with a Brillo pad might remove the images plastered there by the anniversary Late Late.

If you've managed to forget Sinéad O'Connor's creepy story about the first time she met Gay Byrne, Dustin's offensive and unfunny quip about three men and a bike, Liam Neeson's incoherence or the rest of the boring drivel good for you. As the night dragged on even Ryan Tubridy had the look of a man who might at any moment clutch his head and do a passable impersonation of the man who didn't they make it shorter? The first 40 minutes, when Gay Byrne and Pat Kenny were on gassing with Tubridy, was entertaining; the rest felt like more proof that *The Late Late Show* has run its course.

Get stuck into . . .
Dead Boss (BBC3, Thursday) is a new murder/mystery/comedy series written by the brilliant Sharon Horgan (right), who plays a woman imprisoned for killing her boss, Jennifer Saunders' costar.

Torch Relay (RTÉ One, Wednesday), which followed the flame as it went through the city. Anchoring the programme from the studio, she interviewed her panel of Olympic athletes, Paul Hession and Olive Loughmane, with an engaging ease, flipped back and forth between the action outside, introduced archive footage (including Ronnie Delany's epic win in 1956) and dished out Olympic facts. There was never any doubt that if anything went horribly wrong, and someone legged it with the torch, she'd lose the smile, whip back into her trusted-newsreader persona and carry on.

TO BE FAIR to the BBC and its jubilee coverage, filling airtime on unscripted big occasions is tricky. But it is possible, just look at how adept Eileen Dunne was throughout the three-plus hours of the RTÉ News Special. Olympic

On the road to nowhere – and Poland

MICK HEANEY
RADIO REVIEW

AS THE RESIGNATION and apathy of the fiscal treaty was campaign suggested, our attitude to Europe has become increasingly weary, if not cynical. But even the most ardent Europhile must have been slightly alarmed at the symbolism of the German ambassador appearing on RTÉ the day after the referendum was passed to give his country's verdict on the result.

Admittedly, when De Ederhard Lubkemeier spoke to George Lee on *The Business* (RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday), he came across as an impeccably mannered diplomat rather than an all-powerful plenipotentiary passing judgment on a vassal state, but it was still clear which country was the supplicant.

When Lee asked what the German reaction to the Yes vote was, the ambassador immediately replied "relief". But when it came to relieving Ireland's fiscal woes, Lubkemeier offered little reassurance.

It was a patronising remark picked up by Paul Sweeney, chief economist with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, when he said that "we made a terrible mistake in socialising bank debts, and of course the beneficiaries of that are the German banks, so no wonder he [the ambassador] respects that".

Let's were left with any lingering traces of optimism after that exchange. Lee spoke to the Nobel-winning economist Paul Krugman, whose jauntily mannered belief his deep gloom for the future. On the referendum outcome he was unequivocal: "The fiscal thing is a bad idea, and one shouldn't vote for a bad idea."

Far from requiring more austerity, Europe needed to spend to kickstart the economy, as our example proved: "Ireland has been such a good soldier and done everything it's supposed to do, and austerity still hasn't worked."

Having spoken from Dunkirk, John Murray drove 1,000km to broadcast from Berlin the next day

and done everything it's supposed to do, and austerity still hasn't worked." Krugman was downright about the euro's chances, as well as the "bad idea" of the referendum. "The fiscal thing is a bad idea, and one shouldn't vote for a bad idea."

Clearly, we might have to get used to hearing from Lubkemeier. Last Saturday's edition was a good example of how Lee has reshaped *The Business* since he took over from John Murray as host. There are still interviews with bigwigs and items on successful Irish enterprises, as well as content courtesy of the comedian Tara Flynn. But Lee has given the show a spine of intellectual rigour and serious inquiry, as his illuminating discussion on Europe testified.

Since entering the environs of daytime talk radio with *The John Murray Show* (RTÉ Radio 1, weekdays), Lee's predecessor has given free rein to the playfulness that marked his tenure on *The Business*, as his own forays into the world of radio have shown. Not for Murray analysis of the prospects for the single currency; his mind was focused on Euro 2012, as he drove across the

Continent to arrive in Poland before Ireland kick off their campaign in the football finals.

It was a vintage play by Murray, road trips having been one of his trademarks on *The Business* and *Morning Ireland*. This was of a larger order than usual, however. Having spoken from the beaches of Dunkirk on Wednesday, Murray and his travelling companion, Zbyszek Zalski, drove 1,000km to broadcast from Berlin the next day. But, for all the scale of the journey, it made for curiously flat listening.

Murray's reports on his progress only accounted for a few minutes each day, much of it occupied by slightly forced banter with the comedian Neil Delamere, who handled studio duties back in Dublin. Attempts to give a Homeric spin to the trip foundered: characterising Wednesday's long drive as "epic", Murray told awestruck tales of "tailbacks like you've never seen before".

There was also a slightly perfunctory quality to his on-the-spot chat with Irish experts in Berlin, moving rapidly from guests to guest without allowing time for a rapport to develop. Given that Murray had only a short time in each destination, a certain looseness could be forgiven, but the tone was rushed and confused rather than free-wheeling and anarchic.

Still, Murray's journey had its telling every night. I was on one interview, "We've got Irish bars, Dutch bars, German bars and Belgian bars, so there's no problem on the socialising front." For some, at least, the European dream lives on.

Get art in that garden

GEMMA TIPTON
Recent installations at Bloom and Chelsea show how well art works outside the white cube of the gallery. So are gardens art? And can a forest walk become an outdoor gallery?

A VISIT TO BLOOM or to the Chelsea Flower Show – in which, for just a few days, gardens appear fully formed – demonstrates the artifice of gardening. Using nature as a medium, designers create places and spaces out of nothing. The descriptions of many of the gardens imply that they also mean something.

The World Vision Garden, for which John Warland and Sim Fleming won a silver medal at Chelsea, symbolises "how World Vision's work with children also helps families, communities and, ultimately, entire countries."



ABOVE Irish Sky Garden by James Turrell at Liss Ard Estate, Co Cork

Gardens have always had meaning. Persian gardens were laid out according to the precepts of paradise. A walled, rectangular enclosure is irrigated with a canal, pond or fountain, often quartering the space, echoing the four rivers of the Garden of Eden. This template can be seen in gardens from the grounds of the Taj Mahal to Versailles.

The gardens and large landscaping projects by 18th-century designers such as Capability Brown and Humphry Repton were also made to convey something. Beyond merely creating charming views by damming rivers, forming lakes and sometimes almost moving mountains, they demonstrated man's mastery over nature, even though the work of Brown in particular often involved copying nature closely.

Throughout history, sculpture has featured in gardens. At the Boboli Gardens of the Pitti Palace in Florence, Abundance looks over the natural world while Neptune commands the water features, and the Roman emperor Hadrian once lent a neo-subtle whiff of power by proxy to the Medici family. In contemporary times, art in gardens is more often a question of design and decoration.

At Chelsea, symbolises "how World Vision's work with children also helps families, communities and, ultimately, entire countries." At Bloom, the Departures garden, by Cillian McDonald and Luke Byrne, investigates "the motivations of the emigrants in a contemplative setting". Bringing natural or manmade materials together to create something meaningful is

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SOLDIER OF THE CANVAS: John Banville on conversations with Louis le Brocqy and other artists



At its best, sculpture in outdoor settings, and not simply large public pieces on motorways, roundabouts and in civic spaces, benefits from being freed from the confines of the art gallery

spaces, benefits from being freed from the sometimes stultifying confines of the art gallery or museum. In his groundbreaking study of art galleries, *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty writes about the way in which "the ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself."

Greats outdoors Where to soak up sculpture

ARTISTS' GARDENS Gardens created by artists can be the perfect combination of nature and vision. **Claude Monet** created the gardens at Giverny that then inspired some of his most beloved paintings. **Derek Jarman's** garden at Dungeness in Kent is a bleak beauty in the shadow of a nuclear power plant. **Barbara Hepworth's** garden at St Ives contains many of her sculptures and is in the care of the Tate.

THE GREAT AND THE GOOD From the gallery to the curious, the **Ewe Gardens** in Glangarriff in Co Cork (ewe.com) are worth a visit. All the pieces, including *Fish* (RIGHT), are by Sheena Wood. (The gardens have a charity tea party today, from 1pm to 5pm, in aid of RehabCare and the National Learning Network.)

Victoria's Way in Co Wicklow (Victorstownway.eu) is a sculpture garden containing large-scale works from India. The National Botanic Gardens will hold **Sculpture in Context** in September and October (sculptureincontext.org).

Kilfane in Co Kilkenny has work by David Nash and Bill Woodrow. It opens in July and August (kilfane.com).

CORPORATE GOOD One of the best sculpture gardens was created for the soft-drinks company PepsiCo by its former chairman Donald Kendall, in the belief that his vision for the company would be reflected in the atmosphere of "stability, creativity and experimentation" that the art creates. About an hour from Manhattan, the **PepsiCo sculpture gardens** contain works by Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore, Claes Oldenburg, Alberto Giacometti and Jean Dubuffet. The gardens have been landscaped to suit the sculptures.



ABOVE Learning to be I by Antony Gormley at Lismore. Photograph: Andrew Lawson



LEFT Nestled by Tony O'Malley at Oak, at Killenure Castle



RIGHT Square with Two Circles by Barbara Hepworth at the Yorkshire Sculpture Garden. Photograph: Jorj Wilde



BELOW Sky Train by Michael Bulfin and 60 Degrees by Kevin O'Dwyer, both part of Sculpture in the Parklands at Lough Boora



BOTTOM Decet #2 by Steven Aylin at Oak

is the Catalan artist Joan Miró, whose work is on show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (esp.co.uk) until January. Menacing the very English landscape with their wild surrealism, Miró's works fit in with the park's other pieces, which include works by Alec Finlay, Andy Goldsworthy, Anthony Caro, David Nash, Sophie Ryder and Henry Moore.

Putting art in a gallery asks us to look at it in a different way: as an idea, a comment, a piece of history and a commodity. Putting it outside can seem an intrusion into an already beautiful setting, but at its best, and freed from the often overbearing energy of those plain white gallery walls, something very special can occur. And if you think nature doesn't need the artifice of art added to it, don't forget it would be hard to experience nature at all if it wasn't for the roads that bring us to it, or even the paths that wind within.

Cuts and a clueless power grab characterise this Government's approach to the arts

FINTAN O'TOOLE
CULTURE SHOCK

IT IS TEMPTING to say that the current Government is the most philistine in the history of the State. But that would be a wild exaggeration. It is merely the most philistine since the end of the second world war. For 50 years it could be said that, even when official cultural policy was neglectful, it was not actively hostile. This claim would be hard to make now.

Roughly speaking, for the first 25 years of the State's existence, cultural policy was dominated by prurience and paranoia. The young State did make some positive moves, such as making the Abbey the first subsidised theatre in the English-speaking world. But cultural policy was dominated by two major themes. One was a very badly executed attempt to revive Irish art as the main vernacular language – a policy that arguably did more harm than good. The other was the idea, inherited from turn-of-the-century cultural nationalists, that there was an authentic (rural and traditional) Irish culture that needed to be protected from foreignness and filth (which amounted, pretty much, to the same thing). The idea that free artistic expression might be a value in itself, that the State's existence might be validated by its vibrant modern culture, had little purchase on official policy.

There was little to choose in this regard between Cumann na nGaedheal, which dominated in the 1920s, and Fianna Fáil, which replaced it as the governing party in the 1930s. Both were led by men with no real interest in the arts: William Cosgrave admitted in 1924 that he had never been to the Abbey; Eamon de Valera went to the national theatre for the first time when he was in his 50s, to see a play about St Francis of Assisi.

Each has his signature piece of culturally destructive legislation. Cumann na nGaedheal's was the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929, a response to the report of the committee on English Literature. (How apt that one of the books banned under the legislation was George Orwell's *1984*.) George Bernard Shaw was young State did make some positive moves, such as making the Abbey the first subsidised theatre in the English-speaking world. But cultural policy was dominated by two major themes. One was a very badly executed attempt to revive Irish art as the main vernacular language – a policy that arguably did more harm than good. The other was the idea, inherited from turn-of-the-century cultural nationalists, that there was an authentic (rural and traditional) Irish culture that needed to be protected from foreignness and filth (which amounted, pretty much, to the same thing). The idea that free artistic expression might be a value in itself, that the State's existence might be validated by its vibrant modern culture, had little purchase on official policy.

Fianna Fáil's great act of cultural vandalism was the Public Finance Halls Act of 1935, which attacked traditional music and dance by placing dances under the control of the courts, the police and, in effect, the censors. Since the end of the second world war, however, the broad tendency of official cultural policy has been supportive. The Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra was allowed to expand during and immediately after the war years. A new Censorship of Publications Act in 1946 was slightly more liberal, in that it established an appeals process under which some serious works (Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, for example) were unbanned. The interparty government of 1948 established the cultural-relations committee of the department

grab characterise this Government's approach to the arts

of external affairs. More significantly, it established the Arts Council in 1951. It was just as significant that Seán Ó Faoláin, the most trenchant critic of previous State cultural policy, was appointed as its director in 1956 – making a statement about the council's independence from government.

It is pretty bad in itself that the programme for government has virtually nothing to say about cultural policy. There's a bland statement about encouraging touring "in order to protect the State's investment in regional arts infrastructure" – not, one notes, in order to create transformative artistic experiences. And there's an equally bland aspiration to encourage more private sponsorship. But this wouldn't be the first time a government was so cluelessly tokenistic.

For the first time since the 1930s, we have a government that is moving beyond benign neglect to active harm

That the Government has no vision is obvious (its appointment of an Arts Council with a conspicuous paucity of artists is telling). What's staggering is that the energies it is willing to devote to cultural policy are going into determining the integrity, policy, independence of institutions such as Culture Ireland and the National Library.

The only point of all of this seems to be that "responsibility for policy-making will revert to the Department, while agencies will be accountable for implementing policy, assessing outcomes and value for money" seems to suggest that the goal is to reverse 50 years of progress towards establishing cultural bodies as the property of the nation, not of the government.



A vision of the past: Minister for Arts, Jimmy Deenihan at the National Library and, left, George Orwell, whose novel 1984 the State censored in 1929. Photographs: Alan Betson; AP