

Book Report on *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio*

With the seventy-fifth birthday of the Irish Radio, Director General Bob Collins formulated an idea to begin the process of preserving the history of radio (Pine, 2002). To do so, Collins asked Richard Pine to undertake the challenge of writing a volume on the inception of 2RN (Pine, 2002). The resulting text called *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio* is an important piece designed by Pine to give an in depth account of the struggle to create and maintain the interest in and image of Irish Radio. The book follows the events and new technological advances of the early 1900s and then delves deep into the political, social and cultural history from the 1920s into the 1930s that affected and influenced the creation of Irish radio, specifically the 2RN broadcast. Throughout the book, the reader is presented with the tumultuous origins of radio and how radio eventually made its way into the Irish home as a quintessential part of Irish culture and everyday life.

Richard Pine has written critically on multiple literary works for major publications, appeared in various documentaries discussing radio and has extensive works on Irish music history, both as an author and editor (Gifford). He worked for RTÉ as Concerts Manager, retiring in 1999 to become the Director of Durrell School of Corfu (Gifford,). Pine, having worked for RTÉ in the past, was approached to write a book presenting the historical account of radio in Ireland. It can be seen within the book's text how conscious Pine is of the various points of view needed to provide a historically accurate context of Ireland when the potential of radio was being debated. In his precision of detail and concise writing style, Pine introduces an intriguing history on the origins of Irish Radio.

With only the last chapter covering the first broadcast and reception of 2RN, Pine focuses mainly on the history leading up to the formation of the radio in Ireland and the amount of controversy that surrounded it. He writes each chapter with certain events as the main focus that also happen to fall in mostly chronological order. This volume also gives a short timeline of the period in the beginning of the book called *Radio and Irish Society, 1898 - 1934: a chronology*, depicting the events that lead up to the creation of Irish Radio and into a decade after its birth to assist the reader (Pine, 2002, pp. xv-xx). The analysis and most of the book itself, however, centers on a time period between 1916 and 1925. Within this decade, radio, its policies and its implications concerning the Irish way of life are debated over and over until it finally stumbles its way into an important place in Irish culture. Pine is determined to inform the reader of the amount of effort that took place well before the first broadcast of 2RN even aired. Also discussed in this historical literature are the debates over government control and commercial influence, how it should be financed, the investments of politicians, who could actually 'listen in' and how to keep the Irish culture and language alive by using radio.

In regard to historical evidence, Pine uses mostly primary sources to provide the main events and opinions from the multitude of people involved in the history of radio in Ireland. There is a vast array of primary sources used, though notably many are from official documents, court and debate transcripts and from the reflective writings of the people discussed in Pine's history of 2RN. He is very precise about where and when he uses certain primary sources to provide a fluid historical account while also giving a wide range of perspectives from those involved. For example, Pine (2002) quoted Lord J.C.W. Reith's foreboding analogy about radio and the way it would be used to give the reader a sense of uneasiness surrounding radio within

the time period (pp.13). The source of this statement was found in Reith's own book, *Broadcast over Britain*, portraying his lack of trust in the use of radio, one of the many perspectives on radio that Pine felt influenced its creation(13). This use of a primary source to give the authentic opinions and reflections of different perspectives in regards to the process of creating 2RN is an ingenious way to use the texts available. There is some use of secondary sources to provide detailed reflections and context to certain events, but the majority of those sources are only used a couple times throughout the book, while many primary sources are referenced repeatedly.

One of the most important primary sources utilized throughout the book time and again to provide evidence, statements and historical background is called *First, Second and Third Interim Reports and the Final Report of the Special Committee to consider the Wireless Broadcasting Report together with Proceedings of the Committees, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, referred to as *Report* throughout the book. Incorporated into this *Report* are debate transcripts questioning potential policies, court documents covering the trial of Darrell Figgis and a multitude of other pieces of evidence and recordings that were viewed as imperative to the implementation of an Irish Radio. The entire process and debate that took place surrounding radio is within the *Report* and allows Pine to use this source as a foundation for his other pieces of evidence used to give the reader context. Specifically, this source identifies the intense feelings, rudimentary policies and endless negotiation that went into creating the legislation and regulation of the radio and determining its availability for commercial access.

Taking this book in its entirety, there were some very enjoyable and engaging segments that were countered with a few critical flaws. I enjoyed the layout and the writing within the book, but as someone unfamiliar with Ireland and the important people in the country's history it

was hard to grasp the importance of some of the events that occurred or the magnitude by which they were felt. Perhaps this lack of fully comprehending the history is why I felt as if I were reading a book of history instead of a text with a centered argument. Pine (2002) states in the Preface that how the “Irish radio came into existence is of more interest than its early life” (p.xiii). He also professes that it is the constant questioning and “continually re-inventing the wheel” that keeps public service broadcasting “in sight” (Pine, 2002, p.xiii). This belief that the process that brought radio to Ireland is what keeps radio’s original purpose alive is admirable, but not referenced enough within the actual book to promote this concept as a thesis. The overwhelming amount of historical texts and sources Pine quotes and uses within the book tends to eclipse this potential thesis. Yes, strong sources and facts are needed when proving a point, but I struggled to see if there was in fact a point or argument being made amidst the mountain of evidence. The amount of historical content combined with the lack of a specific argument made the book even more confusing for myself as I attempted to find a thesis amongst evidence of a history I knew only vaguely.

With my experience in mind, in order to fully understand and gain insight from this book, it is important for a reader to be well versed in knowledge of Irish political and social history. Pine’s way of writing was very intriguing, however, and this kept the book interesting as he brought the complexity of the history of the radio to the forefront. I appreciate the extent to which he went to describe the historical setting of radio in great detail using an impressive amount of evidence from an array of sources to present an accurate account of history. If the book was supposed to include more than a history of radio in Ireland, then I believe Pine needed to direct his argument more concisely. The simple fact that I could not distinguish a precise

argument is more telling than anything that though the book has an immense amount of historical content, it's function in providing a more impactful point was lost within the avalanche of evidence.

Works Cited

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