

Friday Life

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Patrick Freyne



Adventures of the undernourished and the over-sexed

Given that half of their titles are the same, you might think that The 1900 Island (BBC2) and Love Island (Virgin Media Two) would be very similar. You'd be wrong. They're very different islands and very different programmes and if you went to one expecting the other, you'd be a bit put out. "I wanted to learn to whittle and now a voluptuous man is grinding on me!" you might shout.

The denizens of The 1900 Island have been marooned on the windswept island of Llandwyn by the BBC, who are angry at them because of Brexit, and feel that watching them subsist with early 20th-century technology is good enough for them. And so a number of modern British office workers and their families are given period costumes and jobs – fisherman, baker, farmer, grocer – for educational purposes and, I guess, laughs, and then they have to make their own food out of animals and trees and stuff.

In contrast, on the very sunny Love Island the participants' costumes are removed and their day-jobs include social media influencer, beauty therapist and ballroom dancer. That's all you need, really, to restart civilisation when the lights eventually go out. And then they are tasked with making sweet, sweet love.

On The 1900 Island people battle gout without medication. They cut their hands cleaning mussels they will sell for pennies. They have arguments over

sharing eggs. They struggle to fish in Britain's industrially overfished waters and their children go hungry, because the BBC are apparently allowed to do that with the Tories in power. It's only a matter of time, really, before they make a programme called the 1660s Island in which they infect participants with plague and set them on fire.

On Love Island, the residents are treated like the rarest panda bears. Their food just appears. They do lots of self-grooming, working out and lying around on multicoloured bean bags. They follow any texted instructions unquestioningly, accept the Stalinist erasure of some of their number (Sheriff disappeared this week for unspecified "rulebreaking") and they have no books. In fact, heavily-tattooed fireman Michael is the nearest thing they have to a book, and I fully expect that when the end comes, they will gather around him to read the cursive text on his chest for clues as to why they now live in a burning beanbag-fort.

A key difference between Love Island and The 1900 Island is that, on the latter, people come with families attached. On Love Island, relationship units are formed in an ancient rite overseen by a shiny, terrifying priestess named Caroline Flack. This is called "the Recoupling" and is a nerve-wracking experience because partnerless hunks and hunkettes are banished to the badlands beyond the



■ Above: Love Islanders Tommy and Molly-Mae take a bath. Left: The 1900 Islanders get into the post-Brexit spirit. PHOTOGRAPHS: ITV; BBC

villa where they are probably feasted on by buff vultures.

On one episode this week, Anton, a gym owner, gives us an insight into just how nerve-wracking and unhygienic the Recoupling is. "I was literally shitting myself," he says.

Yewande is my favourite on Love Island (I don't have favourites on The 1900 Island, because life is hard there and I reckon it's best not to get too attached). She's a scientist from Ireland and in the

show's trailers she was shown shedding a labcoat to reveal a bikini, just like Dr Bunsen Honeydew used to do.

Tommy, a boxer, is my other favourite. He's a simple soul who needs help making a cup of tea. He tells Molly-Mae that he wants to find an Adrian to his Rocky. He just wants someone to smile lovingly at him as he is beaten to a pulp. But Molly-Mae's roving eye is already gazing at Anton.

This love triangle makes Tommy glum.

He hates triangles, he says, clearly unaware of the triangular shape of his own torso. "I never want to see a triangle again in my life. If I see a triangle then..." He pauses. "I'm not going to do anything. I just don't want to see a triangle."

Like it or not he's in a triangle of Molly-Mae's devising. She can't choose between him and Anton. "I wish I could create Tomton or Antom," she says, and I imagine her fishing out Yewande's discarded labcoat and heading to the lab.

Tommy does his best to woo Molly-Mae. He uses his huge bearlike mitts to make her an omelette, something he does with the "assistance" of Curtis. This gives him an existential crisis. "I cooked the omelette so I don't know why I'm getting in the mindframe that I didn't," says Tommy, who's not entirely sure he really cooked the omelette.

Curtis, the ballroom dancer, is the house confidante. He guides, advises and whispers. In the past I've likened Love Island to a nature documentary. But on reflection this is only true if canaries, rabbits and rhinoceroses spend huge

amounts of time lifting weights and conferring among themselves about how to mate. There's a lot of talk on the show. When they hear there's to be a new hunk (they later also add a Longford hunkette) and that Yewande is to go on a date with him, rather than thinking, as they would on The 1900 Island, "Oh no! another mouth to feed!", the incumbent hunks start imagining him.

Tommy hates triangles, he says, clearly unaware of the triangular shape of his own torso. "I never want to see a triangle again in my life. If I see a triangle then... I'm not going to do anything. I just don't want to see a triangle"

"I think he's going to be six-foot-tall with a nice slim body," says Curtis. "I think he'll have abs," says Michael. "Healthy clean looking," says Curtis. "He's going to be lean as f**k," says Michael.

It's like a hunk-themed game of Guess Who. They're not shy with compliments. Molly-Mae decides to turn her love triangle into a square by adding new boy Danny to the mix. She praises his "calm" and "friendly" face, making him sound like a mobile above a baby's cot. Then Amber goes on a date with Danny. She dresses up in a sort of bustier and big pants combination that I do not understand and a floppy-haired caterer named Joe says, "You look sick!"

On The 1900 Island when someone says, "You look sick!" it means they're probably dying of malnutrition. That programme comes from a long line of fascinating documentary experiments where people are put in uncertain situations and subjected to the vagaries of fate. On Love Island, as the chortling sun rises and its strangely sweet and lumpy inhabitants waddle out towards their multi-coloured beanbags, it looks less like a documentary and more like a highly-sexed episode of Teletubbies. Anyway, I think they should do a crossover episode.

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PATRICK FREYNE



Lord Sugar needs a new boastful footrest, and 16 crisply suited wasp-chewers are eager to prove how much they want the job

THE MASTER AND HIS APPRENTI

Apprentice 2019 will be a little different, I think. Brexit will have come and gone by then and few will remember the old ways (partly because without EU safety regulations there'll be a coating of lead on everything).

Lord Sugar, garbed in a skull mask, spiked shoulder pads and leather codpiece, will make most of his pronouncements from astride an armoured battlewagon studded with the skulls of failed apprenti, flanked by his dread companions "Claude" and "Karen", now dressed as monks. But the weekly tasks will be pretty run-of-the-mill.

Week one: Scavenge for food. Week two: Experience new cultures (smuggling diesel across the border). Week three: trade with the river people (we need their healthy rats!). Week four: human resources puzzle - where's Dennis? Week five: product development puzzle - what kind of meat is this? Week six: dispute resolution - enter the Thunderdome! Week seven: would you like another helping of Dennis? I admit now that the meat was Dennis; I shouldn't have lied before. Week eight: spreadsheets!

This future season won't be on television, of course. The Tories will burn all the televisions in March 2019 to stop witches. *Apprentice 2019* will instead be whispered by firesides as the people feast on curvy black bananas and chlorinated rat and worship a giant wicker Boris. Meanwhile, over in Ireland, aka Eitropa, everyone will work for Google and be in the 'Ra.

But let's take a step back. It's still 2018 and the BBC has just launched the 14th series of *The Apprentice*. Sir Alan Sugar, looking like a wise old basketball, just can't get enough apprenti (this is the plural). He's got 13 of them already but he wants more. He's the Benny Hill of apprenti. "I can't wait to have me another apprentice!" he says, tucking his napkin into his shirt and smacking his lips. Enter 16 crisply-suited wasp-chewers striding purposefully into the void. It is, yet again, a veritable buffoonery of apprenti (buffoonery is the collective noun) with their wheelie suitcases and outrageous boasting.

One says she's "the Beyoncé of business", apparently unaware that Beyoncé herself is "the Beyoncé of business".

Another prides herself on being a "mumpreneur", which, now that I think of it, would make an excellent title for the next instalment of the Mummy horror franchise.

A third is in denial about a serious medical condition. "I've got so much self-confidence oozing from my skin," he says. The poor man.

A fourth has worse problems but is also in denial: "I'm like a cash machine," he says with delight. "If you press the right buttons I will give you money." (Imagine waking up emitting money like a cash machine, readers - terrifying.)

A fifth utters a warning for posterity. "I'm an extremist," she says, matter-of-factly. "My goal is worldwide domination."

A sixth breaks my heart. "I'd rather cry in a Ferrari than in a banger," he says, apparently clear that his future involves crying in some sort of car.

A seventh has an interesting plan that involves manhandling livestock. "I don't just grab the bull by the horns. I put him in a headlock and squeeze every opportunity that comes out of him."

You get the gist. They're a pile of swaggering clockwork cocks, their skins slick with "confidence", their eyes brimming with tears, money spurting from slots in their glossy heads, their lips gently humming *Crazy in Love* as they massage the glands of a confused bull.

We first see Lord Sugar sitting in a fancy car near a plane. It's implied that he's been on the plane, like some sort of king or wizard, but then we see him walking, using his legs like a peasant. "If you're so rich how come you're using your legs?" I shout.

Laughing at Lord Sugar's "jokes" is the first test. Lord Sugar has many jokes, though he utters them joylessly, as though he's being funny by accident, and he seems a bit annoyed when people laugh.

For example: when one of the apprenti describes herself as a nut enthusiast, he says, "You'll find out that there are a few nutty people here." The apprenti laugh like fools, happy gurgling fools, laughing with the scowling peanut man who they love like a crinkled money-Christ.

"Make me money and don't piss me off," says Lord Sugar eventually, tired of their guff. "If you are unhappy with my process you can go tell it to my HR firm Diddums and Don't Care."

This is presumably a real HR firm, otherwise he'd be risking a lawsuit.

So fickle and random

He splits the apprenti into male and female herds, much like the deer in the Phoenix Park, and then dispatches them to Malta ("while we're still welcome") with a list of items to procure. The list is so fickle and random - some wine, a model of a boat, a quantity of salt, window blinds - it would make a more curious group insane. Not this lot, who take to their respective roles with the zeal of Brexit negotiators, by which I mean they do little useful research and spend the day shouting English loudly at baffled foreigners.

"It turns out that everyone just sleeps all day around here, they don't bother opening the shops," says a man named David, who is at least trying to understand the culture.

One of my favourites so far is Jackie, a Canadian woman who tricks another woman, Jasmine, into being project leader just so she

can spend the rest of the programme sniping at her. I also have a soft spot for Alex because, on purchasing some wine for €59, he successfully haggles with the phrase: "Would you do it for €58.99?"

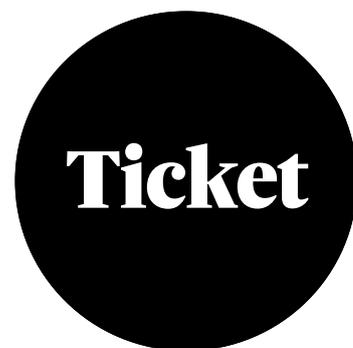
It makes me think of the Cadbury's ad where a child grifter pays for chocolate with some buttons and a toy unicorn. She'd wipe the floor with Alex, the mad bitch.

Like most adults in the workplace, they're all terrible at their jobs. They shout over each other, steal credit and apportion blame. They go to the wrong parts of Malta. The girls' team accidentally procure two of the same item. The boys' team spend time measuring an octopus corpse when what Lord Sugar was actually looking for was a confusingly named diving apparatus.

At the end of the episode, facing the wrath of our favourite sucrose-based aristocrat, it turns out the boys' team have beaten the girls' team. The boys are treated to a slap-up Maltese feed, much like the Bash Street Kids might have scoffed circa 1950 when Britain was great. Meanwhile the girls are treated to derision from a crusty old patriarch, much like women received circa 1950 and, also, today.

Anyway, we're under no illusions anymore that these shows are designed to find people who will be anything more than boastful footrests for his lordship. But *The Apprentice* and that other business-lauding programme, *Dragons' Den*, were developed in an era when "entrepreneur" was still an aspirational term and not, like nowadays, an entry in the DSM. These people take themselves very seriously.

In Ireland we've safeguarded our nation from reality TV businessfolk by creating the consequence-free, pretend role of "president" (not a real job) of "Ireland Inc" (not a real country) as a distraction. Over in the UK and America, however, reality TV business values now shape policy. So remember, while it's fun to snipe from the sidelines, at the end of the day snarky take-downs are no match for shameless ambition.



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PATRICK FREYNE



This week, Michael Healy-Rae pulled one over on all the big eejits in Dublin by pretending to be a television presenter. More power to him

ALL HAIL IRELAND'S LATEST TV PRESENTER

This week Michael Healy-Rae infiltrated the Dublin 4 media bubble as the co-presenter of Virgin Media's *Tonight Show*.

He does so with the panache of the Scarlet Pimpernel, albeit a Scarlet Pimpernel who eats dinner in the middle of the day, smells like rolled-up euros in a biscuit tin and is scarlet only because of the TK red lemonade coursing through his veins.

I suppose we've known something like this was coming, ever since we officially decided that anyone who had an opinion on something should get to have a go at it.

"Pssst, nurse . . . why is my anaesthiologist playing an accordion, wearing a flat cap and shaking hands with my widow?"

"Yes, we could call the bomb squad, but Michael's here already and he's brought pliers."

"Hello passengers, this evening your pilot will be Michael Healy-Rae because it's 2018 and we don't give a f*****k."

The Tonight Show has a strange format anyway, in that its heavyweight presenter (Matt Cooper) comes with a spare (Ivan Yates) lest one of them malfunctions. When one does (in this instance, Yates) they seek interesting alternatives – a trained journalist, six cats in a sack or, in this instance, Michael Healy-Rae, God King of the Southern Reach.

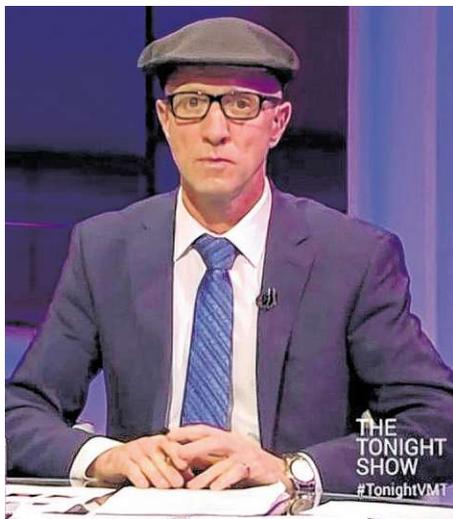
And that's why Healy-Rae is sitting there beside Matt Cooper wearing Clark Kent spectacles because he's done his research about what journalists look like and also, presumably, because he's in disguise ("Aha, it's me!" he says, whipping off his glasses halfway through).

First observation: He looks tiny next to Cooper, like a 10-year-old child, a hand puppet or a mythical woodland creature who grants wishes if you answer his riddle (the latter, the people of Kerry will tell you, is accurate). Initially, Healy-Rae's questions to guests are so reasonable Cooper, a seasoned question-asker, probably assumes he is asking them himself.

At no point, at any rate, does Cooper grab journalist Gavan Reilly by the wrists and shout "YOU CAN SEE HIM TOO?" though he does look over in Healy-Rae's direction from time to time with an expression that says, "So, it has finally come to this."

Sitting nearby are five politicians, academics and journalists who do not wear flat caps and are hence less memorable and telegenic than Michael Healy-Rae and who also look at Michael as though saying, "So, it has finally come to this." I'm going to call them Not-Michael 1 to 5.

It's soon clear why having a sitting politician moderating makes no sense. While Not-Michael 5 (Sinn Féin's Eoin Ó Broin) and Not-Michael 4 (Fianna Fáil's Lorraine Clifford-Lee) bicker over housing policy and the latter's refusal to support the former's no-confidence motion in Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy,



Poacher or gamekeeper? Michael Healy Rae on *The Tonight Show* last Tuesday.

SCREENGRAB: VIRGIN MEDIA

Michael briefly steps in to defend landlords. Michael is, incidentally, the biggest landlord in the Dáil. When, later, they discuss the plan to put cancer warnings on alcohol packaging, he laments the "demonisation" of the industry and starts listing all the wonderful people who work in it. Michael, incidentally, has a brother who runs a pub.

"Have you been lobbied, Michael, or do you need to be lobbied?" asks Matt Cooper, clear he's not a figment of his imagination now.

"I think he's one of the lobbyists," says Senator Frances Black.

The truth is, Michael Healy-Rae isn't really presenting at all. He's making a public appearance. His autocue, if he has one, probably looks like one of those toy steering wheels we give to babies. He is here to make the heads of metropolitan elitists like myself explode all over Twitter like digital spores.

"Surely this was the type of thing our multi-seat proportional representation system was meant to contain in the outlands, with all the ghost estates and country 'n' Irish bands and former members of Westlife?" they tweet. Yes, weeping here at my desk in "metropolitan elite headquarters" (*The Irish Times*), I have so many questions.

Since when can Healy-Raes even leave Kerry? (The Dáil doesn't count; I assume there's an EU-subsidised underground tunnel running directly from the Healy-Rae compound to Leinster House.)

Could a Healy-Rae ever be president? I mean, everyone else is having a go. They'd probably do it if Ireland was declared "Greater Kerry" (running Kerry is a bigger ambition to them than running a parochial backwater like "Ireland").

Is Michael, in donning glasses and asking journo questions, insensitively appropriating my culture? I suppose he is. But cultural

appropriation is part of politics. A few weeks ago, for example, a besuited Leo Varadkar had a go on a horse-drawn plough at the Ploughing Championships. "Look at me!" his expression seemed to say. "Though I am better than you with your lowly peasant pastimes and, how you say, 'cow-shite', I too can walk on uneven ground and feign an interest in diesel."

If Varadkar and the rest can appropriate culchie culture when it suits them, then I guess Michael Healy-Rae can pull one over on the big eejits in Dublin by pretending to be a television presenter (as a grotesque culchie/metropolitan elite hybrid, I'm torn on both issues).

Also, what difference does it make? I mean, look who he's replacing. Ivan Yates, a former bookie with a ministerial pension, is an end-of-level boss version of Healy-Rae anyway.

Because this is the big secret of Irish politics and the reason "mainstream" politicians like to mock the Healy-Raes in the first place: their blatant pandering to their constituents is a core political value in Ireland. If you gave most Irish TDs an MRI scan you'd see that most were, in fact, wearing tiny little Healy-Rae flat caps (hence, as Karl Deeter notes on this show, why so many politicians complain about a lack of housing while simultaneously protesting developments in their own constituencies).

The new breed of photogenic Fine Gaelers may kiss pictures of Macron at night, have the word "technocrat" on their Tinder profiles and name their children things like "Google" and "Development Plan 2020", but get them on the doorstep and they'll sing a rebel song, kiss your stupid baby and rustle up a medical card before you can say the words "single transferable vote". In Irish politics we are all Michael Healy-Rae. And this, I presume, is the crushing point the producers of *The Tonight Show* are trying to make.



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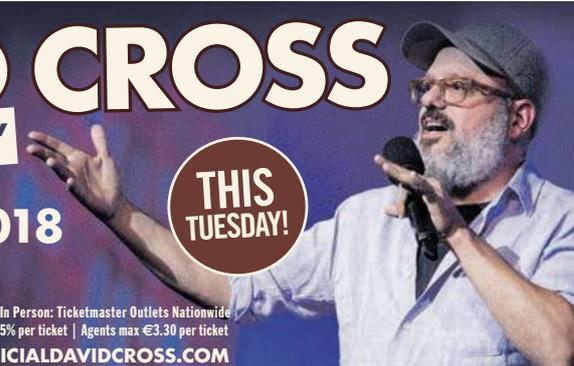
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