

**Culture, Taste and Contestation in British Television Comedy, 1961 – 1969**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Humanities

**2018**

**Michael G. Potter**

**School of Arts, Languages and Cultures**

## **Contents**

Figures	3
Abbreviations	6
Abstract	7
Declaration and Copyright Statement	8
Acknowledgements and Dedication	9
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Morecambe and Wise: projecting and performing ‘ordinariness’ and challenging the ‘swinging Sixties’</b>	<b>30</b>
1.1: Morecambe and Wise and the projection of ‘ordinariness’	37
1.2: Morecambe and Wise performing ‘ordinariness’	49
1.3: Performing in the ‘Sixties’	68
Conclusion	85
<b>Chapter 2: Johnny Speight and the left-wing politics of race and immigration in 1960s Britain</b>	<b>88</b>
2.1: Speight’s sitcoms and the problem of cultural integration	102
2.2: Speight’s sitcoms and the liberal ‘Establishment’	121
2.3: The conservative response to Speight’s sitcoms	134
Conclusion	149
<b>Chapter 3: ‘Look at us, we’re dregs’: <i>Steptoe and Son</i>’s challenge to affluence and modernity during the early 1960s</b>	<b>151</b>
3.1: <i>Steptoe and Son</i> : Victorian poverty amidst modern affluence	162
3.2: Harold Steptoe: cultural capital and its lack	190
Conclusion	210
<b>Chapter 4: <i>That Was The Week That Was</i>: deference, decline and distinction, 1962 – 1963</b>	<b>213</b>
4.1: Deference	223
4.2: Decline	237
4.3: Distinction	246
Conclusion	265
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>267</b>
Bibliography	274
Appendices	298

Word Count: 88,615

## Figures

<b>Fig.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	'Keep going you fool' ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	44
2	Eric and Ernie at home ('Think of Morecambe', <i>TV Times</i> , 10 February 1966, p. 9).	46
3	Ernie's discussion of science interrupted by Eric and his bag ( <i>Two of a Kind</i> , 07 July 1962).	53
4	Hills, Green, Eric and Ernie performing <i>Julius Caesar</i> ( <i>Two of a Kind</i> , 21 July 1962).	56
5	Figure 5 - Eric and Edmund Hockridge both performing as the Red Shadow in <i>Desert Song</i> ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 07 October 1968).	58
6	Morecambe thinks he will be playing the leading role ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	61
7	Morecambe star struck by Cushing ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	62
8	Morecambe in the wrong costume, parodying Cushing ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	63
9	Morecambe laughs uncontrollably at the sight of Wise in costume and his attempts at acting ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	65
10	'What a magnificent suit of armour' ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	65
11	Morecambe mistakes Guinevere for the Doctor ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	66
12	Wise consoles Cushing who claims his career is in ruins ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	67
13	Front Covers of the <i>TV Times</i> and <i>Radio Times</i> promoting the return of Morecambe and Wise's television series during the 1960s (Clockwise from top left: 'Cover', <i>TV Times</i> , 27 March 1964, p. 1. 'Cover', <i>TV Times</i> , 20 January 1966, p. 1. 'Cover', <i>Radio Times</i> , 29 August 1968, p. 1. 'Cover', <i>Radio Times</i> , 24 July 1969, p. 1).	69
14	The Beatles with Morecambe and Wise (Dave Lanning, 'The Beatles get Wise (and Morecambe)', <i>TV Times</i> , 10 April 1964, p. 7).	70
15	The Beatles on <i>Two of a Kind</i> ('The Nation's Favourite Beatles Number One for ITV', <a href="http://www.atvtoday.co.uk/72956-itv/">http://www.atvtoday.co.uk/72956-itv/</a> , accessed 14 February 2018).	72
16	Ernie 'with it' ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 25 December 1969).	73
17	Performing on stage in front of tabs and a backdrop on <i>Two of a Kind</i> (Left to Right. <i>Two of a Kind</i> , 11 August 1962. <i>Two of a Kind</i> , 01 September 1962).	77
18	Performing with the tabs on <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> ( <i>The</i>	77

	<i>Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 25 December 1969).	
19	Eric as G. H. Elliot (the 'Chocolate Coloured Coon') ( <i>Two of a Kind</i> , 14 July 1962).	79
20	Morecambe performing his famed Jimmy Durante impression ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	80
21	Curtain call interrupted by Janet Webb ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 27 July 1969).	81
22	Eric in drag as Marlene Dietrich ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 24 August 1969).	81
23	Danny La Rue before and after make-up ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 07 September 1969).	81
24	Revisiting the old act ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 07 September 1969).	83
25	'Oggie' the ventriloquist dummy ( <i>The Morecambe and Wise Show</i> , 25 December 1969).	84
26	The characters of <i>TDUDP</i> (Left to Right) Alf, (Warren Mitchell), Else (Dandy Nichols), Rita (Una Stubbs) and Mike (Anthony Booth) ('Alf Garnett will be played by Fast Show's Simon Day', <i>Mail Online</i> , 29 March 2016, <a href="http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513539/Alf-Garnett-played-Fast-s-Simon-Day-Till-Death-returns-TV-screens-ll-just-sexist-racist-misogynist-ever.html">http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513539/Alf-Garnett-played-Fast-s-Simon-Day-Till-Death-returns-TV-screens-ll-just-sexist-racist-misogynist-ever.html</a> , accessed 22 May 2018).	99
27	Arthur (Eric Sykes) and Paki-Paddy (Spike Milligan) (' <i>Curry and Chips – 1969</i> ', <i>British Classic Comedy</i> , 01 October 2015, <a href="https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/naughty-but-funny">https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/naughty-but-funny</a> , accessed 22 May 2018).	100
28	The opening titles of <i>TDUDP</i> ( <i>TDUDP</i> , 06 June 1966).	125
29	Alf bursting with pride at the sight of Buckingham Palace ( <i>TDUDP</i> , 20 February 1967).	126
30	Alf's portrait of the Queen gets splattered with ink ( <i>TDUDP</i> , 20 February 1967).	140
31	Alf smiles and nods in agreement as he reads Whitehouse's book ( <i>TDUDP</i> , 27 February 1967).	145
32	Rita throws Whitehouse's book in the fire ( <i>TDUDP</i> , 27 February 1967).	146
33	Harold riding his horse and cart back to the yard ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 11 October 1965).	166
34	The Steptoes' scrapyard ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 17 January 1963).	168
35	The Steptoes' front room ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 17 January 1963).	168
36	Harold's stock costume ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 03 January 1963).	172
37	Albert's stock costume ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 03 January 1963).	172
38	Albert's best clothes ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 17 January 1963).	172
39	Harold's dirty and unkempt clothing ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	180
40	Albert bathing in the front room ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	180
41	Albert eats his dinner in the bath but loses his pickled onions in the water ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	181
42	Delia is horrified by her surroundings ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	182

43	Harold struggles to make a Manhattan cocktail ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	183
44	Delia falls into Albert's bath water ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	183
45	Harold returned home from his rounds with a bath tub ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	185
46	Harold admiring an article in <i>Home and Beauty</i> ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	188
47	The Steptoes' bathroom ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	188
48	Woodworm has taken hold of the bathroom floor ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	189
49	Albert bathes in the living room again ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 10 January 1963).	189
50	Harold loads the chair for his study onto the cart ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	194
51	Harold longingly considers 'The Offer' ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	194
52	Harold's four battered books tied together with string for his pine panelled library ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	194
53	Harold's prized golf club ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	195
54	Harold can't move the cart and therefore leave ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	195
55	Harold falls onto the cart and starts to cry as he realises escape is impossible ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 07 June 1962).	196
56	Harold ponders what life would be like had his mother been alive ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 17 January 1963).	199
57	Harold admires his book collection which is organised according to colour and size ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 24 January 1963).	202
58	The upper-class antiques dealer comes into contact with Harold and Albert who betray their lowly status with their appearance and Harold's failed attempts at Received Pronunciation ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 11 October 1965).	203
59	Albert spots a promotional poster for <i>Nudes of 1964</i> ( <i>Steptoe</i> , 04 February 1964).	207

## **Abbreviations**

Audience research report (ARR)

BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC)

*Curry & Chips (C&C)*

Independent Television Authority (ITA)

National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVALA)

*Steptoe and Son (Steptoe)*

*Till Death Us Do Part (TDUDP)*

*That Was The Week That Was (TW3)*

Transmission Date (TX)

## Abstract

The thesis makes three broad arguments about television comedies and their audiences in the 1960s. My research will highlight how comedy and responses to it engaged with debates about the perceived large scale social and cultural changes taking place during the decade. I challenge the dominant progressive narratives of the period and argue for a more differentiated and nuanced view of the 1960s. In so doing, first, I interrogate the characterisation of the period as post-Victorian and liberal and, consequently, challenge the extent of popular participation in contemporary social, cultural and economic change. Second, my thesis contends that British comedies were sites of cultural contestation where debates about taste and acceptable public discourse were conducted. Finally, I explore how social identity was constructed and challenged both in the texts and production of the comedies and in the audience response to these.

Chapter One examines the comedy double-act of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise in their off-screen activities and in their television programmes *Two of a Kind* and *The Morecambe and Wise Show*. It argues that 'ordinariness' was persistently championed in all aspects of their self-promotion and representation. Consequently, their style of humour was premised on the deflation of all forms of cultural pretension. The chapter also highlights how the mainstream popularity of the duo challenges any straightforwardly progressive reading of Britain in the 1960s, grounded in cultural modernism.

Chapter Two explores two sitcoms written by Johnny Speight: *Till Death Us Do Part* and *Curry and Chips*. I argue that Speight's own confusion about questions of race and immigration in the contemporary period was reproduced in his scripts which, consequently, pointed to his unstable and, oft-times, anxious handling of British social change. Speight's sitcoms, however, invited a popular conservative backlash from critical viewers. I highlight how, in response to these two programmes, the audience made strong claims about taste and acceptability and, by extension, their self-identity.

The third chapter focuses on *Steptoe and Son* and argues that it served as a key site where the supposed contemporary social advancement and material affluence of the working classes was strongly contested in televisual terms. This sitcom offered a representation of Victorian poverty existing into the period of the so-called 'Affluent Society'. Viewers became voyeurs of the Steptoes' social world. Steptoe and Son, as characters, had limited social mobility; they were excluded from the social, cultural and economic advancements of the 1960s, despite Harold's best endeavours to participate.

The final chapter examines the BBC's satirical programme *That Was The Week That Was*. *TW3* has become synonymous with 1960s social change, emblematic of the youthful and liberal backlash against the conservative, establishment Britain. I highlight that whilst the texts of these programmes support this view, the response from some viewers evidenced the persistence of conservative and deferential attitudes well into the 1960s. Viewers utilised the programme to make assertions about their own and others' identity.

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

## **Copyright Statement**

- I. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.
- II. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- III. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.
- IV. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in The University's policy on Presentation of Theses.



## **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Professor Frank Mort and Dr Max Jones who have been outstanding supervisors, not only for this PhD research but at Masters and undergraduate level also. For the past seven years they have provided direction, reassurance and support, yet have been robustly challenging throughout. They have consistently pushed me to become a better historian. Professor Julie-Marie Strange's contribution as my panellist has also been invaluable. Her constructive feedback has always served to reconfigure my thinking and encourage me to look at things differently. It is impossible to overstate how immensely privileged I feel to have been able to work under their tutelage.

I am indebted to the University of Manchester's President's Doctoral Scholarship which funded this postgraduate research.

The majority of the archival research for this thesis was undertaken at the BBC Written Archives Centre. Katie Ankers has been an incredible support over the past four years and the wonderful material presented herein would have remained hidden away had it not been for her help and tenacity.

Since 2009, I have been so fortunate to have been a student, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, in the University of Manchester's brilliant History Department. Over the years I have been taught by, met and been encouraged by so many wonderful people who have broadened my mind, enhanced my knowledge and cemented my love of history.

The University of Manchester will forever be a special place. It is where I made life-long friends, met my wife and married. Manchester has become home.

I must thank my truly marvellous friends, most of whom I met at the University of Manchester all those years ago, who have always enquired about progress, encouraged me to keep going, but, most importantly, have provided countless opportunities for procrastination, escape and fun. Thanks Zara, Jaco, Grace, Helen, Steph, Catherine and Jade.

My amazing parents, Janet and Gordon, have supported me in every way throughout this process, sharing in the highs and encouraging and pushing me through the lows. They've kindly proofread endless drafts of the thesis in its various incarnations throughout the years. I have been so fortunate to have always had them on my side and I owe them everything. I would never have got this far without them.

My grandmother, Una Lindsley, was a constant support throughout my research. Whilst she could never understand why I wasn't doing 'proper history', she was always available, normally at the other end of the phone, to offer encouragement and reassurance when I most needed it. She would have been so immensely proud of me for having finished this PhD.

Finally, I could not have done any of this without the unwavering love and support of my incredible wife. Over the past eight years and, perhaps more importantly, during my PhD, she has offered laughter, happiness and an unwavering belief in me. She always told me I could when I told myself I could not. For Jennifer Potter.

## Introduction

It reached an all-time low level, in the last series, for vulgarity, obscenity and abusiveness.... For sheer bad taste and utter abusive degrading rubbish this show would be very hard to beat – worse than 10<sup>th</sup> rate revue.

It has always been extremely left-wing, but to allow it to sink so low as to plaster a man of our Prime Minister's morals and integrity, with such abusive degrading muck, is beyond the bounds of decency, by any standards.

...we ask you, as decent English people, to see that [courtesy and dignity]... prevail on an English screen.

We want to be entertained in an adult fashion, but not by this foul, disgusting, really offensive mixture, handed out in *TW3*.

Please do not ignore these opinions of ordinary decent people, with teenage families.

Those young male and female despoilers in the *TW3* team are very un-typical – thank God – of most of our young people. We do not want them, and their vulgar exhibitionism, befouling our Saturday night viewing, and we do not want always want to 'turn off' at peak viewing hours!<sup>1</sup>

In this, the third of four letters she sent to the BBC on the same subject, Mrs B. M. Mitchell, of 54 Coleman Avenue in Hove, Sussex, wrote to Stuart Hood, the Controller of the BBC Television Service, on 1 October 1963, to give her appraisal of the corporation's new Saturday night satirical television programme, *That Was The Week That Was*. Long hidden in the BBC's archives, Mrs Mitchell's letter exists alongside thousands of others from viewers who wrote in order to register their opinions on an array of television comedy programmes broadcast during the 1960s. Whilst Mrs Mitchell's is only one voice, her letter is emblematic of a number of the key issues and themes aired by contemporary viewers in their correspondence and revealed in the BBC's audience research reports about 1960s television programmes. As demonstrated by Mrs Mitchell, comedy's content and reception was a site where key socio-cultural issues were hotly debated. Viewers, like Mrs Mitchell,

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter: Mrs B. M. Mitchell, 01 October 1963, R41/289/12, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).

also utilised comedy texts in order to make claims about their own social identity and tastes and that of others. It is such issues, raised by Mrs Mitchell and many other contemporary viewers, which are the principal concern of this thesis.

The thesis makes three broad arguments about television comedies and their audiences in the 1960s. Principally, my research will highlight how comedy and responses to it engaged with debates about the perceived large scale social and cultural changes taking place during the decade, especially those centred on modernity, liberalism, taste, participation, mass culture and social identity. I challenge dominant narratives of the period as defined by large scale radical and progressive social and cultural change and argue for a more differentiated and nuanced view of the 1960s. In so doing, first, I interrogate the characterisation of the decade as post-Victorian and liberal and, consequently, challenge the extent of popular participation in contemporary social, cultural and economic change. Second, my thesis contends that British comedies were sites of cultural contestation where debates about taste and acceptable public discourse were conducted. Finally, I explore how social identity was constructed and contested both in the texts and production of the comedies and in the audience response to these. Thereby, I argue that viewers utilised their critical readings of these programmes as a means of both self-fashioning and in order to make claims about others.

Over four chapters, my thesis will examine a number of different popular television comedies broadcast on British television during the 1960s. These comprise the light entertainment programmes *Two of a Kind* (Associated Television (ATV), 1961-8) and *The Morecambe and Wise Show* (BBC, 1968-9), both starring the comedy double-act of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise, the sitcoms *Steptoe and Son* (hereafter *Steptoe*) (BBC, 1962-65), *Till Death Us Do Part* (hereafter *TDUDP*) (BBC, 1965-8) and *Curry & Chips* (hereafter *C&C*) (London Weekend Television, 1969) together with the satirical television programme *That Was The Week That Was* (hereafter *TW3*) (BBC, 1962-3).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Initially the chapter on satire also considered the further two satirical programmes produced by Ned Sherrin for the BBC in the 1960s: *Not So Much a Programme, More a Way of Life* (BBC,

The programmes examined in this thesis have been selected for four main reasons: their mass popular appeal; the debate they provoked; the substantial archival footprint they generated; and to reveal the wide variety of comedy broadcast on British television during the period. Morecambe and Wise feature because their story captures the history of mass popular entertainment in post-war Britain. They were doyens of light entertainment who emerged to national prominence on television during the 1960s, attracting larger audiences and greater critical acclaim during the period. The television sitcoms of Johnny Speight (*TDUDP* and *C&C*) have been included primarily on account of their contentious content and the popular and official controversy they generated. These responses are well documented in letters to, and in the audience research reports of, the BBC and Independent Television Authority. Furthermore, *TDUDP* in particular attracted huge popular audiences. *Steptoe* deserves attention for its distinctive combination of critical acclaim and large audiences. Finally, *TW3* has been examined because of the sheer volume of varied responses and controversy it produced, documented in almost five hundred letters to the BBC which have been retained in their archive. With the exception of Speight's sitcoms, none of these programmes has been subjected to sustained scholarly analysis.

### **Television and its audiences**

My thesis seeks to extend and develop academic scholarship on television. By the 1960s the medium had come to eclipse radio as the principal form of entertainment, as 90% of British homeowners owned a television and consumed, on average, just under two hours of television programming every

---

1964 – 1965) and *BBC3* (BBC, 1965 – 1966) for which there were scripts, production files and 452 and 327 letters, respectively, sent to the BBC about the programmes. The sheer quantity of primary sources exceeded the space available in the thesis for a quality analysis. Therefore, *TW3*, as the best known of the three programmes, was selected as the case study. The extensive archival work into the two later programmes, however, provides scope for further research beyond the thesis.

evening.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this popularity, television is yet to attract the level of scholarly attention afforded to film and radio.<sup>4</sup> Whilst institutional histories of television have been numerous, this has been to the detriment of historical studies focused on television's specific content and its audiences.<sup>5</sup> Some general surveys of the history of British television programming have recently emerged however.<sup>6</sup> But these largely fail to fully engage with programme content, meanings and reception, because they are grounded in the specialism of cultural and media studies.<sup>7</sup> I seek to respond to the call from historian Lawrence Black for histories of television which 'move beyond discussing it chiefly as an institutional mode of communication to the exclusion of its cultural forms' and to 'contemplate it visually and as something not only produced but also consumed.'<sup>8</sup>

The most developed body of work, though this also lacks sustained historicity, is that on audiences and cultures of television viewing.<sup>9</sup> During the

---

<sup>3</sup> Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume V: Competition* (Oxford, 1995), p. 438. Tim O'Sullivan, 'Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950 – 1965', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London, 1991), p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of television historiography see Helen Wheatley (ed.), *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television History* (New York, 2007). John Corner, 'Finding data, reading patterns, telling stories: issues in the historiography of television', *Media, Culture & Society* 25:2 (2003), pp. 273 – 280. John Ellis, 'Television and history', *History Workshop Journal* 56 (2003), pp. 278 – 285.

<sup>5</sup> Briggs, *Competition*. James Curran and James Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (St Ives, 2000). Bernard Sendell, *Independent Television in Britain, Volume 2: Expansion and Change, 1958 – 1968* (London, 1983). Catherine Johnson and Robert Turnock, *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years* (Maidenhead, 2005). Des Freedman, *Television Policies of the Labour Party 1951 – 2000* (London, 2003). Lawrence Black, 'Whose finger on the button? British Television and the Politics of Cultural Control', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25:4 (2004), pp. 547 – 575.

<sup>6</sup> Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in front of the TV* (London, 2013). Louis Barfe, *Turned Out Nice Again: The Story of British Light Entertainment* (London, 2008). Oliver Double, *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Basingstoke, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Janet Thumin (ed.), *Small Screen, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London, 2002). Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain* (London, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Black, 'Whose finger', p. 548.

<sup>9</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Television Memories', pp. 159 – 181. Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London, 2007). Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991). Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London, 1996). Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale, *Media and Audiences: New Perspectives* (Berkshire, 2003). Virginia Nightingale (ed.), *The Handbook of Media Audiences* (West Sussex, 2011). Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds.), *The Audience Studies*

1960s television audiences were initially assigned a passive role in readings of media texts and were believed to be 'anaesthetised' or unwittingly influenced by them. In opposition, scholars developed the 'uses and gratification' theory whereby media audiences satisfied different social and psychological needs, which were determined by individual personality or psychology. Building on these approaches, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, formulated in the 1980s, argued that media institutions produced messages which defined issues and set agendas for viewers, who then read meanings from the signs and symbols they observed on their television screens. Thus, the viewer was now engaged in active work, but under constraints: media texts contained pre-existing meanings from which only limited readings were possible by the audience.<sup>10</sup> In response, David Morley argued that viewers were actually able to decode television texts in different ways and could offer oppositional meanings, influenced by the individual viewer's socio-cultural situation.<sup>11</sup> This model has come to inform most subsequent readings of media audiences. The question, as Morley has latterly put it, is: 'what people do with the media rather than what the media do to them.'<sup>12</sup> Building on Hall and Morley's work, in this thesis I ask the question: what did audiences do with 1960s television comedy? How did the programmes covered here sit with the wider dynamics of everyday life and popular experience in its multiple contemporary forms?

The majority of studies examining television audiences rely on qualitative interviews and quantitative surveying methods of contemporary viewers. Even where recent research has attempted to examine the 'historical audience' this has been done via 'long semi-structured interviews' with viewers remembering their viewing experiences.<sup>13</sup> Historical studies have tended to

---

*Reader* (London, 2003). Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London, 1991). David Morley, *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andy Lowe and Paul Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972 – 1979* (London, 1980), pp. 128 – 138.

<sup>11</sup> David Morley, *The "Nationwide" Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> David Morley, 'Changing paradigms in audience studies', in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Hazel Collie, Mary Irwin, Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood, 'Researching the History of Television for Women in Britain, 1947-1989', *Media History* 19:1 (2013), p. 112.

ignore the audience as it expressed itself contemporaneously. Janet Thumin has noted in her discussion of the 1950s that television ‘forms, representations and technologies can be discovered and described, but the understandings of these produced by contemporary audiences... can only ever be a matter for speculation.’<sup>14</sup> In similar fashion, Lynn Spigel has cautioned that ‘the reconstruction of viewing experiences at some point in the past is an elusive project.’<sup>15</sup> Whilst some scholars have lamented the absence of sources for engaging with audiences in the past, the sheer quantity and quality of viewer responses provided by the BBC archives and presented in my thesis offers an as yet largely untapped opportunity for analysing audience responses to television comedy in the 1960s. An audience focus is a major contention of the thesis.

The academic study of historical comedy is still in its infancy; most existing works are largely covered by sociology and media and cultural studies.<sup>16</sup> Those who have studied comedy attribute its neglect to its low/popular cultural status, its apparent artistic simplicity and its supposed lack of concern with broader, macro-level, developments.<sup>17</sup> In opposition, some authors have made the case for comedy as having played a central role in the representation of everyday life and its concern with contemporary questions of societal change.<sup>18</sup> The media scholar Andy Medhurst has suggested that comedy has contributed ‘significantly to how English culture has imagined its Englishness.’<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, some scholars have shown how the study of comedy can be particularly productive for social and cultural historians. Vic Gatrell, for

---

<sup>14</sup> Janet Thumin, ‘Introduction: Small screen, big ideas’, in Janet Thumin (ed.), *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London, 202), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, 1992), p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> John Mundy and Glyn White, *Laughing Matters: Understanding film, television and radio comedy* (Manchester, 2012). Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London, 2005). Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference* (London, 1998). Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton (eds.), *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (Basingstoke, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Sam Friedman, ‘Legitimizing a Discredited Art Form: The Changing Field of British Comedy’, *Edinburgh Working Papers in Sociology* 39 (2009), p. 349. Jürgen Kamm and Birgit Neumann, ‘Introduction: The Aesthetics and Politics of British TV Comedy’, in Jürgen Kamm and Birgit Neumann (eds.), *British TV Comedies: Cultural Concepts, Contexts and Controversies* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 8 – 9. Mills, *Sitcom*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London, 1994), p. 11. Kamm and Neumann, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London, 2007), p. 1.

example, in his study of satirical prints in eighteenth-century London, has argued that 'studying laughter can take us to the heart of a generation's shifting attitudes, sensibilities and anxieties' and is 'perfectly contrived to lead us to past mentalities along routes as yet hardly explored.'<sup>20</sup> This thesis builds on Gatrell's work, about the eighteenth-century, to show how comedy represented, responded to and debated the apparently major changes taking place during the 1960s and to what effect.

In so doing, I move beyond the extant accounts of television comedy, which until recently, have been predominantly journalistic in form, offering narrative and/or anecdotal histories. A number of such works exist for the television comedies under examination here.<sup>21</sup> These texts serve to highlight the continuing popularity of certain comedies and the desire for sentimental memorialisation amongst fans, which itself serves as a useful source for understanding how audiences have remembered these programmes. While I have been working on the thesis, however, some important new historical works on British television comedy have emerged.

Gavin Schaffer's 2014 monograph, *The Vision of a Nation*, examined the ways in which television responded to and represented race relations, immigration and multiculturalism on British television in the 1960s and 1970s. Schaffer maintained that the emergent output was 'a manufactured model of multiculturalism, television's own vision of a nation which looked to create impact as much as reflect it.' Television's presentation of these issues, Schaffer has argued, 'played a significant role in shaping the way [they]... came to be understood in Britain' as it 'became a clear "site of struggle" in this period.' Schaffer identified the sitcom genre, specifically *TDUDP* and *C&C*, as one such

---

<sup>20</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Annabel Merullo and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003). David Nathan, *The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London, 1971). Eric Midwinter, *Make 'Em Laugh: Famous Comedians and Their Worlds* (London, 1979). Johnny Fisher, *Funny Way To Be A Hero* (London, 1973). Humphrey Carpenter, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom Of The 1960s* (London, 2000). Roger Wilmut, *From Fringe to Flying Circus: Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960 – 1980* (London, 1982). Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfeld, *Bring Me Laughter: Four Decades of TV Comedy* (London, 1987). Mark Lewisohn, *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy* (London, 1998).



contested site.<sup>22</sup> Emerging at the same time as Schaffer's work, historian Brett Bebbler offered a similar analysis of Speight's output.<sup>23</sup> Schaffer's approach to comedy, which examined production, performance and reception in a historical context, and his recognition of comedy as a contested site, serves as a model for further development here. It is my contention, however, that his work leans too heavily on institutional, authorial and production contexts, at the expense of content and audience. I seek to rectify this in a broader range of television comedy by offering content and performance analysis alongside rigorous examination of the extant popular and critical response from audiences.

More recently, Schaffer has examined how the alternative comedy of the 1980s served as an 'agent of change, challenge and rebellion'. He has explored the 'relationship between comedy and rebellion' and questioned the extent to which alternative comedy performance served as 'an agent of political challenge'.<sup>24</sup> Building on this framework here, I examine how British comedy in the 1960s served as a site of contestation where debates about contemporary social change and taste were enacted.

My thesis will aim to highlight how television comedy, as a key form of popular culture, played a significant role in the formation and reproduction of social identity throughout the 1960s. In so doing, the thesis has been influenced by the framework laid out by Pierre Bourdieu in his study of taste and cultural consumption in 1960s and 1970s France. Bourdieu concluded that whilst class was not produced by culture, culture played a vital part in the sustenance and reproduction of class. Consequently, culture represented a form of capital, inherited and learned through family upbringing and education, and subsequently exchanged as a means of marking social distance from others. Thus, the possession of cultural capital and taste was crucial in determining social position and was the principal means by which the middle classes

---

<sup>22</sup> Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960 – 1980* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>23</sup> Brett Bebbler, 'The Short Life of *Curry and Chips*: Racial Comedy on British Television in the 1960s', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11:2 (2014), pp. 213 – 235. Brett Bebbler, 'Till Death Us Do Part: Political Satire and Social Realism in the 1960s and 1970s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:2 (2014), pp. 253 – 274.

<sup>24</sup> Gavin Schaffer, 'Fighting Thatcher with Comedy: What to Do When There Is No Alternative', *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016), pp. 375 – 376.

distinguished themselves from those at lower positions in the social hierarchy. Bourdieu drew the distinction between the middle class's 'aesthetic disposition' and the latter's 'culture of the necessary'.<sup>25</sup> Whilst Bourdieu's work has been extremely influential and has encouraged greater attention to culture, as opposed to labour, as formative of social identity, it emerged from fieldwork conducted in mid-1960s France and focused on 'traditional' forms of cultural activity to the detriment of newer forms of popular culture, notably television. Indeed, Frank Trentmann has suggested that one of the key failings of Bourdieu's research was his interest in high culture, at the expense of examining cultural practices that cut across all social groups, such as television viewing.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Bourdieu's approach offers a framework through which to engage with popular television comedy in 1960s Britain. I suggest here that comedy relied on notions of cultural capital for comic purposes and that audiences utilised their appreciation/depreciation of television comedy as a form of capital that contributed to the formation of their own self-identities. They also used this to differentiate themselves from and make claims about others within British society.

Most recently, sociologists have made forays, premised on the work of Bourdieu, into the study of popular culture vis-à-vis social distinction and self-identity.<sup>27</sup> A considerable and impressive body of research has also emerged about comedy, principally from sociologists Giselinde Kuipers and Sam Friedman. Their research has highlighted how, for contemporary viewers, preferences for television comedy are based on taste related to social variables (age and education) and that, consequently, humour serves a strong signifier of social class and status, which is linked to identity and the drawing of social boundaries.<sup>28</sup> These studies have been focused on the contemporary media

---

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (St Ives, 2010), p. 346.

<sup>27</sup> Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal and David Wright, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London, 2009), pp. 132 – 151. Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value* (London, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Giselinde Kuipers, 'Television and taste hierarchies: the case of Dutch television comedy', *Media, Culture, Society* 28 (2006), pp. 359 – 378. Friedman, 'Legitimizing', pp. 347 – 370. Nathalie Claessens and Alexander Dhoest, 'Comedy taste: Highbrow/lowbrow, comedy and

and its usages, afforded by detailed quantitative surveying and qualitative interviews. I offer the first foray, via historical correspondence and audience research reports, into how historical audiences engaged with and utilised their readings of television comedy in order to make distinctions about themselves and others.

Not only did taste in comedy contribute to notions of identity, but popular responses also serve as an important barometer of acceptable public discourse. In the thesis I investigate what viewers of television comedy deemed to be beyond the boundaries of good taste. Specifically, I argue that ‘vulgarity’ became synonymous with and shorthand for a whole host of themes, subject matter and language that were deemed to be in bad taste and beyond the pale of polite public pronouncement in the 1960s. Christina von Hodenberg and Schaffer have both emphasised how *TDUDP* was steeped in ‘vulgarity’, but I extend this analysis by examining the precise dimensions of vulgarity in both *TDUDP* and *TW3*.<sup>29</sup>

Social scientists have highlighted, contemporarily, the role comedy has played in debates about taste. Helena Popovic recently suggested that comedy, as a genre, ‘reveals the boundaries of what can be said in public, as well as what counts as civilised and tasteful in contemporary society.’<sup>30</sup> Her argument followed Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering’s edited collection of essays which examined the boundaries between what was considered permissible and offensive in a range of current comedy forms.<sup>31</sup> In a historical context, Gatrell made one of the first forays into this area, contending that ‘laughter has also been central to the processes by which Western manners have been disciplined

---

cultural capital’, *Participations* 7:1 (2010), pp. 49 – 72. Sam Friedman, ‘The cultural currency of a “good” sense of humour: comedy and new forms of distinction’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 62:2 (2011), pp. 347 – 370. Sam Friedman and Giseline Kuipers, ‘The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries’, *Cultural Sociology* 7:2 (2013), pp. 179 – 195. Sam Friedman, *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a “Good” Sense of Humour* (Oxon, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Christina Von Hodenberg, *Television’s Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), p. 114. Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> Helena Popovic, ‘“Uncivilised” Comedy and its Reception’, *Participations* 9:1 (2012), p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (eds.), *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour* (Basingstoke, 2005).

over centuries.’<sup>32</sup> The thesis extends this body of work to determine what audiences of 1960s television comedy determined abhorrent and acceptable subjects for laughter. In doing so, I highlight aspects of popular conservative morality which have often been marginalised in the progressive histories of the decade.

## **The 1960s**

My thesis takes issue with the progressive version of the 1960s as a liberal and modern decade. I seek to utilise the underexplored domain of television comedy and popular responses to this medium to argue for the persistence of forms of popular conservatism into the 1960s and to challenge the concept that the decade was characterised by cultural modernism, marked by a decisive break with the past. Specifically, my thesis calls into question the conclusions of Arthur Marwick that the 1960s represented nothing short of a ‘cultural revolution’, witnessing transformation ‘in material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people.’<sup>33</sup> This type of historiographical approach has also argued that the decade witnessed the derision and rejection of ‘old values and old certainties’ which caused the ‘break down’ of ‘the tightly regulated structured and deferential society of Victorian Britain.’<sup>34</sup> These narratives have overstated the extent and character of change. By engaging with the previously ignored sources of television comedy I extend the arguments of recent revisionist accounts in order to further interrogate and challenge these frameworks.<sup>35</sup> Frank Mort in his study of permissiveness in 1960s London, for example, has proposed that change during the decade was ‘the product of much broader histories’ which

---

<sup>32</sup> Gatrell, *Laughter*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: The Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 – 1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad’s Army* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 18 – 21.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People’s Peace* (Oxford, 2001), p. 259. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (London, 2008), p. 6. Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow, 2005), pp. xii - xiii.

possessed an ‘extensive genesis’.<sup>36</sup> My thesis builds on Mort’s arguments, highlighting how themes, topics and comic styles, characteristic of an older age, specifically Victorian and Edwardian, persisted in the television comedy of the period. Furthermore, I argue that the 1960s continued to be populated by strong currents of popular conservatism. These were evidenced in audience responses to the programmes, which were often in opposition to and in contradiction with contemporary liberal forces.

Black has highlighted how ‘television was a site for and symbol of debates about social change – rendering it a hugely suggestive medium and source for historians.’<sup>37</sup> Mark Donnelly has emphasised that ‘sixties Britain was characterised by competing discourses and shaped by a mass of contradictory impulses’ which ‘made sixties Britain a site of contest, one in which dynamic forces of change were seen to be locked in a recurring struggle with the forces of resistance.’<sup>38</sup> It is a central argument of this thesis that television comedy was a principal site where this cultural conflict occurred, both in the character of the comedy texts themselves and in their reception. The television comedies engaged with here all demonstrated uneasiness with the contemporary world they inhabited. The viewpoint they offered was often vigorously debated and contested by viewers, ensuring meanings and interpretations of the 1960s were never stable.

Hodenberg’s monograph, also published while I have been working on the thesis, examined *TDUDP* and its American and German counterparts, claiming that throughout the 1960s and 1970s ‘television sitcoms became a battleground for the controversial negotiation of the value change wrought by the Sixties cultural revolution – and as such had an impact on the outcome of these negotiations.’ Hodenberg has maintained that the sitcoms she studied ‘accelerated and broadened the wave of sociocultural change’, ‘hastened value change and in the process slightly de-radicalised new norms.’<sup>39</sup> Whilst I agree

---

<sup>36</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Black, ‘Whose finger’, p. 549.

<sup>38</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Hodenberg, *Television’s Moment*, pp. 1 – 4.

that television comedy served as a key flashpoint where change was contested and debated, my thesis does not subscribe to Hodenberg's view that they contributed to the momentum of actual material or moral transformation during the period. Though Hodenberg deserves credit for her use of sitcoms from different international contexts in her historical study, she has overemphasised the extent of change. Complicating such conclusions, my thesis highlights how the majority of television comedies broadcast during the decade attracted a powerful conservative backlash.

The varied subject matter of and responses to the television comedies under review will also illustrate the extent to which there was no single, national or homogeneous experience of the 1960s. Rather, I argue for the existence of several very different 'versions' of experience during the decade which were shaped by differentiating factors. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in his history of the British 'new wave' films, argued that 'the 1960s of popular mythology, the "Swinging Sixties"... did not happen all at once or to everyone at the same time. Indeed for many people... they did not happen at all.'<sup>40</sup> Jonathon Green has also maintained that 'for many, noses pressed to the window', the 'Sixties' was 'merely the reflection, alluring or repellent of those dead set on a good time.'<sup>41</sup> Whilst such accounts have rightly acknowledged that not everyone participated, they have offered little space for any consideration of who precisely those people were. The television comedies and the responses they attracted are littered with the voices of those who were 'left behind' or resisted the apparent advances brought about in the 1960s and my thesis highlights who they were and what their contemporary commentary was.

It is a central tenet of my thesis that questions of class and social status permeated both the content of and responses to 1960s television comedy. Popular culture, specifically television and humour, has been ignored by historians of class. There has been a recent growth of 'cultural class analysts', however, who have sought to uncover the ways in which class was encoded in

---

<sup>40</sup> Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London, 1998), pp. xii – xiii.

social patterns, through the differential possession of forms of cultural capital and its manifestation in everyday life. Cultural approaches to class analysis have also served to question the extent to which occupation and work were the key determinants of class status in post-war Britain.<sup>42</sup> Joanna Bourke has highlighted how culture was the principal means through which working-class positioning was reproduced over time, whilst Ben Jones has made the case for familial and neighbourly cultures shaping class identification in the mid twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> It will be evidenced in this thesis how popular culture also served to reproduce notions of class identity both on- and off-screen.

## Sources

All of the comedy programmes examined in the thesis, with the exceptions of *C&C* and *Two of a Kind*, were broadcast by the BBC during the 1960s. Consequently, the principal archive for this study has been the BBC's Written Archive Centre in Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).<sup>44</sup> The collection houses an array of material relating to the institutional context, production, personnel, performance and reception of the television comedies examined. Though extensive, the archival sources relating to each of the programmes differs in quantity and quality. There is a notable bias towards BBC programming in the thesis, occasioned by the paucity of archival material relating to Independent Television. The archives of the Independent Television Authority (hereafter ITA), held at Bournemouth University, only offers material where there was extensive controversy about a programme because this body was regulatory. As *C&C* was greeted with such a furore, the ITA archive does hold papers, including letters and responses from viewers, written communications between

---

<sup>42</sup> Selina Todd, however, has recently sought to return class to the centre of historical enquiry, arguing for 'the importance of economic developments in shaping working-class lives' and claiming that 'class was not simply a cultural identity.' Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910 – 2010* (London, 2014), p. 246.

<sup>43</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890 – 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 2004). Ben Jones, *The Working Classes in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Jacqueline Kavanagh, 'The BBC's written archives as a source for media history', *Media History* 5:1 (1999), pp. 81 – 86.

officials at the regulator, minutes of meetings and an audience research report into the series as a whole. There are no such holdings for *Two of a Kind*.

The BBC comedy programmes all had production folders in the archive which included letters and memos between BBC employees, selected press cuttings, promotional material, extracts of meeting minutes, and performer contracts. Institutional documentation (by which is meant archival material relating to the BBC's governance and management) has only been accessed where this has been included within the available production files of each programme, or a special institutional file has been produced.

The comedy texts exist in an array of forms, principally in scripts and in audio or film recordings. For example, of the thirty-seven episodes of *TW3* that were broadcast, only twenty-six have left a trace. There are twenty-six scripts, film recordings for five of these twenty-six episodes and an audio recording of another. Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the date of broadcast for each episode of the comedies studied herein, titles of episodes where relevant and highlights in what form, if any, they have survived. It also indicates for which episodes BBC audience research reports exist. Whilst scripts have been accessed at the BBC's WAC, the film and audio recordings of episodes have been accessed commercially (via purchasable DVD collections), online (principally through YouTube), or in the collections of the British Film Institute. The DVD and online recordings of the programmes differ considerably in image quality and because the majority of Figures in the thesis have been taken as 'screen prints' from these recordings, they too are of a variable standard. In approaching these sources, preference has always been given, first, to actual film recordings of the episode's broadcast, then audio recording and, finally, the script of the episode. I have adopted this approach because this offered the most accurate representation of the comedies as viewed by their contemporary audiences. There is no guarantee that the available script of an episode mirrored the comedy as broadcast, because scripts often underwent redrafting and they do not account for performance or the textual changes that may have occurred in consequence.



A key source for viewers' responses has been the BBC's audience research reports, of which there are five for *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, eleven for *Steptoe*, seven for *TDUDP* (alongside a broader report into its impact on viewer attitudes) and twenty for *TW3*. A similar report, compiled by the ITA, exists for *C&C*. The BBC would select one or two television programmes broadcast each day which would form the basis of their audience research. In the case of light entertainment, it appears that the BBC conducted research into the pilot episode then the first, middle and last episodes of a series or, in the case of *TW3*, more frequently because of its highly controversial nature. Reports all followed the same standardised format and were organised into several sections. First, there was transmission information followed by an estimation of the audience size, presented as a percentage of the total UK population and compared to the audience size of programmes being shown simultaneously on other television channels. According to Hodenberg they estimated 'the total UK viewership per channel by following a (daily changing) sample of one thousand to fifteen hundred people'. BBC interviewers then visited around a quarter of those surveyed and asked 'how much they had enjoyed the programme and why, what they thought about script, cast and production and how often they watched the series.'<sup>45</sup> They also sourced this information through quantitative and qualitative questionnaires sent to the programme's viewers. This survey method enabled the audience research reports to offer a numerical audience reception gauge (the Reaction Index (RI)) out of 100 (compared with the RI for previous episodes/series/similar programmes) and was calculated by viewers rating the programme on a five-point scale from A+ to C- (with A+ recording great approval, A appreciation, B a normal reaction, C for antipathy and C- representing active dislike). This quantitative measure was offered alongside several paragraphs of qualitative commentary, often with direct quotes from audience participants. Whilst those quoted were never named, their profession or job often was. In the reports on comedy programmes, the commentary was usually arranged into: a generic appraisal of the programme (positive then

---

<sup>45</sup> Hodenberg, *Television's Moment*, p. 79.

negative), an assessment of the performance by the participants, and, finally, an evaluation of the quality of production, including costume, setting and camera work. As Billy Smart has acknowledged, these reports offer a 'record of everyday responses' which help historians 'understand what people thought about a range of television at the time that it was broadcast, rather than retrospectively.'<sup>46</sup> I have used this rich archival source base in order to provide evidence of key audience preoccupations during the 1960s, most notably in relation to questions of taste and public morality.

Contemporary audience responses have also been sought in the letters from viewers which are located, principally, in the BBC's WAC. Whilst the collection of extant letters about Morecambe and Wise and *Steptoe* is limited, there are some for *TDUDP* and 470 letters about *TW3*. There was also a limited number of letters at the ITA archive about *C&C*. These letters were predominantly sent by middle and upper class members of comedies' audience. Whilst the letters from viewers give the name of the correspondent and their address, further information about the letter writers is difficult to ascertain. The letters contain very limited biographical details but correspondents did on occasion offer information about their occupation, age and family circumstances. Correspondence would often come on letterhead which would indicate organisational affiliations of the correspondent. Where such information has been available I have endeavoured to highlight this in the relevant chapters. An analysis of some of the letters sent to the BBC by a member of the BBC's Secretariat in 1963 offers an insight into how the corporation engaged with such correspondence. They noted how the 'age or at least the generation from which correspondents came was not possible on the evidence contained' within letters. Indeed, the BBC emphasised how they had to rely on the very limited 'information which the correspondents give about themselves.' The Secretariat also noted how the 'middle or upper-middle class' were recognisable from 'the style of writing, the writing paper, almost invariably

---

<sup>46</sup> Billy Smart, 'The BBC Television Audience Reports, 1957 – 1979: Recorded Opinions and Invisible Expectations', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:3 (2014), pp. 454 – 455.

engraved with address.<sup>47</sup> In this chapter I have followed the BBC's lead and interpreted embossed letterheads, typescript or handwriting as signifiers of the correspondent's social status. The Secretariat frequently examined *Who's Who* for further information on correspondents and I have utilised the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* to search for information about notable correspondents.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the status of the correspondent can also be gauged from which member of BBC staff responded to their letter. A response from a senior executive generally denoted higher social status, whereas a response from a member of the Secretariat was more common. For example, Members of the Commons or Lords would obtain a reply from either the Director General or, in more exceptional circumstances, the BBC Chairman.

The thesis draws on an array of other materials from the 1960s which engaged with television comedies. These have been used because as John Fiske has argued, 'primary texts in our culture have produced a huge industry of secondary texts' which all 'work to activate and often extend the meanings of the primary texts.'<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Morley has highlighted how 'it becomes increasingly hard to separate the [media] text from its contemporary encrustations.'<sup>50</sup> Paul Rixon, in his recent study of the role of British television critics, has concluded that such 'work is read by the public and plays a part in the ways we, the public, understand and frame television' and, alongside 'soft news', helps to shape and guide 'public discourse around television.'<sup>51</sup> Therefore, responses to and engagement with the comedies under examination have been sourced in an array of contemporary newspapers and specialist television magazines which, alongside the occasional letter from viewers, featured episode synopses, promotional materials, 'official' criticism from television critics, interviews with writers and performers and other soft news

---

<sup>47</sup> Note to The Secretary, 22 October 1963, R41/289/13, BBC WAC.

<sup>48</sup> Memo: Head of Secretariat to Secretary, Re: *TW3*, Letter from Mr Street, R41/289/17, BBC WAC.

<sup>49</sup> John Fiske, 'Moments of television: Neither text nor audience', in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991), pp. 65 – 67.

<sup>50</sup> Morley, 'Changing paradigms', p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism* (London, 2011), pp. 2 – 7.

about the programmes and those involved with them. Print media also documented specific moments of controversy in response to a number of the programmes. The thesis draws on a range of television magazines and newspaper titles, both popular and quality titles, which represent the span of class and political partisanship, sourced principally through online databases of digitised newspapers and in press cuttings from the archives visited.

### **Thesis structure**

Chapter One examines the comedy double-act of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise in their off-screen activities and in their television programmes *Two of a Kind* and *The Morecambe and Wise Show*. It argues that ‘ordinariness’ was persistently championed by Morecambe and Wise in all aspects of their self-promotion and representation. Uneasy with affluence, they promoted a well-tried rags-to-riches story that enabled them to project themselves as ‘ordinary’, so as to appear familiar to their mass audiences. Their style of humour was premised on the deflation of all forms of cultural pretension. The chapter also highlights how the mainstream popularity of the duo challenges any straightforwardly progressive reading of Britain in the 1960s, grounded in cultural modernism. It argues Morecambe and Wise’s popularity stemmed from a recourse to ‘ordinariness’ and the familiar, providing a nostalgic style of comedy that reached back historically to the music hall and to variety theatre.

Chapter Two explores two sitcoms written by Johnny Speight, *Till Death Us Do Part* and *Curry and Chips*, to examine the comic handling of race and immigration during the 1960s. I argue that Speight’s own confusion about these issues in the contemporary period was reproduced in his scripts which, consequently, pointed to his unstable and, oft-times, anxious handling of British social change. Whilst Speight attempted to champion a liberal and measured response against bigotry, more frequently he articulated the views of the white working-classes who were the apparent victims of the liberal causes he avowedly sought to champion. Speight’s presentation of these issues, however, invited a popular conservative backlash from critical audience members. The

audience also made strong claims about taste and acceptability, while their appreciation and depreciation of the programmes themselves played a significant role in the formation of viewers' self-identity.

The third chapter focuses on *Steptoe and Son* and argues that it served as a key site where the supposed contemporary social advancement and material affluence of the working classes was strongly contested in televisual terms. By mixing elements from different genres, this sitcom offered a representation of Victorian poverty, with all the attendant sense of confinement, dirt and pollution, existing into the period of the so-called 'Affluent Society'. This image of impoverishment, alongside the two central characters' correspondingly low social status, ensured their limited social mobility. Steptoe and Son, as characters, were excluded from the social, cultural and economic advancements of the 1960s, despite Harold's best endeavours to participate in this world. I highlight how viewers became voyeurs of their social world.

The final chapter examines the BBC's satirical programme *That Was The Week That Was*. *TW3* has become synonymous with 1960s social change, emblematic of the youthful and liberal backlash against the conservative, establishment Britain, its values, conventions and institutions, represented by the Macmillan and Home governments. I highlight that whilst the texts of these programmes support this view, the response from some viewers evidenced the persistence of conservative and deferential attitudes well into the 1960s. The chapter explores how *TW3* was deemed a cause and symptom of decline by contemporary viewers. The battle between liberal output and conservative backlash extended into viewers utilising the programme to make assertions about their own and others' identity.

## Chapter 1: Morecambe and Wise: projecting and performing 'ordinariness' and challenging the 'swinging Sixties'.

### Introduction

In 1959, John Ammonds wrote to a colleague at the BBC to confess that he was 'not at all sure' as to Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise's 'strength on a TV programme'. He concluded that they would never 'be in the Number One class', nor make 'the grade in a TV series.'<sup>1</sup> A decade later, however, in his capacity as Executive Producer of the BBC's *The Morecambe & Wise Show*, Ammonds received an audience research report which registered no negative reactions from viewers. The report concluded that 'this was indeed a quite outstandingly entertaining and highly enjoyable show.'<sup>2</sup> Whilst the 1970s are usually heralded as the pinnacle of Morecambe and Wise's careers, it was during the 1960s that they emerged as major figures on British television. This neglected phase is the focus for this chapter in which I develop two broad arguments. First, by studying Morecambe and Wise's self-representation as 'ordinary', I examine how 'ordinariness' was defined during the 1960s. I demonstrate how their identification as 'ordinary', both on- and off-screen, relied on their explicit disavowal of higher status and income, and of any pretensions to their possession. Secondly, I argue that Morecambe and Wise's role as significant public figures in the 1960s challenges the staid notion of the decade as marking cultural modernism. Their success on television indicates a different version of the 1960s, underpinned by the persistence of the established cultural forms they represented.

In this chapter, I extend the work of scholars who have examined the role of film stars and television personalities. This body of literature has largely focused on the cinema star system. John Langer has argued that television personalities were distinguished for their 'representativeness, their typicality,

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter: John Ammonds to Ted Taylor, 05 June 1959, in Morecambe and Wise, North Region Artists, 1949 – 1965, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).

<sup>2</sup> ARR Report: *The Morecambe and Wise Show* TX 27 July 1969, R9/7/100, BBC WAC.

their “will to ordinariness”.<sup>3</sup> Concurring, John Ellis has highlighted how television placed greater stress on ‘the ordinariness of its performers’.<sup>4</sup> These formative studies have influenced subsequent research which has stressed how the television performer was characterised by typicality, ‘ordinariness’ and familiarity.<sup>5</sup> Studies have, however, been overly concerned with examining the possibility of assigning cinema star status to television performers.<sup>6</sup> The chapter does not seek to assess whether Morecambe and Wise were ‘stars’, rather it analyses the strategies the duo used to project ‘ordinariness’, both on and off-screen. In so doing I develop the recent work by James Bennett which has argued that we should recognise the ‘importance of understanding the television personality’s ordinariness and authenticity not in terms of a “lack” in relation to the film star but precisely as a site of their economic, ideological, textual and cultural importance.’<sup>7</sup> Bennett has encouraged scholars to concentrate ‘attention on the skill, labour and performance that goes into the construction of the television’s personality image’ because ‘television personality fame is *achieved*.’ Throughout his works, however, Bennett has defined the ‘television personality’ as ‘*presenters* of television programming’ and largely avoided examining the ‘comedian’, apparently one of the ‘most problematic categories’ of analysis.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter I extend Bennett’s work by examining how the television comedian projected ‘ordinariness’.

Morecambe and Wise emerged as major television performers at a time when viewers increasingly understood class in terms of discourses of ‘ordinariness’. Mike Savage and Ben Jones have argued that ‘ordinariness’

---

<sup>3</sup> John Langer, ‘Television’s “personality system”’, *Media, Culture and Society* 3:4 (1981), pp. 355 – 363.

<sup>4</sup> John Ellis, ‘Stars as a Cinematic Phenomenon’, in Jeremy Butler (ed.), *Star Texts: Images and Performances in Film and Television* (Detroit, 1991), p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minnesota, 1997). Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Andy Medhurst, ‘Every Wart and Pustule: Gilbert Harding and Television Stardom’, in Edward Buscombe (ed.), *British Television: A Reader* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 248 – 264. Deborah Jermyn, ‘“Bringing out the ★ in you”: SJP, Carrie Bradshaw and the evolution of television stardom’, in Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (eds.), *Framing Celebrity: New directions in celebrity culture* (London, 2006), pp. 67 – 85.

<sup>7</sup> James Bennett, ‘The television personality system: televisual stardom revisited after film theory’, *Screen* 49:1 (2008), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> James Bennett, *Television Personalities: Stardom and the Small Screen* (Oxon, 2011), pp. 1 – 65.

became a crucial marker of working-class identity in the 1960s. The working classes saw themselves as 'ordinary', devoid of social distinction and advantages, and the 'inverse of the public "elite" class'; 'the rich/upper class' who were so alien to 'the "average" person'. Television personalities, alongside film stars and millionaires, were singled out as members of this alien elite.<sup>9</sup> Such scholarship, however, is vague on defining what, specifically, comprised 'ordinariness' in the 1960s. The chapter aims to rectify this weakness by examining how Morecambe and Wise, as members of the alien elite of television personalities, promoted themselves as 'ordinary'. In so doing, I offer a more detailed delineation of the elements of 'ordinariness' in the 1960s than has previously been published.

In the final section of this chapter I argue that Morecambe and Wise's status as major cultural figures in the 1960s challenges the stereotypical view of the decade as witnessing a social and cultural 'revolution'.<sup>10</sup> I take issue, like Frank Mort, with this 'progressive version of the 1960s' and those who see 'the decade as a watershed break' with earlier historical periods.<sup>11</sup> Whilst Mort's frame of reference was sexuality and permissiveness, I extend his conclusions to the field of popular culture to argue that Morecambe and Wise's success in the 1960s relied heavily on their presentation of cultural and comic forms which had a much older history, emanating from the music hall and variety theatre of the earlier twentieth century.

Morecambe and Wise have attracted little serious scholarly attention but have been the subject of an abundance of popular studies. The chapter goes some way to redressing this imbalance. Since their deaths, in 1984 and 1999 respectively, Morecambe and Wise have been afforded regular repeats of

---

<sup>9</sup> Mike Savage, 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology* 39:5 (2005), pp. 935 – 938. Ben Jones, *The Working Classes in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012), pp. 52 – 53.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 – 1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 15. Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British national identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 18 – 21. Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940* (London, 1997), p. xvi. Christina Von Hodenberg, *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), pp. 3 – 5.



their original programmes on British television, no less than nine biographies, three West End musicals, at least four documentaries, a docu-drama, and countless references in the literature dedicated to British television and comedy.<sup>12</sup> A considerable amount of this work has emerged from Eric's own family; his wife Joan wrote a memoir-cum-biography soon after his death and his son Gary has been a prolific writer about his father's career.<sup>13</sup> Morecambe and Wise also published two joint autobiographies in 1972 and 1984 and these were followed by autobiographies by Ernie Wise and their writer Eddie Braben in 1990 and 2004, respectively.<sup>14</sup> These myriad texts frequently recycle the same anecdotes, follow the same chronological structure, and are heavily influenced by the autobiographies of the two stars and the testimony of those who claimed to know them best. Furthermore, they are overly concerned with their careers in the 1970s and lack historicism and contextualisation. Even Graham McCann's biography, the most significant work by a professional

---

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Dunkley, 'Morecambe and Wise', in Annabel Merullo and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003), pp. 126 – 129. Comedy Classics, *Morecambe & Wise: Bring Me Sunshine* (London, 2010). Jeremy Novick, *Morecambe & Wise: You can't see the join* (London, 1997). Dick Hills, 'Morecambe, Eric (1926–1984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31464>, accessed 21 Dec 2014. Graham McCann, 'Wise, Ernie (1925–1999)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2006), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72134>, accessed 21 Dec 2014. Robert Sellers and James Hogg, *Little Ern!: The authorised biography of Ernie Wise* (London, 2011). William Cook, *Eric Morecambe Unseen: The Lost Diaries, Jokes and Photographs* (London, 2005). William Cook, *Morecambe & Wise Untold* (London, 2007). *The Play What I Wrote* (Theatre, 2001). *Morecambe* (Theatre, 2009). *Eric and Little Ern* (Theatre, 2013). *Morecambe and Wise: the whole story* (BBC, 2013). *Eric and Ernie Behind the Scenes* (BBC, 2011). *Morecambe and Wise in Pieces* (BBC, 2014). *The Morecambe and Wise Story: Look Back in Laughter* (Chanel 5, 2017). *Eric and Ernie's Home Movies* (BBC, 2018). *Eric and Ernie* (ITV, 2011). Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (Oxon, 2007), pp. 113 – 204. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 948 – 952. David Nathan, *The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London, 1971), pp. 143 – 155. Johnny Fisher, *Funny Way To Be A Hero* (London, 1973), pp. 289 – 296. Leon Hunt, *Cult British TV Comedy: From Reeves and Mortimer to Psychoville* (Manchester, 2013), pp. 46 – 56.

<sup>13</sup> Joan Morecambe and Michael Leitch, *Morecambe and Wife* (London, 1985). Gary Morecambe, *Eric Morecambe: Life's not Hollywood, it's Cricklewood* (London, 2003). Gary Morecambe, *You'll Miss Me When I'm Gone: The life and work of Eric Morecambe* (London, 2009). Gary Morecambe and Martin Sterling, *Morecambe and Wise: Behind the Sunshine* (London, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Eric Morecambe, Ernie Wise and Dennis Holman, *Eric & Ernie: The autobiography of Morecambe & Wise* (London, 1974). Eric Morecambe, Ernie Wise and Michael Freedland, *There's No Answer To That!!: An Autobiography by Morecambe and Wise* (Kent, 1981). Ernie Wise, *Still On My Way To Hollywood* (London, 1990). Eddie Braben, *The Book What I Wrote: Eric, Ernie and Me* (London, 2004).

scholar, is subject to these criticisms.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter I move beyond both this canon of popular literature and the autobiographical materials, to offer a study which locates Morecambe and Wise in their specific historical and cultural context.

Although not within the parameters of the chapter, which examines Morecambe and Wise's relationship with 'ordinariness' and older cultural forms in the 1960s, one noteworthy scholarly intervention has been concerned with how, during the 1970s, the comic duo utilised narratives of gender and sexuality in their television programmes to comic effect. McCann, for example, has suggested that sketches frequently 'played on the implicit masculine/feminine axis of their onscreen relationship.'<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, Andy Medhurst has argued that Morecambe and Wise's relationship was 'shaped and driven by a recurring and often nervous fascination with the precise dimensions of love between men.' Consequently, as Medhurst has suggested, 'the boundaries and complications of male devotion became an explicit part of the source material and subject matter of the comedies these men concoct with each other' resulting in 'recurring jokes about homosexuality.' Medhurst concluded that 'inferred or threatened homosexuality was a core ingredient in the pair's comedic recipe' with 'jokes and routines' which 'merrily threw fragments of queerness into the overall comedic mix.'<sup>17</sup> Most representative of this trend, for McCann and Medhurst, was Braben's decision, from August 1969, to place Morecambe and Wise in bed together in their shared fictional home. Braben explained that he 'wanted to highlight the genuine affection that existed between the two, and one of the ways I did this was by placing them as close to each other as possible, in the flat, in the bed.'<sup>18</sup> Further research into the duo's utilisation of sexual themes in their comedy should move beyond narrowly focusing on Morecambe and Wise's shared bed scenes so as to consider both the dimensions of their homosocial relationship off screen and the texts and performances of their earlier comedy.

---

<sup>15</sup> Graham McCann, *Morecambe & Wise* (London, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> McCann, *Morecambe*, pp. 216 – 217.

<sup>17</sup> Medhurst, *National Joke*, pp. 111 – 116.

<sup>18</sup> Braben, *Book*, p. 97.

It is worth briefly sketching the career of Morecambe and Wise which, in microcosm, is the story of post-war popular entertainment and consumes the narratives of the work thus far available on the duo. Cultural critic Kenneth Tynan noted that they 'form[ed] a unique link between pre-war vaudeville and contemporary television.'<sup>19</sup> They began their careers as child stars in the music halls and variety theatres of the 1930s, before forming a double-act in 1941. As they slowly rose up the variety bill, their stage work was combined with regular radio appearances, before they finally starred in their own wireless series, *You're Only Young Once*, from 1953 to 1954. Their first foray into fronting their own television programme, *Running Wild* (BBC, 1954) was a critical disaster. In the aftermath, they returned only as guest acts on a number of television shows. By 1961 the *TV Times* recorded that 'Morecambe and Wise were two of the most televised British comedians without actually having a series of their own' before announcing the start of their own show at Associated Television.<sup>20</sup> Entitled *Two of a Kind* and written by, and often starring, Dick Hills and Sid Green, it was broadcast until 1967 when Morecambe and Wise made a decisive move to the BBC. Hills and Green remained as writers for the first series in 1968, but were replaced by Eddie Braben from 1969. Although it was their ten-year association with the BBC from 1968 which is regarded as the pinnacle of the duo's work, it was at ATV that they emerged as major figures in British television. Morecambe and Wise also featured in three feature-length films produced by the Rank Organisation in this period: *The Intelligence Men* (1965), *That Riviera Touch* (1966) and *The Magnificent Two* (1967). It is their televised years at ATV and the BBC in the 1960s, however, which are the focus of this chapter.

The principal sources for this chapter are their television programmes and press coverage. I examine the first series of *Two of a Kind*, comprised of 13 episodes broadcast weekly by ATV, from June to September 1962, and the extant episodes of series one and two and the 1969 Christmas Special of *The*

---

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in William Cook, 'Inside Eric', *Independent on Sunday*, 18 September 2005, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> 'Now a show of their own', *TV Times*, 06 October 1961, p. 5.

*Morecambe and Wise Show* broadcast on the BBC in 1968 and 1969.<sup>21</sup> This selection is justified by both the limited availability of broadcast material and in order to offer a rich textual analysis of their comic style at opposing ends of the decade. These broadcast episodes have all been sourced commercially in the form of DVD collections. I have also analysed content from an array of news organisations and specialist television magazines which offered contemporary coverage of the duo's activities. Whilst Morecambe and Wise's time with independent television has not left an archival footprint, there remain some sources at the BBC's Written Archives Centre in Caversham from the duo's time at the BBC in the late 1960s. Varying in quantity and quality, this collection unfortunately offered very little for the period 1968 and 1969.<sup>22</sup> Although the chapter does not analyse their film performances in detail, the British Film Institute in London holds the promotional material for all three of their films which I examine to extend my analysis of how media institutions packaged Morecambe and Wise for popular consumption.

In section one I highlight how Morecambe and Wise actively promoted themselves as 'ordinary' off-screen in the British media of the 1960s. I argue that their 'ordinariness' was underpinned and reinforced by narratives of struggle and hard work in commonplace scenarios. The duo stressed their associations with the material culture of working-class life and their preference for familial domesticity.

The second part of this chapter examines how the media projection of their 'ordinariness' accorded with their television performances which stressed

---

<sup>21</sup> At the time when this research was first undertaken in 2014/2015 this was the only series of *Two of a Kind* available for commercial purchase. In 2016, however, the complete series was made available. Due to the constraints of time, series beyond the first have not been examined. Only series one, episode six (07 October 1968) remains of their first BBC series. The entirety of their second BBC series, broadcast between July and September 1969, and the Christmas Special from December 1969 are extant.

<sup>22</sup> Whilst not primarily concerned with their careers prior to 1960, earlier research interests led me to complete archival visits to the Jack Hylton collection at Lancaster University which held documents pertaining to their earliest days in Variety/Music Hall as child stars and to the Victoria and Albert's Theatre and Performance archives which offered generic sources relating to Variety Theatre in post-war Britain and personnel files for Morecambe and Wise, though these were comprised mainly of press cuttings that post-date the end of the 1960s. This initial interest also encouraged me to engage with archival sources at the BBC WAC relating to their careers in radio during the 1940s and 1950s and their first failed attempt at television with *Running Wild* (1954).

similar narratives. While interviews and features explicitly stressed their 'ordinariness', their own television performances did similarly, but more subtly, by ridiculing participants' pretensions to higher cultural status or capital, ensuring 'ordinariness' always triumphed in their comedy.

In the final section I propose that Morecambe and Wise were symbols of a 1960s which was most definitely neither 'swinging' nor modern. Rather, their popularity relied heavily on their incorporation of earlier cultural forms into their comedy which serves to complicate the familiar characterisations of the decade as a 'revolution'. I explore how Morecambe and Wise reverted back to earlier, established cultural forms textually, structurally and visually.

### **1.1: Morecambe and Wise and the projection of 'ordinariness'**

Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise offer an excellent case study through which to examine the dimensions of 'ordinariness' during the 1960s. Scholars have suggested that whilst audiences consumed film stars primarily through their performances, stars were also presented to their followers through an array of secondary texts and associations, notably magazine and news articles, interviews, press releases and advertisements.<sup>23</sup> It was these texts, according to Charles Ponce de Leon, which made 'public figures visible and familiar to millions of ordinary people.'<sup>24</sup> In this section I examine how Morecambe and Wise were projected as 'ordinary' in an array of similar textual forms throughout the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> I argue that to be 'ordinary' relied on narratives of struggle and hard work, a complementary emphasis on the fragile nature of employment and a stress on domesticity, family and aspects of working-class culture.

---

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Butler, 'Introduction', in Jeremy Butler (ed.), *Star Texts: Images and Performance in Film and Television* (Detroit, 1991), pp. 11 – 12. Richard Dyer, 'Heavenly Bodies', in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London, 2014), p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890 – 1940* (North Carolina, 2002), pp. 5 – 13.

<sup>25</sup> Their posthumous legacy merits further study, especially the role members of Eric's family, notably his son Gary and wife Joan, have played in this. Both of whom have suggested, respectively, that their 'job is to promote the uniqueness of Morecambe and Wise at every suitable opportunity' and 'to perpetuate the "Eric Morecambe" name.'

During the 1960s Morecambe and Wise played an active role in fashioning their own media images. In their 1981 autobiography, they described how they ‘must be the friendliest people the press have ever known’ and how ‘the press can always contact us’, acknowledging that ‘publicity helps us... We can never complain about that.’<sup>26</sup> Morecambe and Wise described in their autobiographies how, at the start of the 1960s, they employed the services of both the Public Relations expert George Bartram and a new agent Billy Marsh to assist with their promotion.<sup>27</sup> Bartram and Marsh’s impact was evident in one of the earlier methods adopted for keeping the pair in the public eye whereby newspapers frequently published letters, apparently from the duo, about the mundane aspects of everyday life published in the national press. In 1962 ‘they’ wrote a letter to the *Daily Mail* about cat’s eyes: ‘fog makes us shudder at the prospect of driving. On the open road we are aided by the cat’s eyes.’<sup>28</sup> Such approaches not only kept Morecambe and Wise in the public view, but also evidenced how, like ‘ordinary’ people, they too were concerned about the minutiae of life. Another strategy developed by Bartram was the duo’s inclusion in newsreels. A *British Pathé* video from July 1960, for example, showed Morecambe and Wise in the Beer Garden of the Battersea Festival Gardens.<sup>29</sup> According to *Pathé* the video was accompanied by ‘a suggested commentary for the film from The George Bartram Press Relations Organisation.’<sup>30</sup>

David Lusted has argued that the television personalities Tommy Cooper, Diana Dors and Morecambe ‘shared a “common touch”, an expression of collusion’ with working-class life in the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Such a collusion with

---

<sup>26</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Freedland, *There’s No Answer To That!!*, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Freedland, *There’s No Answer To That!!*, p. 60. Morecambe, Wise and Holman, *Eric & Ernie*, p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise, ‘Kerb Cat’s Eyes’, *Daily Mail*, 14 December 1962, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Morecambe and Wise 1960’, *British Pathé*, <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/morecambe-and-wise/query/morecambe+and+wise>, accessed 08 January 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately the accompanying commentary is no longer available either within the collections of *British Pathé* or the *British Universities Film and Video Council* which holds the ephemera previously held by *British Pathé* for their videos.

<sup>31</sup> David Lusted, ‘The Glut of Personality’, in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London, 2000), p. 254.

working-class life, however, can be evidenced far earlier in Morecambe and Wise's public pronouncements in their media coverage throughout the 1960s. Reports frequently drew on long established discourses from traditional working-class biography. In her study of nineteenth-century working-class autobiography Nan Hackett has highlighted how when 'stor[ies] of social advancement' were told 'the narrative adopted was always one of "struggle and sacrifice"'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, David Huxley and James David found that around 38% of interviews in *Red Letter* (a woman's weekly magazine) with star artistes of music hall, at the start of the twentieth century, 'were rags to riches stories' which encouraged the reader to 'both sympathise with' the early poverty of the star and 'applaud his subsequent rise to fame and fortune'. Such narratives were adopted, they argued, so as to 'clearly mark out the entertainers as one of "us" rather than one of "them" and implicit in all the accounts was the assumption that 'the struggle to "raise oneself up by the bootstraps" is to be applauded just as much (if not more) than actually achieving stardom.'<sup>33</sup> An emphasis on struggle and hard work became a salient feature of post-war stardom too. Su Holmes has suggested that 'it was usually the case that a combination of talent, "ordinariness", hard work, set backs and lucky breaks had functioned to catapult the subject to celebrity status.'<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in his brief examination of Benny Hill, Bennett found that news coverage of Hill in the 1950s focused on 'the hard work he had put in to *achieve* his fame.'<sup>35</sup>

Whilst the rags-to-riches narrative came to full fruition in Morecambe and Wise's later biographies, its earliest manifestations can be traced to their public representation during the 1960s, which promoted the effort Morecambe and Wise had invested in order to achieve fame. A press release, from June 1962, announcing the start of *Two of a Kind*, highlighted how:

---

<sup>32</sup> Nan Hackett, 'A Different Form of "Self": Narrative Style in British Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography', *Biography* 12:3 (1989), p. 209.

<sup>33</sup> David Huxley and James David, 'No other excuse: Race, class and gender in British Music Hall comedic performance 1914 – 1949', *Comedy Studies* 3:1 (2012), pp. 20 – 22.

<sup>34</sup> Su Holmes, "'Torture, Treacle, Tears and Trickery": Celebrities, "Ordinary" People and *This Is Your Life* (BBC, 1955-65)', in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London, 2014), p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Bennett, *Personalities*, p. 63.

Really big fame has come to them only in recent years, and they have had to fight for their success. A solid background of hard-slogging experience provides them with their present-day polish...<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in 1969, an article in the *Radio Times* written to mark their new BBC series, focused on the set-backs they had endured to become comedians of 'undisputed supremacy': 'they wondered if they'd ever be able to make [it]'. Offering a survey of their early careers, it highlighted how they had 'endured some lean times' when they 'were struggling'.<sup>37</sup> The duo repeated this emphasis themselves to the press. For example, in a 1964 interview, Wise reckoned that 'only those who come up the hard way can be a lasting success.'<sup>38</sup> This struggle and sacrifice narrative, borrowed from earlier forms of working-class biography, was central to their self-representation as 'ordinary'.

Aligned to this narrative of their difficult climb to the top, was a complementary stress on their labour and dedication to their craft as performers. Such an emphasis countered contemporary criticisms of celebrities as being part of 'a class which does not have to work.'<sup>39</sup> In a 1965 interview, Morecambe concluded that 'Everything we do is the result of hard work.'<sup>40</sup> In a televised interview the following year, the interviewer noted that they 'virtually' 'work all the time' and, describing their working-day in recognisably routine terms, Wise highlighted how they worked 'from 8 o'clock in the morning 'til half past five'.<sup>41</sup> Despite their fame, Morecambe and Wise presented the rhythm of their working lives as similar to the mass of 'ordinary' working people.

The duo laid great stress on the fragile state of their current positions as successful television personalities: although their status had been hard earned, it could easily be taken away. In materials promoting one film, they confessed:

---

<sup>36</sup> *Two of a Kind* Press Release as detailed on DVD case cover, June 1962.

<sup>37</sup> 'Cover story', *Radio Times*, 24 July 1969, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *The Intelligence Men* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook large, PBS33524, British Film Institute, London (hereafter BFI).

<sup>39</sup> Savage, 'Identities', p. 935.

<sup>40</sup> 'Anatomy of a hit', *Daily Mail*, 26 March 1965, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> '1966 Interview', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzFrhuthx9Y>, accessed 29 June 2017.



It is our turn to be at the top. We don't know how long it will last. No one knows how long they can last. But one thing is certain no one stays at the top indefinitely. Sooner or later we will find our level.<sup>42</sup>

A *Daily Mirror* article reported Wise as saying 'Right now, we're at the peak, but you've got to make it last as long as you can. You can't last forever.'<sup>43</sup> Two years later Wise highlighted the pressure of television, maintaining that 'three bad shows and you're in trouble. If you've got raging toothache it's all the same to them.'<sup>44</sup> A stress on the fragility of television success was again related to struggle, where staying on television required hard work. They maintained that 'the hardest thing in comedy is to grow up. We can't still be doing in ten years' time what we're doing now.'<sup>45</sup> Eric noted in the promotional materials for *The Intelligence Men*, how 'There's only one thing harder than getting to the top – staying there.'<sup>46</sup>

Two episodes in particular recurred in Morecambe and Wise's self-representation in the 1960s as epitomising both their struggle and hard work, and the fragile nature of their success. The first was the duo's frequent public reference to their ill-fated first attempts on BBC television in *Running Wild* (1954). Such a referent point served to reiterate both how far they had come since then, how fleeting fame could be and also served to emphasise their humility and ability to be the butt of a joke. The narrative was premised entirely on fact: an audience research report for the first episode of *Running Wild* noted how 'viewers were obviously singularly unimpressed' and the final episode was labelled 'not very funny and altogether a bit third rate' by viewers.<sup>47</sup> The duo reminded the media of this failing with regularity. Wise, during an interview with the *Daily Mirror*, highlighted that 'we haven't always been so lucky on TV', to which Morecambe added, 'You know what happened to

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Intelligence Men* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook small, PBS33524, BFI.

<sup>43</sup> Clifford Davis, 'We're giving TV a rest; You can't laugh forever', *Daily Mirror*, 09 September 1964, p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> 'Doubling up for laughs', *Observer*, 13 November 1966, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> Gary Search, 'They're Back', *Radio Times*, 29 August 1968, p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> *The Intelligence Men* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook large.

<sup>47</sup> ARR: *Running Wild* TX 21 April 1954, T12/334/1, BBC WAC. ARR: *Running Wild* TX 30 June 1954, T12/334/2, BBC WAC.

us that other time... it was a national disaster.'<sup>48</sup> Such reminders served to underline their hard work to have achieved subsequent success. In an interview with the *Radio Times* in 1968 it was announced that they were 'back with the BBC after an absence of thirteen years'. Eric recalled their last appearance at the corporation:

I was looking at some old scripts the other day of a radio show we did shortly after our first television series thirteen years ago. It's a scene where someone says to Eric, 'Are you Eric Morecambe?' And I say, 'Have you got a television set?' He says 'No' and I say, 'Yes, I'm Eric Morecambe'.

Ernie concluded that 'It went down as badly as that'. Apparently the memory was etched on their consciousness: 'They still remember it. "You never forget something like that in spite of anything else that happens afterwards. No matter how successful you are, it still hurts if people don't like you".'<sup>49</sup> The *Daily Mail* noted that Morecambe and Wise had 'left as struggling comedians and returned at the very top of their profession.'<sup>50</sup> Repeated references to *Running Wild* served to stress Morecambe and Wise's hard work and struggle.

The second event was Morecambe's heart attack in November 1968. His hard work was proposed as the cause and the scare was emblematic of how fleeting success could be. Lusted suggested that Cooper, Dors and Morecambe's ill health, whilst tragic components of their personal biographies, emerged as a recognised sub-text of their personas in the 1980s, with all three dying within a month of one-another. He highlighted how whilst "'recognition of mortality" is classless', 'labouring through that knowledge has an added frisson for working-class consciousness, in which death through industrial disease and premature ageing has acute meaning.'<sup>51</sup> The stress on Morecambe's bad health emerged much earlier than Lusted has claimed, but certainly related Morecambe to the working class and by association served to

---

<sup>48</sup> Davis, 'We're giving TV a rest'.

<sup>49</sup> Search, 'They're Back'.

<sup>50</sup> 'Untitled', *Daily Mail*, 03 September 1968, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Lusted, 'Glut', p. 255.

stress his 'ordinariness'. In an interview with the *Daily Mail* after his heart attack, Morecambe confided that 'There's nothing funny these days about trying to be a funny man any more. It's damned hard work and I've joined the list of funny guys who cracked under the strain.'<sup>52</sup> The following week, in the *Daily Mirror*, Wise warned fans that 'all slapstick is out... No more jumping through windows or buckets of water being thrown over Eric.'<sup>53</sup> Journalist Kenneth Eastaugh highlighted how the duo 'aren't going back to that old exhausting routine.'<sup>54</sup> In their subsequent autobiography, Morecambe maintained that 'the reason I had a heart attack was because of the hard work.'<sup>55</sup>

The stress on Eric's health was also explored in their television performances, which largely served to emphasise that which had been said in the press. During the first show broadcast, after his heart attack, on 27 July 1969, Morecambe entered the stage and, lifting his suit jacket and looking at his chest, said 'Keep going you fool!' (Figure 1).<sup>56</sup> Morecambe's health, thereafter, was frequently reported on in the press, indicating the extent of their fame. For example, in December 1969, the *Guardian* reported that Eric had been 'taken ill last night at the BBC's White City Studio.'<sup>57</sup> Concern with Morecambe's health, which highlighted how hard work had rendered him unwell, also served to relate him to working-class experience and, by extension, 'ordinariness'.

---

<sup>52</sup> Philip Whitfield, 'Deadly stuff this laughter', *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1968, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Malone, 'Two of a New Kind', *Daily Mirror*, 28 November 1968, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Eastaugh, 'Pipe smoking and no more girl-chasing', *Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1969, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Holman, *Eric & Ernie*, p. 65. Morecambe, Wise and Freedland, *There's No Answer To That!!*, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969.

<sup>57</sup> 'Comedian has flu', *Guardian*, 22 December 1969, p. 16.



**Figure 1 - 'Keep going you fool' (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

Individuals who identified as 'ordinary' in the 1960s suggested this was because they got 'a wage every week', had to watch their finances 'carefully' and had to 'make their own way'. They were the inverse of the 'elites' for whom 'money [was] abundant'.<sup>58</sup> In order to stress their 'ordinariness', Morecambe and Wise disavowed the financial rewards of their success. In the promotional materials for *The Intelligence Men*, the Rank Organisation highlighted how 'Eric will be the first to admit that he is more interested in giving a good performance than in earning money for that good performance.'<sup>59</sup> Similarly, their switch to the BBC in 1968, which Lew Grade attributed to the pair trying 'to dictate new terms', was explained by the duo's desire for a 'colour series' which would enable them 'to move forward all the time.' Their new contract worth £100,000 a year had, apparently, nothing to do with it.<sup>60</sup> This public disavowal invited viewers to associate with Morecambe and Wise;

---

<sup>58</sup> Savage, 'Identities', p. 935.

<sup>59</sup> *The Intelligence Men* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook small.

<sup>60</sup> 'Morecambe and Wise switch over to the BBC', *Daily Mail*, 13 June 1968, p. 7.

they were presented as two men more interested in entertaining than financial rewards.

Morecambe and Wise also emphasised their long professional relationship. This served to underline their hard slog to the top together, while also stressing their friendship. An article in the *TV Times*, which accompanied the start of *Two of a Kind*, recorded that having ‘started when they were very young’, this was their ‘21<sup>st</sup> year together.’<sup>61</sup> Announcing their return to the BBC in 1968, the *Radio Times* indicated that they had been ‘together now for twenty-eight years’ and ‘in show business together since they were fourteen.’<sup>62</sup> The following year, in a story to accompany the launch of another series on the BBC, a profile highlighted how they had met as child stars named Eric Bartholomew and Ernie Wiseman ‘in 1940 when they appeared – separately – in Bryan Michie’s *Youth Takes a Bow*.’<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the public relations material for all three of their films stressed how they had been together 25, 26 and 28 years, respectively.<sup>64</sup> This longevity was also extended to incorporate narratives of friendship. Ernie confided that theirs was ‘a partnership based on genuine friendship’.<sup>65</sup> They highlighted that they knew ‘one another so well that just by looking at each other we know when to come in and what to say.’<sup>66</sup>

Morecambe and Wise were also promoted as family men with ‘ordinary’ lives beyond the screen, characterised by normal hobbies and their preference for domesticity. Clive Barker determined that ‘the private life of the performer performs an important part of the performer’s persona.’<sup>67</sup> Stardom generally pivoted on a contrast between the glamorous film world and the surprisingly ‘ordinary’ domestic life of the star.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, as Ellis has suggested,

---

<sup>61</sup> ‘Now a show of their own’.

<sup>62</sup> Search, ‘They’re Back’.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Cover story’, *Radio Times*, 24 July 1969.

<sup>64</sup> *The Intelligence Men* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook large. *That Riviera Touch* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook small, PBS57926, BFI. *The Magnificent Two* – Ephemera, publicity, pressbook small, PBS36710, BFI.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Cover story’, *Radio Times*, 24 July 1969.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Anatomy of a hit...’.

<sup>67</sup> Clive Barker, ‘The “image” in show business’, *Theatre Quarterly* 8 (1978), p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the “New Look”* (London, 2000), pp. 184 – 185.

publicity photographs often showed 'stars in the most mundane of postures... just relaxing in old clothes' so as to stress their 'ordinariness'.<sup>69</sup>

In a *TV Times* article from February 1966, images showed Eric and Ernie at home with their families (Figure 2), alongside text which read that 'away from the camera', both 'goes home to his family. And here we show Morecambe and Wise. At home.'<sup>70</sup> In a 1966 television interview, Wise stressed how, away from work, home and family were their main preoccupations.<sup>71</sup> They confided in a 1968 article for the *Radio Times* that away from the television studio 'they both welcome the peace and quiet of their respective homes.'<sup>72</sup> At home, Wise revealed that he enjoyed cricket and gardening, whilst Morecambe preferred photography and fishing.<sup>73</sup> Such reports highlighted just how like their audiences Morecambe and Wise were; enjoying the 'ordinary' routines of domestic life.



Figure 2 - Eric and Ernie at home ('Think of Morecambe', *TV Times*, 10 February 1966, p. 9).

<sup>69</sup> Ellis, 'Stars', p. 305.

<sup>70</sup> 'Think of Morecambe...', *TV Times*, 10 February 1966, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> '1966 Interview'.

<sup>72</sup> Search, 'They're Back'.

<sup>73</sup> '1966 Interview'.

Stephen Brooke has suggested that during the 1950s 'more complicated and less certain gender identities emerged at the workplace and in the home'. He has argued that because 'masculinity was seen as reformed', 'established understandings of working class masculinity and femininity' and 'working class gender identities' were 'destablized', with certain 'stereotypes' appearing 'anachronistic'.<sup>74</sup> The post-war home was one such place where traditional gender norms were felt to have been disrupted. Consequently, the question of whether or not British males returned to the familial home and became domesticated after the Second World War has attracted considerable historiographical attention.<sup>75</sup> Claire Langhamer, noting continuities with the interwar period, for example, has suggested that 'modern domesticity reached maturity' in postwar Britain.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, whilst recognising that the 'consolidation of family life' was 'one of the dominant motifs of social reconstruction in the years immediately after 1945', Martin Francis has argued that there was a 'significant post-war male restlessness and a yearning for the all-male camaraderie of service life' which resulted in a 'male "flight from commitment" ... within the male imagina[tion]'.<sup>77</sup> More recently, however, Laura King has attempted to move beyond narratives of male 'domestication' and has argued that 'family centred masculinity' offers a 'better conceptual term, focusing on men's relationships with other family members rather than the home and its associated labour'.<sup>78</sup> King has suggested that an 'emphasis on the family at the heart of post-Second World War reconstruction, led to a new stress on the father-child relationship and an increased assumption that men

---

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History* 34:4 (2001), pp. 774 – 775.

<sup>75</sup> Lynn Segal, 'Look Back in Anger: Men in the 50s', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (London, 1988), pp. 68 – 97. Pat Ayres, 'Work, culture and gender: the making of masculinities in post-war Liverpool', *Labour History Review* 69:2 (2004), pp. 153 – 167. Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England, 1950 – 1970', *Past & Present* 187 (2005), pp. 157 – 185.

<sup>76</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), pp. 360 – 362.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002), p. 644. Martin Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender & History* 19:1 (2007), p. 164.

<sup>78</sup> Laura King, 'Now You See a Great Many Men Pushing Their Pram Proudly', *Cultural and Social History* 10:4 (2013), p. 600.

should focus their masculine identities on fatherhood.’ ‘This shift in cultural meaning’, King has concluded, encouraged a rise in the numbers of men ‘embracing the identity of “family man”.’<sup>79</sup> Consequently, ‘fathers were featured in the press like never before’ with images of ‘happy and involved fathers’ which ‘helped to encourage lived masculine identities that more comfortably included involved fatherhood.’<sup>80</sup>

In their self-representation, Morecambe and Wise offered a narrative of their off screen gendered identity which prefigured home and family; it was to home where they retreated and where they, apparently, much preferred to be. Male relationships were friendly and dictated by the needs of work, but always secondary to family. The image (Figure 2), specifically of Morecambe, at home, smiling as he entertains his children and wife with a toy aeroplane, can and should be read in the context of the contemporary press images of attendant fathers, whereby Morecambe’s happy and involved fatherhood was a key component of his carefully crafted off screen masculine persona.

Morecambe and Wise’s ‘ordinariness’ rather than glamour was also stressed vis-à-vis the products and causes they championed during the 1960s. Langer has highlighted how ‘recommendations for products become the function of particular personalities who are then inexorably bonded to that product and its brand name... one is a sign of the other.’<sup>81</sup> In 1966 the *Daily Mail* reported on the £20,000 deal Morecambe and Wise had signed to advertise beer.<sup>82</sup> Thereafter they became linked with Watney’s Pale Ale, for which they did television adverts.<sup>83</sup> Associations were also made with tobacco, with Morecambe being awarded the title of ‘Pipe Smoker of the Year’ by the British Pipesmokers’ Council at the end of the 1960s.<sup>84</sup> At the same time

---

<sup>79</sup> Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1914 – 1960* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 3 – 15.

<sup>80</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 190.

<sup>81</sup> John Langer, ‘Television’, p. 353.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Grenville, ‘So that’s what Superformance means to Fenella and those other TV ad stars’, *Daily Mail*, 02 November 1966, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Morecambe and Wise Watney’s Advert’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPqqARNBqts>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Comité International of Pipe smokers clubs’, <http://cipc.pipeclubs.com/united-kingdom/>, accessed 28 February 2018.



Morecambe also began his long association with Luton Town Football Club, a relationship that would come to full fruition in subsequent years when he became a board member, director and finally Vice President of the club.<sup>85</sup> Such associations served to promote the duo as 'ordinary'.

Morecambe and Wise, alongside their agent and public relations officer, actively fashioned the duo's public image as 'ordinary' throughout the 1960s. Their promotion of the struggle, hard work and the fragile nature of success accorded with working-class experience and with traditional narrative tropes of working-class biography. These themes were reinforced by their failures on television in the 1950s, Eric's ill-health at the end of the 1960s, and a complementary stress on their long professional relationship which underlined both the years of struggle and hard work they had experienced. They were said to be driven by the desire to entertain rather than financial rewards and would far rather be at home with their families. Their associations with specific aspects of working-class culture also ensured they were seen to have interests in common with their audience.

## **1.2: Morecambe and Wise performing 'ordinariness'**

In the 1960s, 'ordinariness' was constructed in opposition to the socially distinct. Savage has highlighted how 'refusing a privileged position' was a means of making claims to 'ordinariness'.<sup>86</sup> For television performers, who relied on their recognition as 'ordinary', higher status had to be disavowed. Leon has suggested that 'the celebrity who achieved true success might be rich, powerful, influential, or widely revered', but through their media image 'could never be accused of adopting the outlook or airs that have commonly characterised elites.'<sup>87</sup> Building on the preceding discussions, in this section I explore how Morecambe and Wise's television performances regularly ridiculed pretension, ensuring the consequential prevailing of 'ordinariness'. In exploring

---

<sup>85</sup> 'Eric and Luton Town FC', <http://www.morecambeandwise.com/viewpage.aspx?pageid=60>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Savage, 'Identities', p. 938.

<sup>87</sup> Leon, *Self-Exposure*, p. 138.

this contention I have been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's conclusions on culture and capital that the exercise of power and authority was closely interwoven with the possession or the lack thereof of cultural prestige, with culture representing a form of capital that could be exchanged as a means of marking social distance from others.<sup>88</sup> I suggest that Morecambe and Wise's comedy reversed this formulation, whereby claims to cultural prestige, and pretensions to this, were belittled in order to promote and mark a social distance from 'ordinariness'. First, however, I want to briefly consider how the duo handled accusations of cultural superiority in their media self-representation.

Morecambe and Wise's 'ordinariness' was reinforced by their refusing, in their public pronouncements, claims to higher cultural status. During a BBC television interview in 1966 Morecambe and Wise resisted claims of intelligence and any association with people of high cultural status. Wise began the interview by asking if the interviewer was 'going to ask intelligent questions... we're going to be in trouble here!'. During the interview they were asked about the response they had attracted from the 'highbrows':

Interviewer Are you aware of the sort of subtle changes taking place in the... audience response to you? You've always been popular, but now you've got... highbrows, if you like, like Angus Wilson... interviewing you for an Arts Programme on ITV? Does this puzzle you or gratify you or what?

Morecambe: It's something we still don't understand quite honestly.

Wise: Yes, it's very difficult to, we find it difficult to examine things intellectually... we just do it. You see, you're asking questions now that are very... we find a little difficult to answer you know, because you're asking intelligent questions, and... it's hard to answer the questions intelligently...

Morecambe: ...because there's nothing deep with us. It's all surface.

Wise: There's no hidden meanings...

Morecambe: ...we enjoy ourselves...

Wise: ...we enjoy performing!<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> '1966 Interview'. Unfortunately, no records pertaining to Morecambe and Wise's interview for the Arts Programme on ITV exist.

Wise ended the interview, noting that 'They were a bit hard those questions'. In this exchange, Morecambe and Wise appeared to misunderstand why the culturally privileged were so supportive and enamoured of their act which, by their reckoning, had no pretence. Rather, it was just the product of genuine pleasure. Throughout the interview they also demonstrated a remarkable desire to self-represent as un-intellectual. Indeed, discussing television presenters, Francis Bonner has argued that 'exceptional intelligence or insight must be disguised or disavowed, as must high social status' to ensure performers can 'convey at least an appearance of ordinariness.'<sup>90</sup> In this interview, by resisting intelligence and questioning their own appreciation by highbrows, they stressed how 'ordinary' they were.

Morecambe and Wise also stressed their 'ordinariness' by presenting themselves as fundamentally unchanged by their television success. Hackett has highlighted how those who had achieved success continued to insist on 'identifying themselves as members of the working class, no matter what later success or wealth they enjoyed.'<sup>91</sup> Indeed Su Holmes has indicated how there is 'a long-standing trope in star construction which pivots on bearing "witness" to the continuousness of the self.'<sup>92</sup> During the same television interview the duo were pressed on what they would have 'liked to have been' if they 'hadn't been comedians'. Wise stressed he would have been an 'engine driver' because 'my father works on the railway' and Morecambe, similarly, contended he 'would have been a labourer on the Corporation of Morecambe because my father was a labourer on the Corporation.'<sup>93</sup> This served to emphasise their working-class roots, hinting further at a rags-to-riches narrative in their self-representation, and by extension promoted their 'ordinariness'. If they had not achieved televisual success they would just be in normal jobs like the mass of their viewers. To reinforce the continuity of self, Morecambe and Wise also positioned themselves in opposition to film stars; they were simply in awe of, rather than associated with them. During the interview, Morecambe recorded

---

<sup>90</sup> Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV* (London, 2003), p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Hackett, 'Different', p. 209.

<sup>92</sup> Holmes, 'Celebrities', p. 161.

<sup>93</sup> '1966 Interview'. This narrative had its greatest exposition in the duo's autobiographies.

how 'there's nobody more star struck than Ernie and I. We see film stars, people like Cary Grant... Sammy Day, Jerry Lewis, hoo hoo hoo!.' Wise explained how they just wanted to 'have a look at him'.<sup>94</sup>

During their time performing *Two of a Kind*, Ernie and Eric frequently explained the premise of their comedy act in the media. In an interview with the *Daily Mail* in July 1964, Morecambe confessed that 'The whole thing is based on the fact that he's a fool but I'm a bigger fool'. He explained that Wise 'comes on in all the gear and says he's going to dance like Fred Astaire. But he's not a bit like Fred Astaire so he's a fool. I watch him and I think he is Astaire. So I'm a bigger fool.'<sup>95</sup> Wise, more succinctly, told the *TV Times* two years later that 'I'm an idiot. Eric is a bigger one.'<sup>96</sup> Their comedy was described in simple terms, not dissimilar to how they had characterised it in the 1966 interview, in opposition to intelligence. Whilst portrayed as being about two fools, Ernie was always presented as the more knowing and Ernie's pretensions enabled their performances to explore the boundaries of cultural status.

In *Two of a Kind* Ernie's apparently superior knowledge was always undermined by Eric's ridiculing him through words or actions, further serving to distance them from higher cultural status. In one episode Ernie was shocked to discover Eric using the word 'indubitably' in its correct context. Asked where he had found 'a word like that?', Eric explained he had got a dictionary 'from the library'. Ernie was perplexed as to why he had not got 'something like *Gone with the Wind* or *Jane Eyre*', Eric contended that 'That's a waste of time. All the words in *Jane Eyre* or *Gone with the Wind* are in here!'.<sup>97</sup> Ernie demonstrated his cultural superiority in his recognition of classic literature whereas Eric's recourse to the dictionary as literature evidenced him as idiotic but also enabled him to undermine Ernie through his logical illogicality.

In a July 1962 episode of *Two of a Kind*, Ernie attempted to discuss science but was constantly interrupted by Eric performing his ball and paper bag routine, in which he 'threw' an imaginary ball into the air and 'caught' it in a

---

<sup>94</sup> '1966 Interview'.

<sup>95</sup> Barry Norman, 'The long hard road to Yarmouth Pier', *Daily Mail*, 04 July 1964, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> David Lanning, 'Date with a Calendar!', *TV Times*, 20 January 1966, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 21 July 1962.

brown paper bag with the sound of the bag rustling (Figure 3), a trick frequently revisited throughout their television careers:

Wise: I'm talking to the Ladies and Gentlemen about science... You wouldn't like to talk to them about science would you?  
Morecambe: ...No I wouldn't...  
Wise: Well, first of all Ladies and Gentlemen I'd like to speak to you about Einstein's theory of astrophysics [Morecambe in background getting out a brown paper bag]. Of course it's a very, very fascinating subject and very, very difficult for the ordinary man. But as you know we are.... [Morecambe does the trick with the invisible ball and paper bag] As you know we are surrounded by a lot of commonplace things like... [Morecambe does the trick again] motorcars, aeroplanes and vacuum cleaners and very few people seem to understand... [Morecambe does the trick again so Wise grabs the bag and attempts to do it but nothing lands in the bag until Morecambe takes it back from him.]<sup>98</sup>

As Ernie attempted to demonstrate his apparent intellectual understanding of astrophysics, he was constantly interrupted by Eric's recourse to slapstick which the audience much preferred to Ernie's monologue, laughing each time Eric performed it. Wise's pretension, evidenced in his suggestion that he understood a subject that was 'very difficult for the ordinary man', was posited against and ultimately overcome by the lower cultural capital of Eric. Ernie and his pretensions were left ridiculed and rejected by the audience who laugh with the 'ordinary' Eric.



**Figure 3 - Ernie's discussion of science interrupted by Eric and his bag (*Two of a Kind*, 07 July 1962).**

---

<sup>98</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 07 July 1962.

Morecambe and Wise were both 'idiots', with one a slightly bigger idiot, on *Two of a Kind*. Their move to the BBC and the appointment of a new writer, Braben, witnessed a remarkable continuity with this basic premise, altered only slightly. Eric still remained culturally inferior to his comic partner, but this juxtaposition became more pronounced. As journalist Michael Billington noted in *The Times*, 'Morecambe, the volatile enthusiast, is constantly having his hopes dashed by Ernie Wise, the dapper sophisticate.'<sup>99</sup> Discussing their style of comedy, Braben suggested in his autobiography that 'Eric was forever the rascal; Ern was always respectable.'<sup>100</sup> This chimed in with the duo's own characterisation of their comedy in their 1972 autobiography:

One is an idiot but the other is the bigger idiot though he tries harder not to show it. One, oozing self-confidence, comes on with some debonair idea. The other, self-opinionated and supposedly slick and worldly-wise, goes along with the idea in order not to deflate his friend whose morale needs a prop, and they finish by sending up the idea which was nonsense anyway.<sup>101</sup>

The basis of their act remained intact from *Two of a Kind* as it transferred to the BBC as *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, with Ernie posited as the supposedly self-confident, sophisticated and culturally superior partner who was forever foiled by the volatile rascal Eric. Such a characterisation ensured that the conflict between cultures continued at the BBC, whereby pretensions for higher cultural status were always ridiculed and, consequently, 'ordinariness' won through.

The culturally defined differences between Eric and Ernie were pronounced in a discussion of poetry in an early sketch broadcast on the BBC in August 1969. Ernie confessed that 'I live for poetry' and Morecambe, gleefully, told him he did too. Following a suggestion from Ernie that 'they try something together' the two engaged in a recital of their favourite poems:

---

<sup>99</sup> Michael Billington, 'A toothless spoof by a talented pair', *Times*, 08 October 1968, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Braben, *Book*, p. 52.

<sup>101</sup> Morecambe, Wise, Holman, *Eric & Ernie*, p. 170.

Wise: *To love as I do, the purple streets, the call of the feet, the sound of the toes, the tide that ebbs and flows with lumps, betwixt the moons that shelter green, that live all long in my rabbit hutch! As long as there's a heritage....*

Morecambe: *There was a young lady from Ealing, who had a peculiar feeling...*

Wise: Now, please, I don't want any of that trash.

Morecambe: Trash? At least my trash rhymes! Yours doesn't flaming well rhyme...

Wise: It doesn't have to rhyme; it's got a wonderful metre!... It flows!

Morecambe: Well it's rubbish, how can you say things like that... Heritage and rabbit hutch don't rhyme... you've got to be clean and snappy like *There was a young lady from Ealing...*<sup>102</sup>

Ernie's pretensions were evidenced in his apparent proclivity for writing 'highbrow poetry' whereas Eric recited a 'dirty ditty', which Ernie labelled 'trash'. High and low culture were pitted against each other. Ernie's 'cultured' poetic endeavours, however, were comical; 'lumps' and 'hutch' drew gales of laughter from the audience and Eric, highlighting Ernie's pretensions as flawed and belittling his claims to cultural capital.

Ernie the sophisticate foiled by Eric, was to have its greatest exposition in the 'plays' the duo performed throughout the 1960s. Whilst it is commonly believed that Braben was the architect of this format, the plays in fact had an earlier genesis under Hills and Green.<sup>103</sup> These early 'plays' witnessed Hills, Green, Eric and Ernie all participating in the recreation of a play or historical event for the purposes of a sketch which saw Ernie's serious acting endeavours, indeed the entire sketch, derailed by a misunderstanding Eric. In July 1962, for example, the four men appeared in *Julius Caesar* with Hill as Brutus, Green and Eric as guards and Ernie in the title role (Figure 4). Ernie tried to act seriously but Eric kept ruining it through his lack of comprehension, greeting Green and Hills, asking them for cigarettes, and generally being perplexed by their participation and the sketch itself.<sup>104</sup> The same occurred when they starred in the death scene from *Cleopatra* in August 1962. Eric was surprised to see Green

<sup>102</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 10 August 1969.

<sup>103</sup> Morecambe, *Cricklewood*, pp. 96 – 97. Morecambe, *You'll Miss*, p. 121. Morecambe and Sterling, *Morecambe* (London, 1998), p. 213. Novick, *Morecambe*, p. 48. Morecambe and Leitch, *Wife*, p. 110. Fisher, *Funny*, p. 296. Sellers and Hogg, *Ern!*, p. 187. Cook, *Untold*, p. 190.

<sup>104</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 21 July 1962.

and Hills taking part, calling them by their real names and interrupting Ernie every time he attempted to act seriously.<sup>105</sup> The texts of Ernie's plays were also forever debased by Eric's constant recourse to sexual innuendo: high culture debased by the low. During *Julius Caesar*, Ernie attempted, yet again, to provide a straight acting performance but this was constantly ruined by Eric assigning sexual meaning to Ernie's lines, alerting the audience to the hidden innuendo, and debasing the script. Eric giggled behind Ernie as his partner said 'naked breast' and 'unsheaf your dagger'.<sup>106</sup> Ernie's pretensions were evidenced in his desire to star in a serious play, offering a straight acting performance. Eric, however, left these in tatters by miscomprehending the situation, laughing with the audience at his comic partner and bastardising the scripts, ensuring low culture and the 'ordinary' triumphed.



**Figure 4 - Hills, Green, Eric and Ernie performing *Julius Caesar* (*Two of a Kind*, 21 July 1962).**

---

<sup>105</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 11 August 1962.

<sup>106</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 21 July 1962.



The plays continued when Morecambe and Wise, alongside Hills and Green, made their decisive move to the BBC. In 1968 the duo offered a performance of scenes from the *Desert Song* starring the Canadian singer and actor Edmund Hockridge. The sketch began with Ernie assuring Hockridge that 'Eric Morecambe has been sent home', before he announced that Hockridge would play the role of the Red Shadow and he the 'leader of the tribe'. Eric, however, soon reappeared alongside Hockridge. Both were dressed as the Red Shadow, Eric believing he was also performing in the title role (Figure 5). After Hockridge delivered his lines, Eric delivered them again:

Hockridge: But I cannot expose who I am until the right moment.  
Morecambe: When the right moment arrives I will expose myself... Right here in the desert... and you're all in for a shock I can tell you that!<sup>107</sup>

Hockridge, the serious actor offering a serious performance was juxtaposed against Eric, the comic, offering a comic performance. Eric's recourse to sexual innuendo debased the apparently straight and cultured script to the hilarity of the audience who enjoyed its ruin. Eric so derailed the script that Hockridge was forced to announce that 'I can't continue with this fool behind me'. Ernie suggested Eric and Hockridge audition to see who was best suited to playing the Red Shadow. Hockridge pulled out all the stops, singing incredibly and delivering his lines with great dramatic gusto leading Eric to label it 'Rotten, rotten. And I'll tell you something else as well... It was rotten!'. In contrast, Ernie declared that 'it was very good, I think you have a lovely voice'. As a result he was labelled a 'crawler' by Eric. Eric's performance was inadequate by comparison; he got the words wrong and Hockridge concluded that it was 'diabolical'.<sup>108</sup> In this instance not only were Ernie's pretensions ridiculed by Eric, but so too were those of Hockridge. Throughout the play, the audience were onside with Eric's antics, laughing at the complete ruin of others' endeavours to offer a straight play. We also saw, in this episode, the foundations for Braben's later plays: the participation of a straight actor from

---

<sup>107</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 October 1968.

<sup>108</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 October 1968.

the world of the cultural elite, Ernie's pretensions to the same status and Eric's subsequent unravelling of the play to much comic effect by ridiculing both his partner and their guest.



**Figure 5 - Eric and Edmund Hockridge both performing as the Red Shadow in *Desert Song* (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 October 1968).**

It was under Braben's direction, however, that the plays would become more firmly established as part of the programme, more closely tied to the character of Ernie and more frequently involving culturally elite guest stars. Braben recalled that the second show he wrote 'saw the emergence of one of our greatest literary icons, little Ern and *The Play What I Wrote*'.<sup>109</sup> Wise described his altered characterisation as 'a mixture of meanness, ego and vanity.'<sup>110</sup> Ernie's pretensions were most clearly announced in a monologue he delivered in August 1969:

Where can you find such generosity? Such charm? Not to mention my very fine acting ability! The sheer professionalism of my performances and last, but not least, my undying devotion to my less fortunate partner here. But, above all this... my dedication to my job and my eternal

---

<sup>109</sup> Braben, *Book*, p. 41.

<sup>110</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Holman, *Eric & Ernie*, p. 208.

gratitude to you my public for making me the undoubted success story of the decade.<sup>111</sup>

Ernie, in the Braben formulation, was an egotist with pretensions to artistic abilities and convinced of his superiority over Eric. Wise acknowledged that his comic persona ‘of third-rate but self-important dramatist unaware of his own limitations was the perfect foil for Eric’s down-to-earth brashness.’<sup>112</sup> The very construction of their characters, then, was premised on the clash of cultural capital between Eric and Ernie.

At the end of the 1960s Ken Irwin, writing in the *Daily Mirror*, noted that ‘gone are the days when a straight actor refused to appear on the same show as a comedian in case he ruined his image.’ Instead, ‘there’s a new game on television these days. It’s called “Trying to get on *The Morecambe and Wise Show*.” And practically everyone – even the most serious actors and actresses – is happily playing it.’<sup>113</sup> Morecambe and Wise, at their peak, attracted the doyens of the cultural ‘Establishment’. In the 1969 BBC episodes under review here, Morecambe and Wise were joined by respected actors of screen and stage: Peter Cushing, Edward Woodward, Juliet Mills and Fenella Fielding. The participation of these big stars in *The Morecambe and Wise Show* softened their own public image but also offered another layer of cultural conflict to the comic dynamic. Individuals with legitimate claims to both superior cultural status and capital were posited against Ernie, who had pretensions to such a designation, and Eric who did not. Eric served as the foil to both Ernie and their guests. Indeed, Morecambe explained the premise of these plays as having a ‘brilliant and famous actor trying desperately hard but hating every second because Ernie and I are ruining it.’<sup>114</sup> In similar fashion, Braben contended that ‘guest stars all received the same treatment: they were all insulted in the most courteous way.’<sup>115</sup> Wise believed ‘we puncture them.’<sup>116</sup> By ruining the

---

<sup>111</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 10 August 1969.

<sup>112</sup> Wise, *Hollywood*, pp. 147 – 148.

<sup>113</sup> Ken Irwin, ‘They’re taking comedy seriously’, *Daily Mirror*, 01 July 1970, p. 15.

<sup>114</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Freedland, *There’s No Answer To That!!*, p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> Braben, *Book*, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Morecambe, Wise and Freedland, *There’s No Answer To That!!*, p. 25.

personalities and cultural artefacts of serious art, Eric and Ernie championed 'ordinariness'.

I want to explore this point further by offering a close analysis of one 'play' from *The Morecambe and Wise Show* supported by occasional references to other 'plays'. The episode that is principally under review was broadcast on the BBC on 27 July 1969, written by Braben and featured Cushing as the guest performer.<sup>117</sup> Cushing was well known for his performances in film and television and had, in 1968, appeared on television as Sherlock Holmes. The sketch began with Ernie, stood before closed curtains, addressing the audience in front of him and the wider audience at home: 'And now ladies and gentlemen, we come to the highlight in our show. We would like to present to you the play *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*.' The whole play was performed to the studio audience and, by extension, the audience at home and this served to invite viewers to relate to Morecambe and Wise. Indeed, Lusted has suggested that in the 1980s Morecambe's recourse to parody in a range of exchanges to camera enabled him to 'mark off a distance from the rhetoric of personality', serving as both '*commentator* upon' as well as '*collaborator* in the system'. This collusion with the audience at the expense of the personality system also served to construct 'a more social connection to audiences.'<sup>118</sup> Bennett has suggested that the 'shifting use of direct address creates a sense of intimacy between viewer and performer.'<sup>119</sup> The structure of the plays, indeed the whole show, served to underscore the collusion between the comic duo and the audience at home during the 1960s.

The cultural superiority of the guest was always pronounced at the start of the 'play' to signify their cultural difference. Wise described Cushing as 'one of the most distinguished and famous actors on the British stage today'. As he spoke, Eric appeared from behind the tabs and, speaking directly to camera, said 'good evening' (Figure 6). Eric was under the impression he would be the leading man in the play, but was told to 'get off' by Ernie. Eric's first appearance

---

<sup>117</sup> All subsequent references, unless otherwise stated, are to *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969.

<sup>118</sup> Lusted, 'Glut', p. 254.

<sup>119</sup> Bennett, 'System', p. 41.

in the play foreshadowed the destructive behaviour which ultimately served to derail Ernie and their guest's performers.



**Figure 6 - Morecambe thinks he will be playing the leading role (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

The cultural differences, between the hosts and their guests, were also promoted in Eric and Ernie's initial reactions to their star turns. As Cushing arrived on stage, Eric peered out from behind the tabs to take a look. Smiling, he appeared star-struck by Cushing's presence (Figure 7), in the same way they had proclaimed themselves in awe of the big movie stars during their 1966 television interview. Eric leaned in to Ernie from behind the curtain to ask if that was 'him' because they looked 'different off'. Eric's wonderment indicated how culturally different the actor was from them and Ernie's subsequent emphatic praise served a similar function:

- Wise:           What can I say Mr Cushing that an actor of your standing should agree to appear on our humble little show, it's most gracious of you.
- Cushing:       Not at all, I've always enjoyed your humble little show!
- Wise:           ...Peter, as a fellow actor I feel I'm going to learn a lot from working with you.

Ernie looked crestfallen when Cushing agreed that it was a humble little show and his claims to ‘fellow actor’ status were further undermined by Eric laughing uncontrollably from behind the curtain. Other guest stars, often in collusion with Eric, acted similarly. For example, Fenella Fielding wrongly called Morecambe and Wise ‘Morton and White’ and did not recognise the two men when she first met them. When asked by Ernie if she had ever heard of ‘the Ernest Wise Players’ she pointedly replied ‘No.’ Ernie warned Eric he did not ‘want anything untoward in my play. Anything that would upset my followers.’ Asked who his followers were by Fielding, Morecambe knocked Ernie down a peg or two: ‘One lives in Bournemouth, the other one’s in Luton.’<sup>120</sup> Ernie’s pretensions were consistently mocked by the bastions of that very culture he yearned to be a part of, he was shown to be not one of ‘them’, but one of ‘us’.



**Figure 7 - Morecambe star struck by Cushing (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

Ernie always had to warn their star guests about Eric. He told a nervous Cushing not to ‘worry about him. I’ll get rid of him’. In the episode starring Juliet Mills, in August 1969, Ernie, having got rid of Eric, explained to Mills that:

---

<sup>120</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969.

'he's rather inadequate you see. Very restricted in his movements. And unfortunately he can only say "get out of that", "you can't see the join" and "my little fat friend" so I've only given him a very, very small part.' He introduced the play as 'starring Miss Juliet Mills, Mr Ernest Wise, that's me, and a minor player of no importance'.<sup>121</sup> Here, Ernie hoped to align himself with Mills in opposition to Eric but in so doing mocked the very fundamentals of not only Eric's, but his own, comic act and, by extension, his own pretensions.

Eric, however, always returned to challenge and undermine the cultural status of their guest stars. In the *Round Table* he emerged dressed as Sherlock Holmes, parodying Cushing's performances as this character the year before (Figure 8). Later in the sketch, he warned Ernie not to get too close in case Cushing 'bites your neck', in reference to Cushing's roles in Hammer Horror films where he played Van Helsing the vampire slayer. Eric mocked Cushing's costume, tapping his crown with his pipe and asking whether he 'is still at the old margarine?', referencing the contemporary branding of Imperial Margarine which featured a crown.



**Figure 8 - Morecambe in the wrong costume, parodying Cushing (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

---

<sup>121</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 24 August 1969.

Savage found a significant 'dislike of snobbery' and pretension amongst the *Affluent Worker* respondents. Accordingly, 'being a snob meant that you were not a "real" person', who made 'false distinctions on the basis of social signifiers.' A distaste for snobbery was extended to incorporate 'a broader attack on people who thought they were better than they were.' Those who 'creep[ed] to the managers' were abhorrent, much preferable was somebody who 'doesn't creep to anybody'.<sup>122</sup> Ernie was forever shown crawling to figures of the cultural 'Establishment', evidencing his sense of pretension and cultural elevation, so disdained by 'ordinary' people. Eric, however, criticised Ernie's sycophantic antics, belittling his attempted association with their guest stars. When Cushing appeared, Eric joked that they had received a 'telegram... from him this morning begging for work' and he revealed Ernie had apparently asked 'Peter Cushing, who's Peter Cushing?' Wise apologised profusely: 'Peter, Peter, I'm very sorry about this. This must be embarrassing for you. The way he ridicules you like this. Really, I do apologise. As a matter of fact you are my favourite star.' Morecambe, incredulous, labelled Wise a 'crawler'. Similarly, Eric accused Ernie of 'crawling, crawling, he's always crawling he is' as Ernie spoke with Mills and as the 'biggest crawler in the world' in response to Wise praising Woodward.<sup>123</sup> Eric's regular attacks on Ernie's creeping to the culturally superior cemented Eric's position as the champion of 'ordinariness'.

The performance of the 'play' was always derailed by Eric's actions, spoiled by the lower cultural forms he represented. In the *Round Table* the curtains were pulled back to reveal the scene of a medieval hall and Ernie arrived in costume as Merlin. Eric leaned in to the scene and howled with laughter at the site of his partner in such a ridiculous costume, later referring to him as 'Noddy' (Figure 9). Similarly, when Ernie was seen walking around on screen in a peculiar way and Eric, perplexed, interrupted the script to laugh at him and question why he was walking that way. Ernie's vain attempts to be a

---

<sup>122</sup> Savage, 'Identities', pp. 940 – 941.

<sup>123</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 24 August 1969. *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.



serious actor were always undermined by an amused Eric who openly laughed at his partner's endeavours, and by extension, Ernie's claims to high culture.



**Figure 9 - Morecambe laughs uncontrollably at the sight of Wise in costume and his attempts at acting (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

Eric also derailed the attempts of the guest actor to perform seriously. Eric appeared on stage, still dressed as Sherlock Holmes, but this time with a tin helmet. As such, he ruined Cushing's line: 'What a magnificent suit of armour' (Figure 10). Eric laughed at him: 'what is he talking about?'. Later, Cushing went to address Eric as part of the scripted action but Eric walked away from him, ensuring Cushing could not effectively deliver his lines.



**Figure 10 - 'What a magnificent suit of armour' (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

Eric also derailed the 'cultural' plays by bastardising, with innuendo, the scripts which Ernie had apparently written. For example, as Queen Guinevere entered, Eric proclaimed 'hold fire it's the doctor', referencing an earlier sketch in that evening's programme when the same actress played a doctor. Cushing and Ernie both said romantic, dramatic, things to the Queen. Eric, however, spoiling Ernie's script, stated 'When I look into your eyes, I say my horse hasn't had his oats and come to think of it, I'm still getting those earaches.' As he spoke, he lifted his shirt for the 'doctor' to examine him (Figure 11). Similarly, Cushing asked Eric 'What news of Carlisle?' to which Eric responded 'They won 3-1. The second was a beauty I'm told, one of the finest ever scored on that ground.' Eric's football-based response to a famous line of the play clearly posited mass against higher culture.



**Figure 11 - Morecambe mistakes Guinevere for the Doctor (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

The plays always ended with a dissatisfied star and a disappointed Ernie: 'You have spoilt the whole thing and you have ruined it completely.'<sup>124</sup> The derailment of the play by Eric caused Cushing to announce: 'I'm sorry Mr Wise, but I just cannot continue, I have my reputation as an actor to consider.' The

---

<sup>124</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.

high cultural endeavours of Ernie's plays were always derailed by the bastion of the low, Eric. As Ernie grovelled to Cushing, Eric was incandescent, telling Cushing 'we go all the way through a sketch, we don't cut it up you know, like you do in films' before labelling Cushing an 'amateur'. Eric reversed the established cultural conflict narrative to suggest, to comic effect, that Cushing was not capable of appearing on their show and that he, not Eric, was the 'amateur'. Ernie consoled the upset star who claimed his 'career is in ruins' (Figure 12). Indeed, as the play progressed Cushing appeared increasingly incensed before finally declaring 'My whole career is in jeopardy... you are making me look a right nit!'<sup>125</sup> By ridiculing these figures of stage and screen, the performance not only served to soften their guests' cultural status, but also witnessed the triumph of 'ordinariness' over elite culture.



**Figure 12 - Wise consoles Cushing who claims his career is in ruins (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

The series featured a running joke that Eric and Ernie had either neglected or refused to pay their guest stars. Cushing, for example, reappeared in a later episode to demand payment for his performance in the *Round Table*. Interrupting Woodward's turn in Ernie's *Murder at the Grange* the following month, Cushing declared he had not 'been paid'. This prompted Woodward,

---

<sup>125</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.

and a number of supporting actors on the stage, to all confess that they ‘haven’t been paid yet either’. The episode ended with the actors penniless for their performance and Eric and Ernie sharing out the actor’s wages between them.<sup>126</sup> In Robin Hood style, Morecambe and Wise kept the pay of the wealthy celebrities for themselves.

In 1960s Britain, to be recognised as ‘ordinary’ relied on the disavowal of cultural prestige. Morecambe and Wise’s comedy act was premised on the ridiculing of pretensions to higher cultural status and, consequently, can be interpreted as championing ‘ordinariness’. Ernie’s claims to cultural superiority were always challenged and ridiculed by the brash Eric who revealed his partner’s pretensions as flawed or simply derailed his endeavours. Eric’s deflating actions were always accompanied by the audience’s endorsement. The addition of star guests offered further opportunity for the ridiculing of cultural pretension. Many doyens of the cultural ‘Establishment’ lined up to mock Ernie’s pomposity and leave him humiliated whilst, in turn, Eric did the same to them. Morecambe and Wise’s television performances in the 1960s served to reinforce the popular suspicion of those who were socially distinct, wealthy and/or culturally privileged.

### **1.3: Performing in the ‘Sixties’**

Morecambe and Wise’s status and popularity as major figures in 1960s Britain complicates progressive narratives of the period. Not only did Morecambe and Wise attract extensive media coverage, their television performances were also significant cultural events throughout the 1960s. Their successive series were announced on the front pages of the television magazines with regularity (Figure 13) and by the end of the decade, the *Daily Mirror*’s television critic Kenneth Eastaugh could announce that Morecambe and Wise were attracting regular audiences of some 20 million people.<sup>127</sup> The duo were announced television personalities of the year as early in the decade as 1963, 1964 and

---

<sup>126</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.

<sup>127</sup> Kenneth Eastaugh, ‘The grafter in the laughter market’, *Daily Mirror*, 13 March 1970, p. 17.

1965.<sup>128</sup> Morecambe and Wise did not achieve this success through innovation and experimentation. Their television performances and style of comedy presented their audience with visual, structural and textual references to the music hall and variety theatre of the past. In this section I argue that Morecambe and Wise’s success demonstrates the persistence and popularity of earlier cultural forms through the 1960s.



Figure 13 - Front Covers of the *TV Times* and *Radio Times* promoting the return of Morecambe and Wise’s television series during the 1960s (Clockwise from top left: ‘Cover’, *TV Times*, 27 March 1964, p. 1. ‘Cover’, *TV Times*, 20 January 1966, p. 1. ‘Cover’, *Radio Times*, 29 August 1968, p. 1. ‘Cover’, *Radio Times*, 24 July 1969, p. 1).

<sup>128</sup> ‘1963 Television Awards’, *Times*, 23 November 1963, p. 5. ‘John Gough meets the Morecambe and Wise “Boom” Group’, *TV Times*, 27 March 1964, p. 20. ‘Joint personalities’, *Guardian*, 05 February 1965, p. 6.

In a 1964 article for the *TV Times* promoting an episode of *Two of a Kind*, Morecambe and Wise were pictured alongside The Beatles (Figure 14). Here, featured together, were symbols of two very different versions of the 1960s. On one hand, The Beatles, so emblematic of the supposed 'swinging' element of the decade and, on the other, two comics trading in the art of post-war variety. The article's text stressed the generational and cultural differences between them. Both professed themselves fans of the other and their meeting was described as 'a riot of fun'. Paul McCartney told Morecambe and Wise that he had been 'watching you for years. Or so it seems. In fact, me Dad took me to see you when I was a little boy.' John Lennon also noted how he had seen them 'walking around Liverpool' when they 'were appearing in a pantomime there.' Morecambe and Wise, as the Beatles' comments noted, had made a cultural imprint on the 1960s, like themselves, but were older and born of a different performance heritage. As The Beatles discussed having to leave for their concert, Morecambe was reported to have sung the 1948 Doris Day song 'I'll String along with you'.<sup>129</sup> The juxtaposition between the two was clear. The Beatles were the music of today; Morecambe and Wise referred to songs from the 1940s.



Figure 14 - The Beatles with Morecambe and Wise (Dave Lanning, 'The Beatles get Wise (and Morecambe)', *TV Times*, 10 April 1964, p. 7).

<sup>129</sup> Dave Lanning, 'The Beatles get Wise (and Morecambe)', *TV Times*, 10 April 1964, p. 7.

In April 1964, The Beatles appeared on *Two of a Kind* and performed three of their hit songs before being joined by Morecambe and Wise. Ernie asked if they would like to do a number together but he was interrupted by Eric who, to the delight of the Beatles and the audience, identified them as the Kaye Sisters. Corrected by Ernie, he said hello 'Beatle', mispronouncing their name, before repeatedly addressing Ringo Starr as 'Bongo'. Eric was portrayed as culturally out of touch, unaware of who The Beatles were. Again, viewers witnessed the idiotic Eric corrected by his more knowing partner. Ernie introduced Eric to the boys:

Paul: I remember you, you're the one with the short, fat, hairy legs.  
Morecambe: No, no, no, he's the one with the short, fat, hairy legs. [Pointing at Wise]  
George: ...We're the one's with the big, fat, hairy, heads. Get out of that. [Places hand under Eric's chin]  
Morecambe: What's it like being famous?  
John: It's not like in your day you know.  
Morecambe: ...What do you mean not like in my day?  
John: Me dad used to tell me about you...

This comic patter evidenced a cultural awareness of one another; The Beatles were able to recite catchphrases from Morecambe and Wise's act, whilst Eric recognised their fame, but not them. It also highlighted the differences between them, notably how Eric was representative of a time gone by, popular with 1960's fathers, those who were of the same generation as the comic duo, in the preceding decades. Ernie suggested they should do a number together, to which Eric agreed, suggesting something his 'dad could remember, one I used to do.' The past, in relationship to the comic duo, was once again prefigured. Ernie announced their performance together: 'For the first time we have Morecambe and Wise and the Beatles presenting to you that wonderful old-fashioned number "Moonlight Bay".'<sup>130</sup> Morecambe and Wise's music choice was, as in the article promoting the episode, an old fashioned Doris Day classic from the turn of the 1950s. The Beatles appeared on stage dressed in vintage

---

<sup>130</sup> 'The Beatles at the Morecambe & Show – 02/12/63', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysfvM9uhFdg>, accessed 14 February 2018.

barber shop quartet outfits, whilst Eric reappeared dressed as a Beatle, offering a visible incongruence between the faces of swinging modernity and that of an older era (Figure 15). Throughout the article and subsequent performance, the Beatles were highlighted as symbols of modernity whilst Morecambe and Wise represented the past.



**Figure 15 - The Beatles on *Two of a Kind* ('The Nation's Favourite Beatles Number One for ITV', <http://www.atvtoday.co.uk/72956-itv/>, accessed 14 February 2018).**

The incongruity between Morecambe and Wise and the 'swinging Sixties' was pronounced throughout the decade in their programmes, especially in the self-deprecating jokes made about the pair's lack of modernity and out-of-datedness. For example, an episode of *Two of a Kind*, broadcast in August 1962, opened with Ernie looking ridiculous as he 'twisted' to *Let's Twist Again* because, he announced, 'it's all the rage. Everyone's doing it.'<sup>131</sup> A similar sketch was recycled for the Christmas Day Special of 1969 on the BBC. The episode opened with Ernie in a fur coat, feathered hat and flared trousers (Figure 16) before he declared: 'welcome to what this week is a really with it, way out show! From now on it's go, go, go all the way. We've got some really swinging guests for you...'. The association with the 'swinging Sixties' was evidenced from both his clothing and his language. Eric, however, appeared on stage to dispel any of Ernie's claims to modernity and cultural relevance, incredulous at his partner's appearance and behaviour:

---

<sup>131</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 11 August 1962.



Morecambe: You're doing it for laughs? You're not doing it for real, are you?  
You don't mean this! You're doing it for laughs?  
Wise: I'm not getting any laughs.  
Morecambe: You're getting a few funny looks, I'll tell you that!  
Wise: ...Just because somebody is dressed a little differently from you,  
you have to mock and ridicule!

The reason for Wise's outfit was his expressed belief that 'you've got to dress like this to get the birds.' The incongruity of this middle-aged man dressed as a swinging youth caused hilarity amongst the audience. His claims to modernity were repeatedly rendered ridiculous by Eric. Between fits of dancing, Ernie explained to Eric that 'a couple of nights ago, I had a happening... I freaked out on the King's Road. Pow!... I'm freaking out now! I'm gonna tell you something else... I went to this discotheque... I met this dolly bird, and we really moved it!'. As a result, Eric worried Ernie was 'hooked on the LMS', confusing the psychedelic drug LSD with LMS, the London Midland and Scottish Railway.<sup>132</sup> Both the lack of knowledge of drugs and the reference to a long since disbanded railway franchise indicated his out-of-datedness. But it was Ernie who was cast as the more outdated, both visually and by his comic partner, his pretensions to modernity rendered ridiculous. Eric and Ernie's dealings with the 'swinging Sixties' always served to demonstrate how the duo were ill-suited or unable to participate.



**Figure 16 - Ernie 'with it' (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969).**

---

<sup>132</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969.

The 1950s marked the final demise of the variety theatre as a mass cultural form in Britain.<sup>133</sup> According to Oliver Double, by 1960 there were ‘just four’ Variety theatres left in London and ‘the total weekly capacity had fallen by over 80 percent’ over the proceeding decade.<sup>134</sup> The Moss Empires’ accounts, held at the Victoria and Albert museum, demonstrated a steady decline in profits with theatres increasingly being marked in the account books as ‘CLOSED’ then ‘SOLD’.<sup>135</sup> Whilst variety, as initially conceived in the theatres, may have been a dying breed by the end of the 1950s it had an after-life on British television with Morecambe and Wise. Visually, structurally and textually, their television programmes brought variety and music hall to massed audiences throughout the 1960s, demonstrating the continuance and popularity of these earlier cultural forms.

Penny Summerfield has examined the influence of music hall on patriotism and popular attitudes towards empire and imperialism at the turn of the twentieth-century. She has concluded that ‘patriotism and Empire continued to be highly marketable products in the world of popular entertainment, for all that packaging changed over time.’<sup>136</sup> Whereas Summerfield has highlighted the political functions of music hall, Peter Bailey has sought to understand this cultural form as a popular mode of class expression in which music hall’s audiences played an active role in the formation of its meanings. Consequently, Bailey has interrogated performance style and audience interaction so as to relate ‘the articulation of knowingness as popular discourse to the history of music hall development and its circumstantial fit with broader social changes.’<sup>137</sup> Both Summerfield and Bailey are agreed, however, that by the end of the nineteenth century music hall had

---

<sup>133</sup> Andy Medhurst, ‘Music Hall and British Cinema’, in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London, 1996), p. 185. Roger Wilmut, *Kindly Leave the Stage: The Story of Variety 1919 – 1960* (London, 1985), p. 208. Louis Barfe, *Turned Out Nice Again: The Story of British Light Entertainment* (London, 2008), p. xiii.

<sup>134</sup> Oliver Double, *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Basingstoke, 2012), p. 70.

<sup>135</sup> Moss Empires Returns, THM 303/1/10, Howard and Wyndham Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

<sup>136</sup> Penny Summerfield, ‘Patriotism and Empire: Music-Hall Entertainment, 1870 – 1914’, in John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 19 – 42.

<sup>137</sup> Peter Bailey, ‘Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture’, *Past & Present* 144 (1994), pp. 138 – 139.

given way to the 'theatres of variety' which, as Bailey has noted, offered 'a style of comic entertainment' which 'made a successful piecemeal transition to the new media' of the post-war period.<sup>138</sup>

Morecambe and Wise's various biographers have made links between the music hall style and the duo's comic performances on British television in the post-war period, but have not explained the specificities of this association.<sup>139</sup> Eric Midwinter, for example, has argued that 'in style and material', Morecambe and Wise 'invite us to roll the years away and wallow in the luxury of the music-hall stage revisited.'<sup>140</sup> Bailey's account details some of the key performance styles of nineteenth-century music hall and I suggest Morecambe and Wise's comic and performance style in the 1960s accords with Bailey's characterisations.

Music hall performance, Bailey has suggested, was 'a cross between singing and shouting accompanied by various forms of stage business and a high degree of physicality', often completed by 'appearing "in character"', with 'extravagant or eccentric stage dress'.<sup>141</sup> Borrowing heavily from this facet of the music hall mode, Ernie's plays, for example, adopted all of these features: musicality and shouting (as when Morecambe and Hockridge sang in the role of Red Shadow), excessive physicality through the duo's frequent recourse to slapstick and their repeated appearance in character complete with, oftentimes, ludicrous costumes (for example, Ernie as Merlin). Bailey has also suggested that 'knowingness as popular discourse work[ed] to destabilise the various official knowledges that sought to order common life' and in so doing 'punctured official knowledges and preserved an independent popular voice'.<sup>142</sup> Morecambe and Wise's guest stars, all figures of the cultural Establishment, could be viewed as fulfilling the role of officialdom in their programmes, against whom the audience and comic duo engaged in a comic conspiracy. Their guests

---

<sup>138</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', p. 155. Summerfield, 'Patriotism and Empire', p. 22.

<sup>139</sup> Dunkley, 'Morecambe', p. 168. McCann, *Morecambe*, p. 15. Nathan, *Laughtermakers*, p. 142. Novick, *Morecambe*, p. 73. Sellers and Hogg, *Ern!*, p. 93.

<sup>140</sup> Eric Midwinter, *Make 'Em Laugh: Famous Comedians and Their Worlds* (London, 1979), p. 161.

<sup>141</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', p. 143.

<sup>142</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', pp. 154 – 168.

were constantly belittled and embarrassed by Morecambe and Wise to the gales of audience laughter. Finally, Bailey has argued that ‘the music hall dealt in a new form of vocal shorthand, whose language operated like a cue or flash charge that needed the knowledge that was knowingness to complete its circuitry.’ Frequently, Bailey continued, ‘the shared knowledge that is knowingness’ was often ‘sexuality’ because of music hall’s ‘long history of ambiguity and innuendo.’<sup>143</sup> Morecambe and Wise’s comedy, as highlighted in the previous section, was littered with innuendo, frequently of a sexual nature which, when delivered, left the audience clutching their sides. Morecambe and Wise’s comedy had all the hallmarks of Bailey’s nineteenth-century music hall but adapted for television and its mass popular audience.

Morecambe and Wise’s television programmes brought the physicality of the music hall and variety theatre to the modern television studio. The set of *Two of a Kind* had all the trappings of a variety theatre; they performed on a stage in front of changeable backdrops and, occasionally, theatre tabs (Figure 17). The show itself was commissioned and overseen by Lew Grade, the theatre impresario-cum-television executive. Similarly, at the BBC, they performed on a raised platform and in front of theatrical tabs (Figure 18). Both series were performed before a live studio audience. The very physicality of Morecambe and Wise’s programmes, which looked and functioned as a theatre, emphasised how their shows and performances were premised on earlier cultural forms. Indeed, Bailey has described music hall’s audience as ‘stabilised in fixed seating facing the front’ as performers engaged in the ‘direct address of the audience.’<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies of Meaning’, pp. 148 – 158.

<sup>144</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies of Meaning’, pp. 147 – 157.



**Figure 17 - Performing on stage in front of tabs and a backdrop on *Two of a Kind* (Left to Right. *Two of a Kind*, 11 August 1962. *Two of a Kind*, 01 September 1962).**



**Figure 18 - Performing with the tabs on *The Morecambe and Wise Show* (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969).**

Not only did the physicality of their programmes summon memories of the theatre, but the episodes were also structured like a variety performance.

Double explained the running-order of a variety theatre performance:

The show would start with a dance act (or sometimes a speciality act), followed by a comic, and the first half would build to the second top [of the bill], leading into the interval. The opening act would come back to start the second half, which would build to the top of the bill... often followed by a quick speciality act.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Double, *Talent*, p. 20.

The variety theatre bill offered a diverse array of sequential performances by different performers. Whilst Morecambe and Wise were the principal act in their series, musical performances were woven into the programme and Morecambe and Wise's appearances throughout episodes would all be characterised by a different comedy style, be it cross-talk, a sketch, impersonations, etc. For example, the episode of *Two of a Kind* broadcast on 1 September 1962 had the following running order:

- Skit on the contemporary police television drama *Naked City*
- Titles overlaid with Eric and Ernie singing the theme tune
- Cross-talk and slapstick about television and film violence
- Musical interlude: George Chisholm's Jazz Gang 'In a Persian Market'.
- Sketch about the Telstar satellite
- Intermission, commercial break.
- Sketch in which the duo host a part but Eric has lost his glasses.
- Musical interlude: Teddy Johnson and Pearl Carr 'Let There Be Love' and 'Let's Do It'.
- Eric's 'acting bit'
- Recurring ending of the show in which they tried to exit the stage through a door.<sup>146</sup>

The BBC episode broadcast on 27 July 1969 offered a similar eclectic structure:

- Opening titles
- Cross-talk about Eric changing his name
- Musical interlude: Kenny Ball and the Jazzmen
- Very short sketch of Ernie and Eric playing table tennis
- Sketch in which a female doctor came to see a supposedly unwell Ernie
- Musical interlude: Bobbie Gentry
- Sketch of Eric and Ernie as garden tortoises
- Musical interlude: Vince Hill
- Very quick sketch of Eric and Ernie as monks
- Peter Cushing, Eric and Ernie in *The Knight's of the Round Table*
- Final curtain call and performance of *Bring Me Sunshine*.<sup>147</sup>

Such a diverse range and series of performances would have made an effective variety theatre bill, if performed by a diverse range of performers. Arguably, by the end of the 1960s, Ernie's 'plays' had come to function as the 'top of the bill'

---

<sup>146</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 01 September 1962.

<sup>147</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969.

event. Watching Morecambe and Wise, viewers were offered post-war variety theatre on their television.

If visually and structurally Morecambe and Wise's television programmes offered the music hall and variety theatres of bygone days, this was reinforced by their performances which were saturated with references to these cultural forms. The points of reference in their shows were heavily influenced by variety's greatest performers. Bailey has noted that one key component of the 'music hall mode' was the 'practice of appearing "in character"', whereby performers 'impersonated the subject of the song more fully by assuming his or her typical dress and manner.'<sup>148</sup> This was a frequent practice on Morecambe and Wise's programmes throughout the 1960s. In *Two of a Kind*, in July 1962, for example, Eric repeatedly appeared at the end of the show to do his 'acting bit' in black face, in successive episodes, as Al Jolson, G. H. Elliott (the 'Chocolate Coloured Coon') (Figure 19) and as a Black and White Minstrel.<sup>149</sup> In one sketch, in August 1962, the duo explained that they had been at a party the evening before with the post-war theatrical impresario Val Parnell and the girls from the famed Windmill Theatre.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, each episode in the first series began with a skit on a television programme which was apparently 'Presented by Bernard Delfont', the brother of Grade and, himself, a prominent theatre producer.



**Figure 19 - Eric as G. H. Elliot (the 'Chocolate Coloured Coon') (*Two of a Kind*, 14 July 1962).**

---

<sup>148</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', p. 143.

<sup>149</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 14 July 1962. *Two of a Kind*, 21 July 1962. *Two of a Kind*, 28 July 1962.

<sup>150</sup> *Two of a Kind*, 18 August 1962.

Similar references continued at the BBC. Regular references were made to the singer Frankie Vaughan, whose legs and arms appeared at the side of the stage before collapsing onto it.<sup>151</sup> Alongside this, was Morecambe's constant imitation of the vaudeville star Jimmy Durante, in which he placed a paper cup to his mouth and sang 'sittin' hat my piharno' whilst miming playing the piano (Figure 20).<sup>152</sup> The other recurring reference was Janet Webb's appearance at the end of each programme, sidelining Morecambe and Wise to accept the applause of their audience (Figure 21). According to C. P. Lee, this was a reference to George Formby's wife, Beryl Ingham, who, whenever Formby played would appear on stage at the end, link arms with him and bow, lapping up his applause.<sup>153</sup> In one sketch, broadcast at the end of August 1969, Eric appeared briefly in drag, as the cabaret star Marlene Dietrich to sing *Falling in Love Again* (Figure 22).<sup>154</sup> In the following episode, they discussed the drag artist Danny La Rue, who was famed for his impersonation of Dietrich. Morecambe introduced him before and after he got into costume (Figure 23).<sup>155</sup> In their television programmes they invited viewers to share their recollections of the past by presenting their audience with names and references associated with variety theatre and music hall.



**Figure 20 - Morecambe performing his famed Jimmy Durante impression (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).**

<sup>151</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969. *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 10 August 1969.

<sup>152</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 10 August 1969. *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 24 August 1969. *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969. *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969.

<sup>153</sup> *Morecambe and Wise: the whole story*.

<sup>154</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 24 August 1969.

<sup>155</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.





Figure 21 - Curtain call interrupted by Janet Webb (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 27 July 1969).



Figure 22 - Eric in drag as Marlene Dietrich (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 24 August 1969).



Figure 23 - Danny La Rue before and after make-up (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969).

Their comic material also frequently referred to their own past performances. In one BBC sketch from September 1969, as Ernie attempted to

read his broadsheet newspaper in the flat, Eric, bored, went over to a large chest of drawers in the corner of the room which contained memorabilia from their days in variety. Eric initially pulled out a brown paper bag with which to do his, by now well established, invisible ball trick and then a cup to do his impersonation of Durante. Ernie, ever apparently superior, told Eric to 'occupy your mind intelligently' rather than mess around. Eric, however, continued to explore the drawer's content and, as he did, Eric and Ernie began to reminisce:

Morecambe: Look at that! [A large novelty car horn] Do you remember that?  
Wise: Do I remember that? We used to use that in the act... Come on, do the gag!  
Morecambe: What's the difference between [honk] and [honk, honk]?  
Wise: I don't know, what is the difference?  
Morecambe: [honk] [both laugh uncontrollably]... Remember when we used to do that in variety?  
Wise: Yeah.  
Morecambe: Just before we retired... Happy days them.  
Wise: They were happy days... [Morecambe retrieves a bellows pump from the drawer] Wait a minute, that's a prop now isn't it?... Come on, let's do the gag!... Where are you going with that thing?  
Morecambe: To put the wind up Hitler [both laugh controllably]. Remember that... we used to do it in variety... just before we retired. There must have been a reason why we retired?<sup>156</sup>

The insinuation, as they speak in the past tense, was that they *used* to do all of this in their act before they retired, but in reality the audience knows that their act, still going, relies heavily on this type of material from the past. The sketch was self-deprecating. It also highlighted how their act had a long history and descended from a much older type of comic performance. The joke that they had moved on from this earlier period only emphasised how, in reality, the pair were still getting comic mileage from recycling old gags and props (Figure 24). Critics deemed this part of Morecambe and Wise's comic appeal. *Punch's* Bernard Hollowood praised the duo's 'ability to refurbish old gags and dreadful puns and sell them off as original matter with... aplomb.'<sup>157</sup> Similarly, Nancy

---

<sup>156</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969.

<sup>157</sup> Bernard Hollowood, 'On the Box', *Punch*, 03 September 1969, p. 395.

Banks-Smith, writing in the *Guardian*, expressed the view that they were a music hall act 'brought to a very expensive point of perfection' because they gave 'freshness to very venerable material indeed.'<sup>158</sup>



**Figure 24 - Revisiting the old act (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 07 September 1969).**

The Christmas Special of 1969 witnessed another instance of Morecambe and Wise recycling 'venerable material' from the variety theatre for television. The episode featured Eric trying his hand at ventriloquism. Ernie was unsure of the idea at first because it was old and unoriginal: 'we've seen all that before... There's nothing new in that at all... It's not original... this is ridiculous. We've seen ventriloquists before. You're wasting your time, unless there's something...'. Ernie was left dumfounded as Eric re-appeared on stage with an enormous ventriloquist dummy, almost twice the size of Eric and named 'Oggie' (Figure 25). This old and unoriginal comic form, however, mixed with slapstick attracted gales of laughter from their audience, highlighting how

---

<sup>158</sup> Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Comedy overdose', *Guardian*, 12 March 1970, p. 10.

there was still laughter in such old material. The dummy's size ensured the pair struggled to position him, having to get step ladders for Eric to reach his levers. They then struggled to place the dummy on Eric's knee, it falling on top of Ernie as Eric attempted to wrestle him back up, Oddie's mouth flew out onto the stage floor.<sup>159</sup> Ventriloquism mixed with slapstick, performed by two seasoned comics, on a stage in front of music hall style tabs and all before a studio audience which howled with laughter and an audience of some 20 million in the country, who no doubt did similarly, indicated that the 1960s weren't necessarily about revolution or modernity. Rather, older cultural forms were still available and widely popular.



**Figure 25 - 'Oddie' the ventriloquist dummy (*The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969).**

In March 1960, before Morecambe and Wise had again obtained a television show of their own, Henry Turton, writing in *Punch*, claimed that their act was 'a classic variety routine'. Turton warned, however, that it would be

...a sad day if ever it becomes stretched out, or swamped in some vast and tottering extravaganza called *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, with

---

<sup>159</sup> *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, 25 December 1969.

dancing girls and visiting pop singers and all the rest of the trimmings. I suppose the money would be good – but so many brilliant comics have met a sorry end this way.<sup>160</sup>

When Morecambe and Wise did come to star in their own television series, Turton's fears were proved unfounded; their performances still revolved around classic variety. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, Morecambe and Wise's recourse to earlier cultural forms was acknowledged and celebrated in the popular media. Commenting on an early series of *Two of a Kind*, Michael Gowers, of the *Daily Mail*, noted that their comic partnership had been 'maintained and even strengthened its appeal on the classical music-hall tradition which we are always being assured is dead.'<sup>161</sup> At the other end of the decade, the *Daily Express*' James Thomas wrote a series of articles on the same topic. He praised how they had 'mastered the art of transferring the robust atmosphere of the music hall to the cold cathode ray tube' and how their performances 'demonstrated all the old art of the music hall'. He concluded that they were 'the last breath of music hall left on television'.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, Bernard Hollowood characterised Morecambe and Wise as 'old timers' whilst a review in the *Observer* suggested that to watch their shows was 'to move back into the thirties, a nostalgic exercise.'<sup>163</sup> Morecambe and Wise's appeal lay, principally, in their comic reversion to the past.

## Conclusion

As television personalities, Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise were expected to be 'ordinary' in order to be familiar and recognisable to a broad audience who came, increasingly, to identify themselves as 'ordinary' in 1960s Britain. Examining how they carefully self-represented, with the support of agents and press relations experts, in order to be recognised as such has enabled me to

---

<sup>160</sup> Henry Turton, 'On the Air', *Punch*, 16 March 1960, p. 402.

<sup>161</sup> Michael Gowers, 'I Say, I Say, Cheers for Eric and Ernie', *Daily Mail*, 29 July 1963, p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> James Thomas, 'Magic comedy – but it needs a better script', *Daily Express*, 15 January 1970, p. 12. James Thomas, 'Eric and Ernie have a royal success', *Daily Express*, 26 March 1970, p. 20. James Thomas, 'At a loss for words – the best double-act', *Daily Express*, 02 July 1970, p. 10.

<sup>163</sup> Hollowood, 'On the Box'. 'TV', *Observer*, 13 October 1968, p. 28.

develop understandings of the precise dimensions of 'ordinariness'. I have argued that to be 'ordinary' in 1960s Britain involved, as in the tradition of working-class biography and representation, emphasising one's struggle and hard work, in precarious working conditions, to achieve success. In Morecambe and Wise's case they stressed how their contemporary cultural prominence was the result of hard slog together through music hall, variety and radio over many years, which they had pursued for the pleasure of others and not for money. Their television failure with *Running Wild* in 1954 and Eric's heart attack in 1968 served to repeatedly underpin this narrative. 'Ordinariness' was also asserted through their commitment to family and domesticity, and their enjoyment of the commonplace pleasures of beer, tobacco and football.

During the 1960s, 'ordinariness' was also defined in opposition to privilege. To be 'ordinary' required the disavowal of higher cultural status and/or capital and any pretensions to these. Morecambe and Wise's television performances demonstrated this rejection and championed 'ordinariness'. Their comedy characters, throughout the decade, were premised on the superiority of Ernie, as the uncultured (Morecambe) was regularly positioned against the pretentious (Wise) to comic effect. This received further and, its clearest, exposition when, at the end of the 1960s, members of the cultural 'Establishment' increasingly participated in their programmes. Eric ridiculed the cultural prestige of these participants and also teamed up with them to ridicule Ernie's pretensions to the same status, exposing them as flawed and false. It was Eric, with the audience's laughing endorsement, who emerged as representative of 'ordinariness' in their comedy and it was always he who triumphed over his comic partner and their guests.

Morecambe and Wise's status as major culture figures in 1960s Britain complicates progressive narratives of the decade as a 'revolution' which was characterised by its modernity and a decisive break with earlier periods. The comic duo achieved cultural prominence and televisual success not because they were representative of progressive change but rather in spite of this. Morecambe and Wise attracted mass audiences for their television programmes, which were significant televisual events, because of their

reversion visually, structurally and textually to the variety theatre and music hall of the past. Their programmes and comedy represented not a watershed break with earlier cultural forms but rather the persistence and salience of these into the 1960s. Their television programmes looked like and were structured as if a variety performance. Morecambe and Wise's comedy relied heavily on references to variety and on the older comic forms they borrowed from the music hall and variety theatre of the earlier twentieth-century. Morecambe and Wise offer a very different version of the 1960s than thus far available. Theirs was not 'swinging', modern or a significant break with the past; it was steeped in the history of older cultural forms.

## Chapter 2: Johnny Speight and the left-wing politics of race and immigration in 1960s Britain

### Introduction

On the 19 November 1969, a Senior Programme Officer at the Independent Television Authority (hereafter ITA) wrote to his colleagues to express his concern that the sitcom *Curry & Chips* (hereafter *C&C*) was ‘simply a revelation of Johnny Speight’s deep-seated prejudices.’<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I explore how Speight’s ‘deep-seated prejudices’ affected his engagement with questions of race and immigration during the late 1960s in his two sitcoms *Till Death Us Do Part* (hereafter *TDUDP*) (BBC, 1966 - 1968) and the oft-neglected *Curry & Chips* (London Weekend Television (hereafter LWT), 1969). Speight’s public pronouncements in the late 1960s and his subsequent autobiographies revealed his nervousness about the ability of new immigrant communities to culturally integrate and about the impact of liberal integrationist race relations legislation on the white working-class. I argue that these sentiments underpinned and manifested themselves in his two sitcoms. Tackling such subject matter, Speight’s comedies emerged as a popular cultural response to the contemporary restrictionist and integrationist approach of the Labour Governments of 1964 to 1970 under Harold Wilson. I highlight how the Labour Party’s own difficulties with questions of race and immigration were emulated by the left-wing Speight’s own fraught and complicated engagement with the subject.

In his sitcoms Speight highlighted how cultural integration was not possible because of the ignorance of the white working class. This, however, was not wholly of the working classes’ own making, because they were the victims of immigration as a result of legislation imposed on them by distant governing elites, which Speight railed against in his anti-Establishment scripts. In this vein, I also highlight how *C&C* can be read as a comic response to Enoch

---

<sup>1</sup> Memo: SPO to HPS, 19 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA Archive, Bournemouth University (hereafter ITA).



Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech and argue that whilst Speight supported Powellist notions of working-class victimhood, he disdained the way in which the working classes were utilising Powell to justify their own bigotry. Speight's sitcoms served as fruitful terrain for the contestation of contemporary social, cultural and political issues. I argue, however, that this did not serve to hasten value change during the 1960s but, rather, invited a popular conservative backlash, underpinned by 'vulgarity' which became an expansive term for a litany of contemporary complaints. The chapter also argues that viewers utilised their readings of Speight's comedies in order to make claims about themselves and others.

Since work began on this PhD, a considerable body of research, predominantly by Gavin Schaffer and Brett Bebbler, has emerged about Speight's sitcoms.<sup>2</sup> The historiography of Speight's work has principally revolved around the question of whether or not Speight's sitcoms were successful in relation to the professed satirical intentions of the responsible broadcast institutions, and if not why this was the case. In this chapter I offer a more complex analysis of Speight's texts premised on his own, rather than institutional, beliefs about race and immigration. I suggest that if we look at Speight's public pronouncements a complicated and contradictory handling of the questions of race and immigration emerges, premised on his bringing to bear his left-wing credentials in his comedies. In a related context, Elizabeth Buettner has argued that 'Multiculturalism has never indisputably been deemed

---

<sup>2</sup> Brett Bebbler, 'The Short Life of *Curry and Chips*: Racial Comedy on British Television in the 1960s', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11:2 (2014), pp. 213 – 235. Brett Bebbler, 'Till Death Us Do Part: Political Satire and Social Realism in the 1960s and 1970s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:2 (2014), pp. 253 – 274. Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television* (London, 2002). Brett Mills, 'Till Death Us Do Part and *All in the Family*', in Glen Creeber (ed.), *Fifty Key Television Programmes* (New York, 2004), pp. 208 – 212. Gavin Schaffer, 'Race on the Television: The Writing of Johnny Speight in the 1970s', in Laurel Forster and Sue Harper (eds.), *British Society and Culture in the 1970s: The Lost Decade* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 107 – 118. Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960 – 1980* (Basingstoke, 2014). Gavin Schaffer, 'Till Death Us Do Part and the BBC: Racial Politics and the British Working Classes 1965 – 1975', *Journal of Contemporary History* 45:2 (2010), pp. 454 – 477. Christina Von Hodenberg, *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2015).

“a positive force” for Britain’ but rather ‘has been imagined as a problem’.<sup>3</sup> Schaffer has suggested that the racialised sitcom was presented, both by the BBC and Independent Television, as ‘wells of conflict resolution’ and, consequently, they “worked through” a host of authorial concerns, rarely unconnected to social anxieties about immigration and multiculturalism’. He has maintained, however, that ‘writers and producers hid behind a cloak of anti-racist intention and defended themselves by holding up their creations as subjects of ridicule.’ The notion that the anti-hero forced the public away from bigoted views by revealing him to be a fool, Schaffer noted, had mixed outcomes: ‘while some viewers may have taken their anti-prejudice medicine, others harvested the racial stereotypes which provided so much of the humour in the racial sitcom, taking jokes from the screen into real life.’<sup>4</sup> Such conclusions echoed those of Sarita Malik who, discussing Speight’s character Alf Garnett from *TDUDP*, has suggested that ‘within the context of news and documentary images of the Black problematic at this time, Alf’s views, for many, inevitably appeared logical attitudes towards race, and validated their racist opinions.’<sup>5</sup> This focus on the split between those viewers who recognised Speight’s satirical intentions, and those who either missed or were offended by the highly provocative jokes has also underpinned Bebbler’s research. Those who missed the ‘joke’, Bebbler contended, did so because Speight’s sitcoms ‘succeeded in building familiarity with working-class audiences through the creation of spaces’ that many viewers recognised and could identify with. Like Schaffer and Malik, Bebbler has also argued that Speight’s comedy ‘ultimately failed to transcend the racial characterisations and ethnic essentialisms that it represented’ and therefore served to ‘reinforce, rather than liberalise, the political attitudes of its viewers.’<sup>6</sup> Such interpretations, however, rely too heavily on the notion that the sitcoms were intended to be satirical. I suggest

---

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Buettner, “Going for an Indian”: South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain’, *The Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008), p. 866.

<sup>4</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, pp. 187 – 205.

<sup>5</sup> Malik, *Representing*, pp. 92 – 93.

<sup>6</sup> Bebbler, ‘*Till Death*’, pp. 254 – 258. Bebbler, ‘Short Life’, pp. 214 – 215.

that examining the authorship of the programmes offers a different, more complicated narrative.

In this chapter I extend the top-down political histories of post-war race and immigration to examine how left-wing writers engaged with this topic for popular television. In his autobiography Speight declared himself 'a socialist if I'm anything at all' and contemporary media comment labelled him a 'well-known Leftist'.<sup>7</sup> I highlight how, in keeping with the Labour Party's contemporary approach, Speight's own comic engagement with race and immigration was fraught and complex. The influx and presence of new Commonwealth immigrants in Britain during the 1960s was, Steven Fielding has argued, an issue 'that Labour was ill-prepared to address and one many wished would disappear as quickly as possible' because of uneasiness about what the 'party's principles actually were'. Throughout the post-war period, Labour was confronted with a conflicted membership; on one side the traditional working-class who believed the growing presence of black immigrants in Britain was problematic and therefore urged controls, and on the other liberal activists and officials who, consistent with Labour's commitment to equality, believed integrationist measures should be promoted to challenge white opinion.<sup>8</sup> Speight's comedies responded to Labour's dual policy; he examined the working-class relationship with the immigrant and the response to the liberal integrationist policies.

The Labour Governments of 1964 – 1970 passed a series of laws addressing race and immigration intended to mollify the opposing constituencies of members within the party. The Race Relations Bills of 1965 and 1968 introduced legislation which outlawed racial discrimination and alongside this integrationist approach the government introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 which limited the rights of entry previously enjoyed by Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies. This, James

---

<sup>7</sup> Johnny Speight, *For Richer, For Poorer: A Kind of Autobiography* (London, 1991), p. 166. D. A. N. Jones, 'Old Contemptible', *Listener*, 10 August 1967, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964 – 1970, Volume 1: Labour and Cultural Change* (Manchester, 2003), p. 140. Steven Fielding, 'Brotherhood and brothers: Responses to "coloured" immigration in the British Labour Party, c. 1951 – 1965', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3:1 (1998), p. 81.

Hampshire has argued, ‘marked the beginning of a policy linkage known as the “limitation-integration equation”, by which restrictive immigration controls are conjoined with integration and anti-discrimination measures as part of a broad policy package.’ Hampshire has attributed this approach to political expediency and Wilsonian pragmatism intended ‘to maintain support from opposed constituencies within the Labour Party as well as the country as a whole’ by appeasing ‘anti-immigrant sentiment by restrictive immigration controls’ and placating ‘liberal and left-wing progressives with Race Relations legislation.’<sup>9</sup> The reception to Labour’s dual approach, however, was unstable. Fielding maintained that it was ‘in direct opposition to the sentiments of most of its accustomed supporters as well as many ordinary Party members and activists’, because many members and potential supporters saw black immigration as a threat.<sup>10</sup> Speight was one such left-winger who was ill-at-ease with immigration and integration and the impact of both issues on the white working-class. This discomfort underpinned his handling of these themes in both *TDUDP* and *C&C* which highlighted the inability of the working class and the immigrant to culturally integrate and the former’s revulsion at measures intended to ensure it.

Speight’s sitcoms were, as both Schaffer and Bebbler have suggested, promoted as ‘complementary to the progressive race relations agenda promised by Harold Wilson’s Labour administration’ and the programmes were used by both broadcasters as evidence of their ‘support for the Race Relations Act of 1965 and 1968.’<sup>11</sup> Schaffer has concluded that as a result of Speight being ‘a committed socialist from a working-class background’ whose comedy ‘centred on working-class characters in a traditional Labour supporting community’, his writing ‘may illuminate some of the tensions that attended

---

<sup>9</sup> James Hampshire, ‘Immigration and race relations’, in Peter Dorey (ed.), *The Labour Governments, 1964 – 1970* (Abingdon, 2006), pp. 309 – 327.

<sup>10</sup> Fielding, ‘Brotherhood’, p. 80. Fielding, *Labour*, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> Bebbler, ‘Short Life’, p. 218.

Labour immigration policy'.<sup>12</sup> Whilst Schaffer has proposed the hypothesis, he has not, in any substantive way explored it, something rectified here.

In the chapter I highlight how Speight used narratives of cultural 'otherness' in relation to the immigrant in order to narrate their difficulties in culturally integrating with the white working-class host community and vice versa. No matter how hard the immigrant tried to integrate, the working classes were unreceptive. Indeed, Buettner has suggested that 'Ethnic minorities and their cultural practices have long been... widely met by racism, suspicion and intolerance.'<sup>13</sup> Historians have engaged in fraught debates about the impact of new Commonwealth immigration on British national identity in the post-war period. Chris Waters has written how, in the 1950s, 'discussions about the rapid increase of "new Commonwealth" migration to Britain could not wholly be separated from discussions of what it now meant to be British.'<sup>14</sup> Immigration spurred debates about who belonged to the national community and who did not. Examining race relations as a social problem which re-defined the nation in cultural terms, Waters has suggested that 'reimagin[ing] the national community in the 1950s depended on reworking established tropes of little Englandism against the migrant other.'<sup>15</sup> Bill Schwarz has maintained that the British people were profoundly re-racialised in the post-war period, especially as a result of the new found presence of immigrants in the metropolis, ensuring that 'the white man could only be a white man in relation to his others'.<sup>16</sup> Offering a summary of 'otherness', Linda Colley has concluded that 'we usually decide who we are by reference to who and what we are not.'<sup>17</sup>

Exploring the representation of issues of race and immigration in the sitcoms *TDUDP* and *C&C*, I move beyond extant studies of 'otherness' which have predominantly focused on official and academic discourses of race.

---

<sup>12</sup> Schaffer, 'Race', p. 115. In earlier work Schaffer described Speight as identifying with 'Marxist politics' which resulted in a 'Marxist world view' (Schaffer, *Till Death*, pp. 457 – 473).

<sup>13</sup> Buettner, "Going for an Indian", p. 866.

<sup>14</sup> Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers" in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947 – 1963', *Journal of British History* 36:2 (1997), p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Waters, "Strangers", p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 20 – 21.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31:4 (1992), p. 311.

Jordanna Bailkin has observed that whilst the 'decolonising state' may have 'derived its conception of migrants from experts', there was a distinctive popular opposition to this 'culture of expertise'.<sup>18</sup> I therefore seek conceptions of the migrant as expressed in more popular forms. Such an approach builds on the work of Wendy Webster who, in her study of post-war films about empire, has suggested that 'old ideas of "little England"' were reworked in order to construct 'Englishness against empire and particularly against immigrants.'<sup>19</sup> I argue that, in his sitcoms, Speight borrowed heavily from the formal language of 'otherness' in order to demonstrate how the working classes viewed the immigrant community and to underline why the immigrant and native working-class failed to integrate.

Scholars of comedy have also highlighted the centrality of 'otherness' to Speight's sitcoms. When they discuss 'otherness', however, it is generally in relation to the question of whether or not such portrayals were in keeping with the publicly professed satirical intentions of the sitcoms and whether this portrayal backfired. Schaffer has suggested that Speight constructed the immigrant as an 'other'; their inclusion and exclusion was much less about simple questions of colour but, rather, revolved around cultural hybridity, with colour marked as only a signpost of difference. Thus, the consequence of such a representation, Schaffer has maintained, was that 'black and Asian minorities... were constructed comically in a manner which cemented their subaltern social status and emphasised their apartness from the mass of British society'. Such a portrayal ensured, Schaffer has concluded, that the immigrant emerged as 'foreign and inassimilable' and 'totally and irreconcilably different to white Britons.'<sup>20</sup> Malik, in her study of race and television, has concluded that a large proportion of British humour had traditionally rested on notions of racial difference: 'Blackness was always located as a source of ambivalence, discussion and Otherness.'<sup>21</sup> I build on the work of Schaffer and Malik by offering a comprehensive textual and performance analysis of the 'other'. I argue,

---

<sup>18</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (London, 2012), pp. 9 – 24.

<sup>19</sup> Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939 – 1965* (Oxford, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, pp. 183 – 203. Schaffer, 'Race', p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> Malik, *Representing*, p. 95.

however, that Speight 'othered' his comic subjects so as to highlight how the integration of the immigrant could never be achieved. For Speight, and as explored in his sitcoms, this was because of the fundamental cultural differences between the immigrant and white working-class populations.

One prominent theme to emerge in the historiography of race is that of the apparent victimisation of the native white working-class by a distant liberal Establishment, as a result of new Commonwealth immigration. Speight's comedies evidenced his concerns about working-class victimhood; he believed they were unfairly bearing the brunt of immigration. Webster has suggested that in areas where immigrants were settling, white communities were portrayed in films as 'beleaguered and vulnerable'. Accordingly, the homes and gardens of white Britons, in these films, emerged as a 'symbol of embattled Englishness' with the 'nation under siege from "blacks next door"'.<sup>22</sup> The narrative of victimhood has emerged most prominently, however, in relation to debates about Enoch Powell. For example, Camilla Schofield has highlighted how his postcolonial nationalism relied on an obsessive preoccupation with victimhood and she has stressed how Powell cast immigration as 'a story of abandonment and political alienation from a failing leadership'. Consequently, his supporters 'saw themselves as victims of liberals in government.'<sup>23</sup> Also utilising Powell as a case-study, Schwarz has maintained that 'whites were coming to imagine themselves as historic victims' and 'commensurably, blacks were believed to be acquiring a status of supremacy.'<sup>24</sup> Speight's sitcoms, especially *C&C*, expressed similar concerns; his working-class characters voiced concerns about them bearing the brunt of immigration and being disregarded by liberal elites in government. *TDUDP*'s humour relied heavily on anti-Establishment themes and narratives.

Both Schaffer and Bebbler are unanimous in the belief that Speight sought to use his comedies to give voice to the working classes on the issue of

---

<sup>22</sup> Webster, *Englishness*, pp. 152 – 166.

<sup>23</sup> Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 3 – 232.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Schwarz, "'The only white man in there": the re-racialisation of England, 1956 – 1968', *Race and Class* 38:1 (1996), p. 73.

immigration.<sup>25</sup> Schaffer has argued that Speight was influenced to write his sitcoms by the 'working-class Britons who were bearing the brunt of immigration' and paying the social cost, whilst 'middle-class leaders were insulated from the daily impacts' and reaping the benefits. Indeed, Schaffer maintained, Speight was, like Marxist theorists, unable to separate race from class, and therefore 'understood colour as a tactic of class conflict.' What riled Speight especially, Schaffer has argued, was that the middle class were 'stifling debate about immigration by making allegations of racism', thus Speight sought to vocalise concerns about immigration, 'not in the language of political elites, but of ordinary British people' in order to challenge 'the hypocritical liberal silencing of immigration concerns in Britain.'<sup>26</sup> Schaffer has suggested that across the genre of racial sitcoms, those responsible 'seem to have seen themselves as radical transgressors, fighting not so much against racism as against political correctness and the perceived censoring of discussion about immigration.'<sup>27</sup> I build on these arguments to demonstrate how, through a textual and performance analysis, Speight critically engaged with understanding the political Establishment in his sitcoms and also how, specifically, *C&C* responded to the question of Race Relations and Powell.

Indeed, no discussion of post-war race and immigration is complete without reference to Powell. Scholars have engaged with his role in the formation of a post-colonial national identity and the popular and official responses to Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech.<sup>28</sup> Links have also been made between Speight's sitcoms and Powell. Andy Medhurst has concluded that Alf Garnett was 'the ambivalently monstrous Enoch Powell of the sitcom'; Stephen Bourne and Jim Pines have remarked that Alf was, respectively, Powell's 'fictional disciple' and 'alter-ego'; while Schaffer has argued that Alf

---

<sup>25</sup> Schaffer, *Till Death*, p. 473. Bebbler, 'Short Life', p. 218.

<sup>26</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 213. Schaffer, 'Race', pp. 107 – 117. Schaffer, *Till Death*, pp. 472 – 473.

<sup>27</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 212 – 214. Schaffer, 'Race', p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> Schofield, *Powell*. Schwarz, *White*. Amy Whipple, 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy', *Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009), pp. 717 – 735. Benjamin Bowling, 'The Emergence of Violent Racism as a Public Issue in Britain, 1945 – 1981', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain, 1840 – 1950* (Leicester, 1996), pp. 185 – 215.



'offered a reflection on the agenda of Enoch Powell.'<sup>29</sup> Indeed, even Speight confessed in May 1968 that 'If the show were on the air now, [Alf]'d be agreeing with every word Powell said' and maintained that Enoch Powell had proved his 'point: the country's full of Alf Garnetts'<sup>30</sup> Similar comparisons were made by the contemporary press, with David Robinson, of the *Financial Times*, contending that individuals 'from those inarticulate areas of society which are prepared to march for Powellism, may well see Alf Garnett as their own spokesman.'<sup>31</sup> Writing in the *Observer*, John Heilpern felt that 'Enoch Powell and several hundred dockers have proved something that everyone was supposed to know, but nobody wanted to admit: Alf Garnett, the know-all embodiment of every conceivable form of bigotry and ignorance, actually exists.'<sup>32</sup> Although no documentary or anecdotal evidence exists to prove the contention, Malik has suggested that 'Speight was inspired' to write *C&C* 'after the fever-pitch response to Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech.'<sup>33</sup> This is not unlikely given *C&C*'s 1969 airing date and the regular references to Powell throughout the episodes. Furthermore, the sitcom was set in a West Midland's factory where Powell's constituency was, and according to Fred Lindop, was 'one of the principal areas affected by recent immigration' and where 'the majority' of strikes in support of Powell occurred.<sup>34</sup> I explore how *C&C* responded complexly to Powell in order to highlight how Speight was in sympathy with the Powellite stress on victimhood but also ridiculed the way in which the working-classes were utilising Powell in order to justify their own bigotry.

Scholars have acknowledged the significance of Speight's sitcoms to broader socio-cultural change during the 1960s. Bebbler, for example, has

---

<sup>29</sup> Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London, 2007), p. 38. Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television* (London, 2001), p. ix. Jim Pines, *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* (London, 1992), p. 12. Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 473.

<sup>30</sup> John Heilpern, 'Who created Alf Garnett?', *Observer*, 05 May 1968, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> David Robinson, 'Too true to be good', *Financial Times*, 13 December 1968, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Heilpern, 'Who created', p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Malik, *Representing*, p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Fred Lindop, 'Racism and the working class: strikes in support of Enoch Powell', *Labour History Review* 66:1 (2001), pp. 82 – 87.

suggested that the ‘incessant squabbling’ in *TDUDP* ‘touched on a wide range of anxieties expressed by working Britons as society changed during the 1960s.’<sup>35</sup> Schaffer has maintained that the programme emerged as a ‘mechanism for Speight to offer original and sharp social commentary’ on contemporary British society.<sup>36</sup> In her recent intervention, Christina Von Hodenberg has sought to examine the extent to which *TDUDP*, and its international syndications, not only mirrored ‘the Sixties cultural revolution’ but also served ‘as an important agent in societal debates about the acceptance of new values.’ She has concluded that Speight’s sitcoms not only ‘hastened value change’ but also ‘slightly deradicalised new norms.’ It did so by sanitising, deradicalising and ‘deideologising’ the ‘Sixties cultural revolution’ by depicting both ‘the new values of the lifestyle revolution and the backlash’, which ensured the ‘new values’ were showcased but also ‘watered them down to make them palatable to the masses.’<sup>37</sup> In this chapter, however, I take issue with this progressive version of both the 1960s and Speight’s sitcoms. Whilst the programmes undoubtedly broke new ground with their social criticism, the surviving responses to both *TDUDP* and *C&C* evidence a significant conservative response to the programmes, from a significant segment of the audience, underpinned by a language of ‘vulgarity’ which included a host of contemporary concerns not limited to television itself. Probing what was deemed vulgar also enables me to highlight what was considered unacceptable public discourse in the late 1960s. I also highlight, building on the work of sociologists Sam Friedman and Giseline Kuipers into contemporary comedy and taste hierarchies, how viewers utilised their interpretations of Speight’s sitcoms in order to mark social distinctions and boundaries.<sup>38</sup> I argue that viewers drew their own cultural boundaries, in their

---

<sup>35</sup> Bebber, ‘*Till Death*’, p. 256.

<sup>36</sup> Schaffer, ‘*Till Death*’, p. 459.

<sup>37</sup> Hodenberg, *Television’s Moment*, pp. 1 – 2 and 428.

<sup>38</sup> Giseline Kuipers, ‘Television and taste hierarchies: the case of Dutch television comedy’, *Media, Culture, Society* 28 (2006), pp. 359 – 378. Sam Friedman, ‘Legitimizing a Discredited Art Form: The Changing Field of British Comedy’, *Edinburgh Working Papers in Sociology* 39 (2009), pp. 347 – 370. Sam Friedman, ‘The cultural currency of a “good” sense of humour: comedy and new forms of distinction’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 62:2 (2011), pp. 347 – 370. Sam Friedman and Giseline Kuipers, ‘The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries’, *Cultural Sociology* 7:2 (2013), pp. 179 – 195. Sam Friedman, *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a “Good” Sense of Humour* (Oxon, 2014).

appreciation of Speight's comedies, between both themselves, in classed terms, and the immigrant 'other', in racial terms.

*TDUDP* was initially broadcast in three series on the BBC between 1966 and 1968.<sup>39</sup> Written by Speight and set in the dockland area of the East End of London, it followed the antics of the Garnett family: the father Alf (Warren Mitchell), mother Else (Dandy Nichols), daughter Rita (Una Stubbs) and her husband Mike (Anthony Booth) (Figure 26). By the second series, episodes of the sitcom attracted 'audiences of twenty million – nearly two out of every three viewers in the United Kingdom'.<sup>40</sup> Alongside this mass viewership, Speight recalled how the programme also generated both 'critical approval' and a 'controversial storm'.<sup>41</sup> The series explored the clash of cultures between the conservative and older Alf and Else and their left-leaning daughter, Rita, and son-in-law Mike, as the four characters debated a series of contemporary issues not limited to race.



**Figure 26 - The characters of *TDUDP* (Left to Right) Alf, (Warren Mitchell), Else (Dandy Nichols), Rita (Una Stubbs) and Mike (Anthony Booth) ('Alf Garnett will be played by Fast Show's Simon Day', *Mail Online*, 29 March 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513539/Alf-Garnett-played-Fast-s-Simon-Day-Till-Death-returns-TV-screens-ll-just-sexist-racist-misogynist-ever.html>, accessed 22 May 2018).**

<sup>39</sup> There was also a special *TDUDP* episode in honour of the 1970 General Election and a further four series broadcast between 1972 and 1975. Another series of *TDUDP* was broadcast in 1981 before it returned as *In Sickness and In Health* for six series between 1985 and 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Dennis Main Wilson, 'Till Death Us Do Part', *Radio Times*, 25 December 1967, p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> Speight, *Richer*, p. 162.

*C&C* was produced by LWT for Independent Television and was broadcast in 1969. Co-written by Speight and Spike Milligan, it followed the attempts of Kevin O'Grady (Milligan), a Pakistani-Irish immigrant, to adapt to English society and culture in a multiracial joke factory in the West Midlands. Consequently, the sitcom was more overt than *TDUDP* in its racial content. *C&C* explored Kevin's interactions with his colleagues, principally Arthur (Eric Sykes), the supposedly liberal factory foreman; Norman (Norman Rossington), the shop steward; Kenny (Kenny Lynch), a British-born West Indian factory worker and Smellie (Sam Kydd), a factory worker (Figure 27). As a report in the *Financial Times* suggested, Speight 'creates the Irish Pakistani, the cockney spade, the liberal foreman, the racist worker, and sets them down, appropriately enough, in a joke factory.'<sup>42</sup> Though attracting fewer viewers than *TDUDP*, around six to seven million homes, *C&C* attracted no less controversy; the ITA cancelled the series after only six episodes.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 27 - Arthur (Eric Sykes) and Paki-Paddy (Spike Milligan) ('Curry and Chips – 1969', *British Classic Comedy*, 01 October 2015, <https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/naughty-but-funny>, accessed 22 May 2018).**

---

<sup>42</sup> T. C. Worsley, 'Out into the open', *Financial Times*, 26 November 1969, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> 'TV Top 10', *Financial Times*, 04 December 1969, p. 32.

There is an extensive archival source base which underpins this chapter. All six episodes of *C&C* have survived in their original state and have been accessed online. The episodes of *TDUDP* broadcast during the 1960s exist in an amalgam of sound recordings, video recordings and scripts but all have been located and are analysed here. The textual and performance analysis of these programmes are augmented by an examination of the records held in both the BBC and ITA's archives, both of which offered viewer correspondence, audience research reports, production documents and internal institutional correspondence. As a programme produced for Independent Television, *C&C* is extremely rare in having left an archival footprint. It is testament to the controversy it attracted that such a considerable body of documentation relating to its production, broadcast and reception has survived. The chapter also incorporates biographical materials and contemporary press comment.

In the first section I examine Speight's exploration of the potential for cultural integration between the white working-class and the new Commonwealth immigrants. I begin by setting out how the institutions responsible for the programmes defended them on the grounds of anti-racist, satirical intent and the subsequent contemporary debates, within the mainstream media and amongst viewers, about whether or not this was successful. Complicating this well trodden field of scholarly exploration, I move to reconceptualise the programmes by re-examining them in light of the specific public pronouncements on race and immigration that the writers made. In so doing, I argue that Speight's sitcoms played out his personal belief that the new Commonwealth immigrants and native white working-class could not successfully integrate owing to the fundamental cultural differences between the two opposing groups, expressed through a lexicon of 'otherness', and the deep-seated ignorance of the latter, who Speight represented as grotesque.

The second section examines how Speight's working-class characters responded to the governing elites and the policies they introduced aimed at managing the contemporary problems of race and immigration. Speight portrayed his characters as bearing the brunt of immigration and, as a result of the corresponding stress on integration, he saw them as victims of a distant

governing elite. Consequently, I argue that both *TDUDP* and *C&C* were underpinned by an anti-Establishment narrative. The section explores *TDUDP* as foreshadowing and *C&C* as responding to Powell and his 'Rivers of Blood' speech. I suggest that whilst Speight was in sympathy with Powell's stress on the liberal abandonment of the working-classes, he was also critical of the ways in which Britons were utilising Powell to justify their own bigotry.

In the final section I examine the popular and critical responses to *TDUDP* and *C&C* in the mainstream media, in audience research reports and in letters from the viewers. I utilise this extensive archival material to call into question the extent to which Speight's sitcoms accelerated value change amongst its viewers. In opposition, I argue that the sitcoms invited a conservative response from its audience. The conservative backlash was underpinned by protests about the programmes' 'vulgarity', an expansive term which came to stand for a host of broader contemporary concerns. Unearthing what was considered 'vulgar' enables an exploration of what was deemed to be beyond the realms of acceptable public discourse in the mid to late 1960s. The section ends with an examination of how viewers utilised their appreciation of Speight's sitcoms in order to make strong claims about themselves and others, in both classed and racial terms.

### **2.1: Speight's sitcoms and the problem of cultural integration**

Scholars have predominantly engaged with Speight's sitcoms in order to assess whether they achieved their apparent satirically anti-racial intentions, laughing at racial prejudice and bringing working-class bigotry to the fore.<sup>44</sup> The cultural 'othering' of the immigrant is often cited as a reason for the comic misfiring of both *TDUDP* and *C&C*.<sup>45</sup> In this section, I move beyond this limited frame of study to investigate how Speight's personal public pronouncements, which were more explicitly about race and immigration, influenced and embedded

---

<sup>44</sup> Bebber, 'Till Death', pp. 254 – 258. Bebber, 'Short Life', pp. 214 – 215. Malik, *Representing*, pp. 92 – 93. Schaffer, *Vision*, pp. 187 – 205.

<sup>45</sup> Malik, *Representing*, p. 95. Schaffer, *Vision*, pp. 183 – 203. Schaffer, 'Race', p. 116.

themselves into his comedy programmes. In so doing I suggest that in keeping with segments of the Labour Party, Speight, as a well-known left-winger, was nervous about the impact immigration was having on the native white working-classes, and he railed against Labour's integrationist policy. Such an approach enables an exploration of the handling of these issues through popular discourse, rather than political frameworks.

Fielding has concluded that the Labour Party believed that the new settlers needed to be encouraged to accept much of their host's culture.<sup>46</sup> He maintained that 'Labour members decided that coloured immigration was the cause of a series of "problems"' because of 'the character of coloured immigrants themselves.'<sup>47</sup> Contemporary debates within Labour focused on the cultural differences of the immigrant community: a columnist in *Socialist Commentary* argued that 'it was not immigrants' colour that antagonised many Britons as much their customs.'<sup>48</sup> One party official reportedly said that the aim was to 'fit these coloured people in, and to [get them] living up to the standards of our way of life' and in *Socialist Commentary*, again, the opinion was expressed that 'newcomers had to discard those habits which "disturb the English community".'<sup>49</sup> Speight's concerns, however, centred on the inability of the two opposed constituencies to integrate owing to fundamental differences between the distinct immigrant community and the white working class. As Speight explored in his sitcoms, much of this was due to working-class ignorance, represented by his grotesque characters, which ensured the immigrant always emerged as culturally 'other'. In Speight's comedy, identity was less about race and colour than about culture. I suggest that laughter emerged from his characters' lack of cultural cohesion and the consequential clash of cultures. Waters has highlighted how post-war race relations experts 'narrated the migrant as a "stranger" to assumed norms', 'customs and conventions' of 'what it meant to be British' and Marcus Collins, who has analysed official responses to questions of West Indian masculinity, suggested

---

<sup>46</sup> Fielding, *Labour*, p. 140.

<sup>47</sup> Fielding, 'Brotherhood', p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Fielding, *Labour*, pp. 139 – 140.

<sup>49</sup> Fielding, 'Brotherhood', p. 91.

that the immigrant was 'constituted as a "countertype" to that of whites.'<sup>50</sup> I move beyond such studies which have been overly concerned with official and academic narratives of 'otherness'.

I begin by highlighting the ways in which the institutions responsible for *TDUDP* and *C&C* defended their programmes on the grounds of anti-racism, before moving to examine the explicit comments of Speight and Milligan on race and immigration in order to complicate this narrative. The BBC and ITA remained steadfast, publicly, in their belief that both *TDUDP* and *C&C* were satirical and thereby corrective texts for race relations. As Schaffer has noted, 'across comedy and light entertainment in the 1960s and 1970s, both the BBC and the ITA were similarly unresponsive to claims that racial content was problematic or offensive.'<sup>51</sup> The ITA, in its generic response to letters of complaint about *C&C*, explained that the programme aimed to 'expose to ridicule all the misconceived prejudices to which people can be prone in this area.' The ITA explained the 'thinking of the writer and the producers' thus:

...these prejudices already exist among some sections of the population; if we ignore them, they will not disappear; if they are brought into the open, and shown as being ludicrous and illogical, the likelihood is that they will be made untenable.<sup>52</sup>

In an audience research report into *C&C*'s reception, the document similarly highlighted how the sitcom 'used a broad, almost slapstick, approach to lampoon racial prejudices'.<sup>53</sup> Publicly the broadcaster sold Speight's sitcom as a corrective text for race relations, whereby bringing to the fore and lampooning racist attitudes would serve to challenge and silence bigotry amongst its viewers. Speight proclaimed himself 'not a reformer' but 'a comic writer' who wanted 'to make people laugh.' But he conceded that what his comedy 'set out to do' was 'to make people laugh at really important real-life subjects, because that way you can perhaps help them face up to their own

---

<sup>50</sup> Waters, "Dark Strangers", p. 209. Marcus Collins, 'Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 40:3 (2001), p. 392.

<sup>51</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 206.

<sup>52</sup> Letter: Peter Heneker, ITA, to R. D. Milner, 11 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>53</sup> ITA Paper 131(69), 21 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.



stupidity or ignorance or prejudice.<sup>54</sup> He defended C&C on the grounds that 'There is a message in the series: Prejudice is laughable.'<sup>55</sup> Such statements, however, were ill-at-odds with comments he made specifically about race and immigration, which revealed his nervousness about immigration and the potential for integration.

Debates about whether or not Speight's sitcoms were backfiring from their anti-racist intention were also evident in the contemporary press and amongst viewers. Many newspaper commentators agreed that the comedic representations in C&C and TDUDP functioned as satire against bigotry. The *Financial Times*' television critic T. C. Worsley maintained that Speight was skilled at 'bring[ing] out into the open and expos[ing] those boils and pustules on the body politic... Bring it out... and laugh at it, and then indeed there might be some chance of getting it into proportion.'<sup>56</sup> Some viewers certainly responded in this way. Mrs Ballantyne, from County Tyrone, maintained that C&C 'was of immense social value' because 'by bringing blind prejudice into the open and making us laugh at illogicality such a programme can only have a salutary effect.'<sup>57</sup> Similar views were expressed in audience research reports for TDUDP. Describing the series as a whole, one viewer maintained that it was 'quite brilliant in its exposure of ignorance and bigotry... It makes people see... the stupidity of their own dogmatic beliefs.'<sup>58</sup>

Some, however, were doubtful about the programmes' positive impact on racial issues. Clive Jenkins, the joint General Secretary of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs and prolific critic of Speight, expressed himself 'thoroughly fed up with Mr Johnny Speight's argument that you bring racialism into the open by making jokes about it.' He complained that 'it puts into mass circulation insulting descriptions which are not in everyday use.'<sup>59</sup> Mr Grant, the Headmaster of Hesketh School in Cranleigh, wrote to the BBC to complain

---

<sup>54</sup> Barry Norman, 'Here comes Paki Paddy', *Daily Mail*, 21 October 1969, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Brian Dean, 'Curry & Chips Starts TV Colour Row', *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1969, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Worsley, 'Out into the open', p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> 'Letters: Curry and Chips could teach Ulster people a great deal', *Sunday News*, 21 December 1969, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> ARR: TDUDP TX 27 February 1967, R9/7/85, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).

<sup>59</sup> Clive Jenkins, 'Curry and Chips is off!', *Daily Mirror*, 09 December 1969, p. 6.

that 'your programme has done more, in thirty minutes, to undermine all that has been worked for to achieve this integration in the past years.'<sup>60</sup> Even Warren Mitchell was later forced to conclude that the professed desire to challenge prejudice in *TDUDP* 'didn't make much difference' as people came up to him in the street to proclaim 'I love it when you have a go at the coons.'<sup>61</sup> Miscomprehending the stated aims of the broadcasting authorities, many viewers enjoyed the negative racial representations as fact.

The personal testimonies of both Speight and Milligan, however, sit uncomfortably with the much publicised institutional promotion of anti-racist satirical intention. Speight's autobiographies highlight his complicated and contradictory approach to questions of race and immigration, which predominantly revolved around his concerns about overpopulation and integration. He described his return to Canning Town in 1973 to seek out filming locations for the cinema version of *TDUDP*. He visited a home occupied by 'a coloured woman', a member of 'one of five families that were living there then – perhaps a whole tribe.'<sup>62</sup> Speight's use of the word 'tribe' suggested he had a perception of the immigrant family as uncivilised and dislocated from mainstream society, perhaps even as primitive. Such a view would come to influence his representation of the immigrant community in his comedies. His concerns about overpopulation were further evidenced in his comments about Moss Side, in Manchester, which he described as a 'coloured ghetto' where 'coloured cats spent small fortunes on their woolly heads.'<sup>63</sup> Again, Speight geographically placed the immigrant community beyond the realms of mainstream white society and his use of animal imagery dehumanised his subjects. He explained in an interview with Barry Norman for the *Daily Mail* in October 1968 his belief that:

Ignorance and poverty are the breeding grounds of prejudice. You get an influx of Pakistanis into a place like Birmingham and there's bound to

---

<sup>60</sup> Letter: P. Grant, 27 February 1967, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>61</sup> 'Private View', *Guardian*, 20 November 1968, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Johnny Speight, *It Stands to Reason: A Kind of Autobiography* (London, 1973), pp. 19 – 20.

<sup>63</sup> Speight, *Reason*, p. 134.

be race trouble. In the first place the two cultures can't mix because people don't understand each other. And secondly, we're overcrowded.<sup>64</sup>

Speight expressed concerns about both overpopulation and overcrowding, coupled with geographic separation into racially defined ghettos, which rendered cultural integration impossible. It was this concern about cultural integration, however, which was to be given its greatest exposition in his sitcoms. Speight explored the inability of the new Commonwealth immigrants to be accepted by their white hosts, because of the cultural divide between the two groups.

Milligan wrote *C&C* alongside Speight as well as performing in it as 'Paki-Paddy'. Speight and Milligan appear to have occupied a level of creative and editorial control over *C&C* beyond the scope of simply writers and actor. Archival sources reveal that the ITA struggled to maintain editorial control over the final broadcast episodes: a memo indicated a series of 'objectionable passages' in the episode of 27 November 1969 were 'ad libs'.<sup>65</sup> According to his biographers, Milligan, like Speight, was also anxious about immigration and its impact. Pauline Scudamore has maintained that Milligan 'believe[d] that overpopulation is the cause of virtually every ill known to contemporary man' and his 'passionate anxiety for population control' went 'back many years and seems to have stemmed from his childhood in India.' His imperial upbringing in India, Scudamore has suggested, ensured that 'Milligan was born into a racist society and spent the first fifteen years of his life being taught that he was superior because he was white.'<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Schofield has contended that 'conceptions of race from the empire left a deep imprint on British postwar racism' and consequently, according to Andrew Thompson, most whites 'saw no reason to revise attitudes unaltered in their essentials since colonial days.'<sup>67</sup> Attitudes of this sort were exhibited in both *TDUDP* and *C&C*, where the

---

<sup>64</sup> Norman, 'Here comes', p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Memo: HPS to DDG, 27 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>66</sup> Pauline Scudamore, *Spike Milligan: A Biography* (London, 1985), pp. 246 – 255.

<sup>67</sup> Schofield, *Powell*, p. 227. Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century* (Harlow, 2005), p. 221.

working-class characters were shown to hark back to themes of Empire and, explicitly, primitivism, in their descriptions of the immigrant community. According to Milligan's former agent and close friend, Norma Farnes, Milligan was, throughout the 1960s:

...seriously concerned about the wave of immigrants from India and Pakistan... he could and did go on about it for hours. The situation was getting out of hand, he said, and nobody in government was keeping an eye on it... if illegal immigrants went unchecked, he argued, one day in the future England would become a melting pot, its native cultural submerged until it became so diluted it would disappear forever.<sup>68</sup>

Milligan shared Speight's concerns about immigration and its negative impacts on the native white population. Specifically, Milligan was overtly concerned about how overpopulation, caused by the influx of immigrants from the new Commonwealth, would result in the dilution of the native white population's culture. This undoubtedly impacted on Milligan's contribution to *C&C* and the subsequent portrayal of immigrants as culturally 'other'. With such views, it was little wonder that in advance of *C&C* going out on television, a Senior Programme Officer at the ITA had already sent a memo to all Regional Officers to warn them that 'we are in trouble... I myself believe that [*C&C*] is certainly not calculated to help race relations.'<sup>69</sup> If the public pronouncements of Speight and Milligan on race and immigration are examined, rather than the statements of the responsible broadcasters, it is evident that both were focused on challenging any notion of the possibility of successful cultural integration.

The failures of the immigrant to integrate were largely laid, by Speight, at the door of an ignorant, white working-class, represented by his grotesque sitcom characters who were the mouthpiece for his exploration of race and immigration. In promotional materials for *TDUDP* the characters were underpinned by their negative stereotyping: Alf was described as 'an old reactionary, bigoted Conservative, arrogant in his prejudices' and Else as 'a

---

<sup>68</sup> Norma Farnes, *Spike: An Intimate Memoir* (London, 2003), p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> Memo: SPO to All RO, Subject: *C&C*, 19 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA. Memo: SPO to HPS, Subject: *C&C*, 19 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

pleasant cow-like lady of slow mentality, unread and unintelligent.<sup>70</sup> Internal BBC documentation described Alf as ‘foul-mouthed, ignorant, selfish – even vicious’.<sup>71</sup> Dandy Nichols, in an interview with the *Radio Times* in 1967, maintained that her character, Else, was ‘A bit of an old slag. Not dirty but certainly not houseproud! A cabbage.’<sup>72</sup> Mitchell described Alf as ‘An ignorant, loud-mouthed, stupid pig of a man. A know-all. Nasty, repulsive. I hate him.’<sup>73</sup> Similar descriptions permeated the contemporary media. The television critic George Melly concluded that Alf and Else were part of the ‘small pantheon of immortal comic monsters’ and Ned Sherrin, the producer of *That Was The Week That Was*, expressed his belief that Speight and Mitchell ‘have brilliantly created a Back Street Frankenstein in Alf Garnett.’<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the principal mouthpiece for bigoted racism, Smellie, in *C&C* was by nature like his name: deeply repulsive. Peter Black, writing in the *Daily Mail*, claimed ‘You like flag-waving patriots? Here’s the ignorant, foul-mouthed, sentimental, cowardly Alf! You like swinging Liverpool? Here’s your Labourite scouse git... [Mike].’<sup>75</sup>

This clash between opposing working-class stereotypes underpinned *TDUDP*’s dynamic, something acknowledged by Speight in an internal memo: ‘the whole atmosphere of the show depends upon this peculiar brand of horrible family togetherness.’<sup>76</sup> Speight’s characters were also working-class stereotypes. Ben Jones has highlighted how the traditional regional contexts of working-class life have predominantly focused on ‘the north of England and the East End of London’ and this was true of *TDUDP* also, which was set in the East End and featured an unemployed scouser (Mike) as a principal character.<sup>77</sup> Throughout the series Alf frequently berated Mike as a ‘layabout socialist

---

<sup>70</sup> Handbook on *TDUDP* for The Golden Rose of Montreaux, 1967, T12/1,321/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>71</sup> Viewing Report VR/73/175, R/757/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Dandy Nichols: who plays Else the silly old Moo’, *Radio Times*, 09 February 1967, p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Derek Jewell, ‘Late developer’, *Sunday Times*, 12 November 1967, p. 52.

<sup>74</sup> George Melly, ‘Television: At Alf Garnett’s wake’, *Observer*, 25 February 1968, p. 25. Ned Sherrin, ‘Behind the pop mythology’, *Observer*, 20 August 1967, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Black, ‘Never Mind, Mrs Whitehouse, Alf’s on your side’, *Daily Mail*, 28 February 1967, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Memo: Johnny Speight to Tom Sloan, undated, T12/1,321/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>77</sup> Ben Jones, *The Working Classes in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012), p. 10.

scouse git' and an 'atheist antichrist scouse git'.<sup>78</sup> In an article for the *Times*, Mike was described '[as] appalling a subject for consideration as Alf himself.'<sup>79</sup> The shop steward in *C&C*, Norman, was also a scouse and was described by the union leader Jenkins, in the *Daily Mirror*, as intensely dislikeable, because he was 'odious and unrecognisable.'<sup>80</sup>

The characterisation of the Garnetts as deeply unpleasant was not lost on *TDUDP*'s viewers. Bebber has suggested that *TDUDP* built familiarity with working class audiences through Speight's use of 'working-class idioms to create spaces for political and social identification.'<sup>81</sup> Whilst this was doubtless true, I believe there was also a sense that Speight was successful in creating characters that viewers could be repelled by and laugh at in superiority. Indeed, an audience research report in 1967 recorded that 'as usual' viewers 'had a good laugh at Alf and his family.'<sup>82</sup> The popular audience response to *TDUDP*, as documented in correspondence and audience research reports, highlight how viewers' enjoyment of the programme revolved around their appreciation of the monstrous working-class characters. According to audience research, it was their very 'repellent' and 'unattractive' nature which made them so popular.<sup>83</sup> For example, an audience research report for the final episode of the first series of *TDUDP* recorded viewers' opinions that the Garnetts were very 'true to life', 'full of rough life and conflict' and 'so true to much of the ordinary Cockney working class life'.<sup>84</sup> Another surmised that they were 'in keeping with the class of family depicted, it was widely felt, and Alf Garnett himself a typical ignorant and prejudiced "loud mouth".'<sup>85</sup> Offering an appraisal of the second series, one viewer declared 'all four members of the family come over as very real, and human, characters – "have spent many years in the East End of London working among people so very like the Garnetts".' Another viewer believed that *TDUDP*

---

<sup>78</sup> *TDUDP*, 26 December 1966. *TDUDP*, 20 February 1967.

<sup>79</sup> 'Till Death Us Do Part', *Times*, 17 February 1968, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Jenkins, 'Curry & Chips', p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> Bebber, 'Till Death', p. 258.

<sup>82</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 06 February 1967, R9/7/85, BBC WAC.

<sup>83</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 05 January 1968, R9/7/91, BBC WAC.

<sup>84</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 01 August 1966, R9/7/82, BBC WAC.

<sup>85</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 26 December 1966, R9/7/84, BBC WAC.

offered 'a faithful enough representation of a certain section of the community.'<sup>86</sup>

Alf's diatribes against immigration and immigrants went unanswered in *TDUDP* because of the lack of a prominent or recurring black or Asian character. The decision by the BBC not to give overt voice to black actors itself reflected the powerful codes of cultural authority exercised by predominantly white institutions and their subordination of black cultures. The only black actor, in the 1960s, to consistently appear in Speight's work was Kenny Lynch who starred throughout the run of *C&C* as Kenny and made a cameo appearance in a special Easter episode of *TDUDP* in March 1967. Lynch was of West Indian descent but was born and raised in the East End of London, like Speight. Having achieved widespread commercial success as a singer at the start of the 1960s, he made his acting debut towards the end of the decade. Indeed, Angela Barry has stressed the centrality of dance and music to acceptable black performance in the 1960s. Given Lynch's British birth and commercial success as a singer in the early part of the decade, this could explain his later successful transition to television acting.<sup>87</sup> It is notable that Lynch was of British birth. In the very first episode of *C&C* Arthur, the foreman, defended Kenny from racist abuse on the grounds that 'he's British, he was born in London. Look, he's not black... well... only in colour.'<sup>88</sup> Kenny expressed that he 'might be a bit on the brown side... but I ain't a wog like' Kevin and declared himself 'bloody English I am', 'the original cockney spade'.<sup>89</sup> Kenny was acceptable to his British colleagues in *C&C* because he had been both born in Britain and was culturally British. Speight's exploration of cultural integration evidently extended to the choice of actors too; Lynch was acceptable because, whilst black, having being brought up in Stepney he was culturally similar. Similar sentiments were expressed by LWT in response to complaints from the actors' union Equity about the lack of racial diversity on television. LWT maintained that there were 'few coloured

---

<sup>86</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 27 February 1967.

<sup>87</sup> Angela Barry, 'Black mythologies: representations of black people on British television', in John Twitchin (ed.), *The Black and White Media Book* (Staffordshire, 1992), p. 88.

<sup>88</sup> *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

<sup>89</sup> *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

performers who can be funny in a way that appeals to British audiences', arguing that 'There is only one Kenny Lynch'.<sup>90</sup>

Exploring questions of cultural integration further, Speight and LWT also decided, in a conscious editorial decision, to cast the white comic Milligan, complete with black face, mock pidgin accent and his typical exuberant comic style, in the principal role of Paki-Paddy, rather than to seek out an Asian actor for the part. Michael Pickering has highlighted how the longstanding popularity of black-face within British popular culture has been 'cross-class and cross-gender in its popular attractions' since its inception in the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> With regards to its prominence on television, however, Gajendra Verma has suggested that racial clowning has only served 'to reinforce the stereotypes of the majority'.<sup>92</sup> Milligan's imitation of a Pakistani-Irish immigrant continued the comic Edwardian music-hall tradition of blackface characters as victimised clowns in unfamiliar settings and consequently brought reductionist stereotyping into the popular television age. This was not lost on viewers nor the ITA. Joy Gargett wrote to the ITA to complain that Milligan's performance was 'horrifyingly racist' and asked why it did not 'constitute a violation of the Race Relations Act?'.<sup>93</sup> The union leader Jenkins, with much publicity, wrote to the Race Relations Board to complain that Kevin was 'played by a gifted British comic (Spike Milligan) who is recognisable as such' and ensured the character emerged as 'a figure of ridicule who constantly seeks to ape British manners while also... denying his ethnic origin' and that *C&C*, more broadly, 'takes a serious theme and then sensationalises and degrades it'.<sup>94</sup> The Race Relations Board, however, told the *Daily Mail* 'Whatever Spike Milligan does on the show I can't see the board getting involved'.<sup>95</sup> Such complaints bore out the initial concerns of the ITA who, in advance of the programme's first broadcast, despaired that:

---

<sup>90</sup> Clifford Davis, 'A little off-colour', *Daily Mirror*, 05 December 1970, p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Gajendra Verma, 'Attitudes, Race Relations and Television', in John Twitchin (ed.), *The Black and White Media Book: Handbook for the study of Racism and Television* (Staffordshire, 1992), p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> Letter: Joy Gargett, undated, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>94</sup> 'Curry & Chips to come under scrutiny from Race Board', *Daily Express*, 01 January 1970, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> 'No race probe into Curry & Chips', *Daily Mail*, 21 November 1969, p. 9.



If we want to do a series which... is in the end sympathetic to race relations, then it is ludicrous not to make some attempts to make it with a Pakistani central character. To employ a white man giving an imitation of a Pakistani... is to give up a position that I would find it difficult to defend.<sup>96</sup>

The authority responsible for monitoring Speight's *C&C* admitted nervousness about the central character being performed by a white comic. It is hard to understand why scholars have viewed *C&C* as backfiring from its supposedly anti-racist intentions, when its initial construction was so opposed to giving a fair representation to the immigrant community. Milligan was cast in black face to push further the boundaries of Speight's exploration of cultural non-cohesion.

Speight created deeply unpleasant and stereotypical working-class characters who were recognisable as such. Having established these characters, he utilised them to explore why they and the new immigrant communities could never mix. This narrative revolved around the cultural, rather than the racial differences, between the two communities. In Speight's sitcoms race and colour were simply identifying categories; the real determinant of difference was the cultural disparity between immigrants and the British working-class. Norman, the shop steward in *C&C*, contended that 'the colour' was 'how we tell 'em isn't it?... That's all we've got to go on.'<sup>97</sup> For Alf, in *TDUDP*, race 'ain't got nothing to do with colour... the colour... is just how you recognise 'em.'<sup>98</sup> What Alf was sure of, however, was that no foreigner was 'white the same as we are... None of your foreigners are proper whites.'<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Schwarz has suggested that with the onset of new Commonwealth immigration, 'a language of racial whiteness assumed a greater prominence at home' and the presence of immigrants in the metropolis made it easier for Britons 'to imagine themselves as white.'<sup>100</sup> For Speight, the cause of the inability of the two cultures mixing

---

<sup>96</sup> Memo: SPO to HPS, Subject: *Curry & Chips*, 19 November 1969.

<sup>97</sup> *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

<sup>98</sup> *TDUDP*, 27 June 1966.

<sup>99</sup> *TDUDP*, 04 July 1966.

<sup>100</sup> Schwarz, *White*, pp. 9 – 12.

successfully, lay in the working-class' perceptions of the immigrant community as culturally different; colour merely served as a signifier.

This notion of difference being cultural, rather than racial, was explored in the character of Paki-Paddy who was both Pakistani and Irish. Portrayed by a white man, Kevin's identity was particularly fluid; he could be a Pakistani, Irish, or, in the context of viewers' living rooms, a white British-Irish man. As one contemporary observed, in *C&C* 'colour prejudice was turned topsy turvy.'<sup>101</sup> Peter Mandler has highlighted the existence of modern national identities and their formation being 'not only context-specific, but situation specific.'<sup>102</sup> For Irish-Pakistani Kevin, the identity he favoured was always informed by his endeavour to achieve his work colleagues' acceptance in his quest for integration. His hybrid identity ensured his racially charged nickname of 'Paki-Paddy'. The very title of the show highlighted the premise of the sitcom as an exploration of cultural hybridity. Giving an interview to the *Radio Times* in 1969, in advance of the series, Milligan and Sykes described themselves, respectively, as the curry and the chips.<sup>103</sup> Sykes, as the liberal foreman, was the British chips who was mixing with the foreign curry (Milligan). The audiences' early introduction to Kevin also prefigured his mixed Pakistani-Irish identity. The audience saw him sat in the bath singing 'Oh Danny Boy, the poppads are calling.'<sup>104</sup> As he made reference to cultural artefacts of both his supposedly Irish and Pakistani heritage, the viewer was invited to consider his complicated identity. Furthermore, Arthur, on first meeting Kevin, immediately assumed he was an Asian immigrant because of his race and was shocked to learn that Kevin was actually Irish. Kevin explained that he had left 'Pakistan because there far too many wogs there [sic].' Arthur was perplexed, highlighting how he is one, but Kevin, faced with being categorised as a racial 'other', asserted how he was 'Irish! Mick! Red-faced Mick... with Jesus', as he

---

<sup>101</sup> Martin Jackson, 'Now Speight gets on the colour kick', *Daily Express*, 14 November 1969, p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Mandler, 'What is "national identity"? Definitions and applications in modern British historiography', *Modern Intellectual History* 3:2 (2006), p. 275.

<sup>103</sup> Fergus Cashin, 'It's a mixture of Milligan Spiced with Sykes, Laced with Lynch and Served up by Speight as *Curry and Chips*', *TV Times*, 13 November 1969, p. 12.

<sup>104</sup> *C&C*, 27 November 1969.

crossed his chest religiously, so as to emphasise his difference from Asian immigrants.<sup>105</sup> His frequent recourse to his Irish heritage, however, also excluded him from Britishness because being Irish was also to be 'other'. The hybridity of Kevin's identity enabled Speight to explore the extent to which identity could be chosen and changed depending on circumstance, but even this failed to secure cultural integration. Laughter always emerged from the incongruity of Kevin's identity selection.

In both Speight's sitcoms the immigrant was regarded as an 'other' by his characters, with cultural habits and characteristics ill-at-ease with those of the native British working-classes, enabling essential definitions of whiteness to be shored up in opposition to the New Commonwealth immigrants. As Schwarz, Schofield and Thompson have argued, imperial conceptions of race from the empire left a deep imprint on post-war society and it is therefore unsurprising that Speight explored how working-class characters' perception of the immigrant emanated from a belief in black primitivism and inferiority.<sup>106</sup> In so doing, Speight followed the precedent set by post-war empire films which, Webster has highlighted, continued to characterise black people by their 'exoticism, primitivism or barbarism' and which served to reinforce 'the idea that black migrants from the empire and Commonwealth were "dark strangers" who did not belong in Britain.'<sup>107</sup> Immigrants were 'Primitives', concluded Alf, because 'they don't got the education like we've got.'<sup>108</sup> The audience laugh at Alf because his inability to utilise grammar and tenses properly demonstrated his own lack of education. Alf also suggested that 'until we went out there an' found 'em... they was just natives they was... savages that's all', highlighting how memories of empire still influenced contemporary perceptions of the immigrant.<sup>109</sup> Having met a West Indian doctor, who referred Alf to a throat specialist, Alf maintained the reason for the referral was because the doctor 'don't know what's wrong with me... the only bleedin' cure he knows is a couple

---

<sup>105</sup> C&C, 20 November 1969.

<sup>106</sup> Thompson, *Empire*, p. 203. Schofield, *Powell*, p. 3. Schwarz, *White*, p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Wendy Webster, 'Domesticating the Frontier: Gender, Empire and Adventure Landscapes in British Cinema, 1945 – 59', *Gender & History* 15:1 (2003), p. 99.

<sup>108</sup> TDUDP, 27 June 1966.

<sup>109</sup> TDUDP, 13 February 1967.

of chicken bones under yer pillow.’<sup>110</sup> His status as a doctor suggested otherwise to the audience, who laugh at Alf’s ignorant characterisation. Arthur, the supposedly liberal foreman in *C&C*, expressed similar sentiments when he explained to a colleague that ‘they don’t grow up in trees still you know... They’ve been brought up the same as us.’ Challenged by his colleague, Arthur backtracked and concluded that they had been brought up ‘more like us but not the same as us.’<sup>111</sup> As Peter Black, writing in the *Daily Mail*, contended, Arthur was ‘a very good picture of the liberal with doubt’.<sup>112</sup> Borrowing from historic imperial concepts of black people as primitive, Speight evidenced how the immigrant could not mix because of perceptions of them as savage.

When describing their encounters with immigrants, Speight’s characters were always surprised to learn that they were not in fact primitive. Having launched a tirade about the savagery of the immigrant, Alf conceded that the:

...white influence on ‘em’ had rendered ‘some of ‘em quite intelligent really... some of ‘em’s almost human. I was watching one of ‘em on the bus coming up here this morning... Conductor he was... doing the job quite well he was... seemed to know where the bus was goin’ an’ everything... he wasn’t any different really to a white conductor... quite bright he seemed... still I s’pose... always the exception ain’t there!’<sup>113</sup>

Even Alf’s acknowledgement of the immigrant’s capabilities was condescending; it was always ‘some of ‘em’ who had only ‘quite’ managed to live up to white expectations. Furthermore, those who had ‘quite’ managed, were treated as exceptional. In an earlier episode, Alf described being treated by a ‘coon doctor’, a ‘Sambo’ who had breathed ‘curry all over him’. Challenging such virulent racism, Alf’s daughter Rita, advised him that Dr Jingala had been ‘born in Manchester’ and has ‘more degrees after his name than you’ve had hot dinners.’ Consequently, Alf joked that ‘if he was born in Manchester... it must have been a blummin’ hot day up there the day he was born’ before concluding

---

<sup>110</sup> *TDUDP*, 11 June 1966.

<sup>111</sup> *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Black, ‘Speighting for the day when pinks and browns can laugh together’, *Daily Mail*, 24 November 1969, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> *TDUDP*, 13 February 1967.

that 'he's not a proper black'. Alf distinguished Jingala from 'your proper blacks... the ones that were born in the jungle. Your natives... half of 'em are still eating each other.'<sup>114</sup> Like Kenny in *C&C*, Doctor Jingala was acceptable because he was British born and, apparently, culturally similar.

In keeping with contemporary, and historic, concerns about miscegenation, both of Speight's sitcoms explored the supposed sexual promiscuity and predatory nature of the immigrants. This served, alongside the perception of the immigrant as primitive, to further highlight how Speight sought to demonstrate the ways in which the two cultures could not integrate. Webster has highlighted the 'strong focus on miscegenation in media coverage' of immigration as their sexuality 'generate[d] anxieties not only about the safety of women, hearth, and home but about the very safety of the nation itself.'<sup>115</sup> In *TDUDP*, Else announced that 'My Alf was out there once and he said if ever they [foreigners] see a white woman... some of 'em can't control 'emselves.'<sup>116</sup> Else's perception of New Commonwealth migrants was couched in memories of empire, of Alf's experiences on the colonial frontier, a place she did not identify by name but somewhere elusively 'out there'. Similarly, in *C&C*, one of the factory workers suggested that it was immigrants' 'one ambition to have a white woman.'<sup>117</sup> Just as Commonwealth migrants were castigated for their apparent over vigorous sexuality, so too were women who chose to associate with them. Mrs Bartok, Kevin's landlady in *C&C*, for example, was criticised by two women in the pub who were watching her with Kevin. The women described Mrs Bartok as 'no better than he [Kevin] is, [for] sitting with him' and labelled her 'a sauce'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Webster has highlighted how 'white women guarded sexual boundaries against "miscegenation"' and such debates became central, Waters maintained, 'to the policing of the imaginary boundaries of the nation itself.' Consequently, white women who engaged in interracial sex 'were

---

<sup>114</sup> *TDUDP*, 27 June 1966.

<sup>115</sup> Webster, *Englishness*, p. 157.

<sup>116</sup> *TDUDP* 27 June 1966.

<sup>117</sup> *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

<sup>118</sup> *C&C*, 27 November 1969.

ritually expelled from mainstream society in order to maintain a cohesive model of national unity.’<sup>119</sup>

In *C&C*, Kevin’s cultural alienation from his co-workers and his inability to integrate was emphasised and attributed to his colleagues who reworked his cultural characteristics into signs of his ‘otherness’. Waters has highlighted how ‘race relations writers explored behaviour norms in order to chart cultural difference.’ Such academic work ‘removed the question of national identity from the realm of biology, opening up the possibility of re-narrating the nation in wholly cultural terms against the culture of the migrant other.’<sup>120</sup> Kevin’s endeavours to be integrated were central to the sitcom which was billed as an invitation to witness ‘Paki-Paddy’s’ ‘attempts at integration’.<sup>121</sup> Television critics felt that Milligan offered:

...the role an air of injured innocence. No matter how hard he tries to integrate, there is always the metaphorical banana skin on which to come a cropper. He is the victim of circumstances, which gives the role the ring of truth.<sup>122</sup>

This narrative of his failed attempts at gaining his colleagues’ acceptance was most pronounced in relation to Kevin’s work ethic. Kevin was portrayed as a committed and hard-working employee; he claimed that he worked ‘hard, fast’. He could not therefore comprehend why the British working-classes ‘don’t work hard’ and ‘say no’ because ‘this is not good for England.’<sup>123</sup> Kevin’s hard-working attitude only drove a wedge between him and his co-workers. Norman, the shop steward, warned that if ‘Paki-Paddy doesn’t slow down a bit... you’re going to have an industrial dispute on your hands... he’s working too fast.’ Arthur, the foreman, explained to Kevin how ‘industry works in this country works’ and Norman was annoyed that ‘nobody works during the tea-break except him. It’s one of the unwritten laws of British industry. Part of our

---

<sup>119</sup> Webster, *Englishness*, p. 10. Waters, “‘Strangers’”, p. 230. Collins, ‘Prejudice’, p. 407.

<sup>120</sup> Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’”, p. 220.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Curry & Chips’, *TV Times*, 11 December 1969, p. 57.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Peter Evans’, *Times*, 20 December 1969, p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> *C&C*, 27 November 1969.

white culture.’<sup>124</sup> Collins has demonstrated how in the case of West Indian men in the 1950s, the competitive threat posed by immigrants to white workers ‘gave rise to the charge that... West Indians worked not too little but too much.’ Consequently, new West Indian immigrants to Britain were issued with a booklet advising them ‘not to risk “Overdoing it”, by which it meant working through tea-breaks.’<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the Labour Party, Fielding has highlighted, believed immigrants should be ‘taught about the British way of life and urged not to indulge in activities which might ‘antagonise’ their white neighbours.’<sup>126</sup> Kenny, British-born but of West Indian heritage, however, was never castigated for his work ethic in *C&C*; he was well versed in native working-class culture. Like his colleagues Kenny took long trips to the toilet and always had his tea-break. Speight and Milligan highlighted how no matter how hard the immigrant may try, he was fundamentally ill-suited to working-class culture and therefore integration was futile. Laughter always emerged at Kevin’s unsuccessful endeavours at integration and from the satire on the white working-classes.

The Irish remained the largest single immigrant group in post-war Britain. Waters has acknowledged how white immigrants ‘were neither discussed to the same extent nor elicited the same anxiety as the “dark strangers” who arrived.’<sup>127</sup> Webster has suggested that:

...despite the substantial migration of white Europeans to Britain in the post-war period, as well as some migrant whites from the Commonwealth, the terms ‘immigration’ and ‘immigrant’ generally denoted black and Asian persons. In turn, the term ‘immigration’ was closely connected to the idea of a ‘coloured problem’.<sup>128</sup>

This can be attributed to the fact that, culturally, the ‘differences between the Irish and the rest of the British population [were] the least of all’ the new Commonwealth migrant groups.<sup>129</sup> Perceptions of white immigration were

---

<sup>124</sup> *C&C*, 27 November 1969.

<sup>125</sup> Collins, ‘Prejudice’, p. 400.

<sup>126</sup> Fielding, *Labour*, p. 146.

<sup>127</sup> Waters, “‘Strangers’”, p. 226.

<sup>128</sup> Webster, *Englishness*, p. 149.

<sup>129</sup> Ceri Peach, Alisdair Rogers, Judith Chance and Patricia Daley, ‘Immigration and Ethnicity’, in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 133.

explored in *C&C* through Kevin's hybrid nationalism but also in *TDUDP* when Mike interacted with an Irish man and another fellow claimant at the social security office:

- Irish man: No good putting in for those kinda jobs... foreigners, they'd be getting them kinda jobs... put a good country down... dirty rotten swines!
- English man: Especially the Irish, they're the worst... see the trouble with you Irish, they're... the only ones... without a movement against 'em see... all the others they got movement against 'em. Keeps 'em down... You're not Irish are you?
- Irish man: Oh no...!<sup>130</sup>

Speight's use of the word 'other', traditionally associated with immigrants of colour, highlighted the difference between the white English and the white Irish immigrant, who was also acknowledged as an 'other'. Speight highlighted the possibility that white immigrants could be characterised like black and Asian immigrants. Again, it was culture not colour that determined difference. The Irishman's denial of his ethnicity, when confronted with racist abuse also reinforced the subjective nature of identity and how it was less about race than culture. Speight utilised wider narrative frameworks associated with the abuse given to black immigrants and, in so doing, highlighted how these could just as easily be adapted for the Irish.

Whilst the institutions responsible for *TDUDP* and *C&C* may have defended the programmes on the grounds of their anti-racist satirical intentions, the public pronouncements of Speight and Milligan on issues of race and immigration invite a more complex reading of their comic aims than has thus far been available. Both expressed significant concerns about overpopulation and the ability of new Commonwealth immigrants to integrate with the native white working-classes and, as I have argued, this underpinned their sitcoms. Speight's nervousness about race and immigration ensured he railed against the integrationist approach of the Labour Party in order to evidence it as a fundamentally flawed and futile approach. Speight created

---

<sup>130</sup> *TDUDP*, 23 January 1967.



grotesque and unpleasant working-class characters, who were recognisable as such, and who were ill-suited to the demands of cultural integration owing to their own deep-seated prejudices. The decision not to allow overt black and/or Asian voices in *TDUDP* and to cast a British-born West Indian actor and a white man in blackface for *C&C* highlighted further how cultural integration, in the field of popular television performance, was also a fraught process. *TDUDP* and *C&C* presented the immigrant as a cultural 'other'; colour was a signifier of difference, but the fundamental reason for the two opposed constituencies not mixing was the extensive cultural differences between them. This was clearly evidenced in the powerful attacks on the white Irish immigrant groups in Speight's comedies. Underpinning the working-class characters' perception of the new Commonwealth immigrant in both sitcoms was a lexicon of difference grounded in earlier debates about primitivism and miscegenation. Coupled with this was the representation of the immigrant as fundamentally unsuited to British working-class cultural mores.

## **2.2: Speight's sitcoms and the liberal 'Establishment'**

Peter Evans, writing in *The Times* in 1969, concluded that 'There are two genuinely held complaints: one is that the people were not consulted about an immigration which, they say, is changing the character of Britain: the other is that there is a conspiracy to curtail freedom of opinion about coloured people now that they are here.'<sup>131</sup> Hampshire has highlighted how 'unlike the populist approach to immigration, the process by which race relations was placed on the agenda and legislated for was largely elite driven.' Consequently, 'anti-discrimination measures were not popular with the electorate', with organised labour particularly hostile and segments of the Labour Party unenthusiastic.<sup>132</sup> Speight was one such popular left-winger who, sceptical about the possibilities of cultural integration, was similarly opposed to the introduction, by a governing elite, of anti-racial legislation and the stifling of debate, amongst the

---

<sup>131</sup> 'Peter Evans', p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> Hampshire, 'Immigration', pp. 317 – 322.

working classes, about race and immigration. Just as his sitcoms explored the inability of the immigrant to culturally integrate, they also railed against elites for promoting immigration and positive race relations. I argue that Speight's comedies were driven by a fundamental disdain for the Establishment which, post-Suez, was blamed for declining national prestige and confidence.

Mandler has argued that 'blame for national decline fell most heavily upon "the Establishment"'.<sup>133</sup> Speight portrayed the working classes as victims because they were bearing the brunt of immigration as a result of legislation introduced by an elite. In this regard, the narrative Speight adopted in *TDUDP* foreshadowed the agenda of Powell, and *C&C* can be interpreted as responding to the Conservative politician and his 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Schwarz has maintained that Powell came to speak for an 'embattled, vulnerable white community on the point, so they believed, of being sold down the river by their own government... quislings, wilfully deceiving those whom they represent in order that they be destroyed.'<sup>134</sup> In the letters Powell received following his 'Rivers of Blood' speech, Commonwealth immigration was highlighted by his working class correspondents as a 'problem' dumped on them.<sup>135</sup> Lindop has also highlighted how workers went on strike in support of Powell owing to their 'sense of anger that Powell was being penalised by "them" – the political establishment – for recognising the legitimacy of working-class experience and daring to say openly what was commonplace in white working-class communities: that there were too many immigrants.'<sup>136</sup> In his two sitcoms, Speight railed against the British Establishment for forcing the working class, who to his mind could never easily integrate with the new immigrant community, to cope with the problem of immigration. Studying *C&C* also invites an exploration of a popular cultural response to Powell and I suggest that *C&C* evidenced a sympathy with Powell's opposition to liberalism, but opposed the working-classes' bastardisation of Powell's views to sanction their racist bigotry.

---

<sup>133</sup> Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 196 – 216.

<sup>134</sup> Schwarz, "'Only white man in there'", p. 77.

<sup>135</sup> Whipple, 'Revisiting', p. 720.

<sup>136</sup> Lindop, 'Racism', pp. 83 – 84.

Speight used his sitcoms to explore how the working class emerged as victims of liberal policies; notably unrestricted immigration (until 1968) and the Race Relations legislation of 1965 and 1968 which witnessed a growth of immigrants in working-class communities and the corresponding stress on racial harmony. In an interview, Speight expressed concerns about a 'shortage of work' and his dismay that 'If our own people can't get council houses, there's bound to be resentment of immigrants getting them.' Such sentiments, he concluded, 'produces people like the shop steward' Norman in *C&C*.<sup>137</sup> According to his biographer, Milligan was similarly concerned that the immigration 'situation was getting out of hand... and nobody in government was keeping an eye on it.'<sup>138</sup> It was this resentment towards a government that had allowed unrestricted immigration and legislated for integration that Speight and Milligan dramatised. They did so through the vehicle of their working-class characters.

In keeping with the contemporary post-Suez disdain for the 'Establishment', much comic mileage was garnered in Speight's sitcoms from his attacks on both elites and their supporters. The opening credits of *TDUDP* began with a shot of the Houses of Parliament which panned out to an aerial view of London before zooming in on the Garnett's terraced house in the East End (Figure 28). The divide between the political Establishment and the working class was visually ingrained from the start of every episode in these titles. This separation was also pronounced in the first episode of *TDUDP* which began with a discussion, between Mike and Alf, about the recent 1966 re-election of Harold Wilson's Labour Government. Both characters expressed their dissatisfaction with the political elite, albeit from opposing sides of the political spectrum, with Alf critical of Labour and Mike of the Conservatives:

Alf: I wrote to Harold Wilson once... told him his bloody clock was wrong, his Big Ben... never even had the decency to reply... and there was a stamped addressed envelope in the letter an' all...  
 Mike: You don't expect him to answer letters like that do you?

---

<sup>137</sup> Norman, 'Here comes Paki Paddy', p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> Scudamore, *Milligan*, pp. 246 – 255.

Alf: If he was a gentleman, he would have answered it, wouldn't he? If he had any manners? Nicked my four penny stamp! And they sit up there, them MPs, in that Houses of Parliament, copping their twenty thousand a year.

Mike: ...old Wilson don't even get twenty thousand a year and he's Prime Minister!

Alf: Listen, what they tell you they get and what they bung in their pocket... Perks! They ain't got nothing of their own, them Labourites, they ain't got no private fortunes, not like us Tories!

Mike: ...well how they get their private fortunes?

Alf: By using their own loaf and keeping hold of it... the salient facts are this... number one, the Tories have got money... number two, if you got money you don't need to fiddle... number three, the Tories can afford to be honest...

Mike: Don't be so wet... the most dishonest government we've ever had was during thirteen years of Tory rule!

Else: ...well, he's done alright hasn't he, old Wilson... well you, you haven't got a house to call your own... why ain't your Labour Party done nothing for you two... what did they give 'em?

Mike: I'll tell you what they give us... they've given everyone in the working class the chance to build a Better Britain... more houses for every young person that needs 'em, every young couple that needs 'em...

Alf: You wan' a house?... You bloomin' great pudding. You wan' a get a job first, get your hands dirty a bit, save up and buy a house like what I had to...

Mike: ...If you think I'm gunna spend forty years of my life flogging me guts out like you... to end up with a muck hole like this; you're barmy!

Alf: Muck hole? Muck hole?<sup>139</sup>

The scene immediately gave viewers a flavour of what they could expect from the programme; virulent arguments between two opposing groups on the generational and political scale. The discussion was underpinned by the comical incongruence of Alf, with cockney accent and bad manners, being a working-class paternalistic Tory and completely opposed to Wilson and the Labour Party. The viewers were encouraged to laugh at Alf's blind support for the Tory Party. In opposition, the viewer was confronted with the socialist, Labour-supporting Mike who was able to quote verbatim from Labour's 1966 election manifesto which had promised a 'Better Britain' for all.<sup>140</sup> Yet his own unswerving commitment to Labour and their election promises was also comical because

---

<sup>139</sup> *TDUDP*, 06 June 1966.

<sup>140</sup> 'Labour Party Manifesto 1966: "Time for Decision"', <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab66.htm>, accessed 25 May 2018.

his aspiration for a house was undermined by his complete unwillingness to work. Conversely, there was Alf who had worked his entire life to secure his home which Mike, rudely, labelled a 'muck hole'. Both characters, however, were in agreement that politicians were members of a corrupt Establishment, with Alf believing the Labour Party were in it for money and Mike claiming that the previous Tory governments were characterised by corruption. The viewer laughed at both the absolute support the characters offered their respective party affiliations and their attacks on each other. Such anti-Establishment sentiment underpinned the series.



**Figure 28 – The opening titles of *TDUDP* (*TDUDP*, 06 June 1966).**

Alf perpetually emerged as a figure of ridicule for being a working-class, paternalistic Tory and devotee of the Establishment. In Speight's narrative, its supporters were as repulsive as the institutions themselves. Whilst in the pub, Alf declared himself a drinker of Governor's beer because:

...he pays my wages dun he?... Listen I ain't got nothing against the working class, but what I say is this, let them stick to their proper function, and their proper function ain't sitting up there in Downing Street, mucking about with the status quo... you don't work your army with working-class generals do you?<sup>141</sup>

Alf's blind acceptance of this social hierarchy, in which he was subservient to the Establishment, was laughed at by the viewers as he emerged as a figure of fun. In contrast, as a paternalistic Tory, he was highly critical of Edward Heath,

---

<sup>141</sup> *TDUDP*, 06 June 1966.

who, according to Alf, was a 'grammar school twit'.<sup>142</sup> There was no picture of Heath on Alf's living room wall, though there was a portrait of Winston Churchill and the Queen, further evidencing his belief in the Establishment. Alf also purchased a framed picture of Edward VIII, which he placed on the wall above his portrait of Churchill, and expressed the intentionally controversial view that he was 'the finest monarch this country's ever had'.<sup>143</sup>

Burnishing his paternalistic Tory credentials, Alf was also portrayed as a diehard monarchist, standing to attention during the national anthem on Christmas Day: 'It's a mark of respect innit? It's your national anthem... It's what you stand for, out of respect for her... She is your monarch... the head of your state... your sovereign lead.' Discussing the virtues of monarchy, unsurprisingly, Rita and Mike declared themselves republicans and questioned what the Queen did to 'earn her money?'. Rita mocked her for just 'cutting bits of tape'. Rita offered an impression of the Queen opening a bridge, complete with high pitched received pronunciation, which prompted an angry response from Alf: 'I'll put the back of my hand across your face in a minute if I have any more of that'.<sup>144</sup> When he visited Buckingham Palace in one later episode Alf was visibly bursting with pride (Figure 29).<sup>145</sup>



**Figure 29 - Alf bursting with pride at the sight of Buckingham Palace (TDUDP, 20 February 1967).**

---

<sup>142</sup> TDUDP, 06 June 1966.

<sup>143</sup> TDUDP, 06 February 1967.

<sup>144</sup> TDUDP, 26 December 1966.

<sup>145</sup> TDUDP, 20 February 1967.

Of particular chagrin to Alf was Harold Wilson, about whom Alf brought to bear his ironic self-deprecating opposition to the working classes. Responding to the suggestion Wilson could become president if Britain ever became a republic, Alf unleashed vitriol:

Cor blimey, it's bad enough having him Prime Minister... sittin' up there in that Downing Street with his mac and his pipe trying to behave like a gentleman. Pathetic. I mean if anyone a bit decent called round to see him, someone with a bit of manners, someone with a bit of breeding, someone like her majesty, he wouldn't even know how to talk to her... he ain't her type of Prime Minister... You don't think her majesty would vote for one of your rough old lot do you?... she'd vote for someone more like herself, more like Sir Alec Home... I mean that's the sort of Prime Minister she'd prefer... someone she can mix with a bit socially... Her Majesty don't want Harold Wilson round the Palace all day knocking his pipe out on her furniture.<sup>146</sup>

The use of the determiner 'that Downing Street' further promoted the idea of separation between working people and the governing elites. According to Alf, only gentlemen, like Alec Douglas-Home, were suited to governing and mixing with the Queen, who was labelled a conservative by association. Such views drew gales of laughter from the audience. So too did the characterisation of Wilson as ill-suited to governing due to his lowly status, encapsulated, in Alf's mind, by his mac, pipe and an excess of tobacco ash. The Conservatives, according to Alf, were the party of class and the Labourites were rough.

In *TDUDP*, Alf frequently reminisced about the empire and mourned its passing, placing blame for its decline at the door of politicians. The Labour Party was forever attacked for giving away the British empire. Looking at a map, Alf decried 'all these countries we've give away!' and 'old Attlee must have been senile, fancy giving away all them things.'<sup>147</sup> Alf missed the days when 'we ruled the world. When we had our empire. Before yer Labour Party gave it all away.'<sup>148</sup> The subsequent loss of status and power inherent in Britain's decolonisation was a particular bone of contention for Alf.

---

<sup>146</sup> *TDUDP*, 26 December 1966.

<sup>147</sup> *TDUDP*, 16 January 1967.

<sup>148</sup> *TDUDP*, 04 July 1966.

Consequently, he was beyond furious to read the *Daily Mirror's* 'traitorous' characterisation of Britain as 'A tiny offshore island which no longer has any pretensions to be a First Division World Power!'. In contrast, Mike accepted the *Daily Mirror's* description without issue. A riled Alf proclaimed 'Not? Not? You bolshey bastard! Look this country had the finest empire the world has ever seen! Til old Attlee got hold here and gave it all away. Silly old fool.'<sup>149</sup>

Speight used his sitcoms to present his personal view that Britain, a victor in war, had been outstripped by those she had defeated. Britain had consequently emerged from victory as a vanquished nation. In his autobiography, Speight lamented how 'Japan and Germany were both losers in World War Two... but to look at them now you would think they won it. Perhaps... we should... have another war... but this time make sure we lose.'<sup>150</sup> Implicitly, it was the failures of successive post-war governments, of various creeds, who were to blame. Speight's scripts reflected this belief. Alf questioned what Britain had 'got out of' being victorious in the 'two biggest wars the world has ever known', 'Nothing! America has, and so's bloody Russia!', even the German's, who had 'lost both of 'em', had not 'done too bad either'. He mourned the fact 'we used to be a proud nation once... now look at us!'. Interestingly, and uncharacteristically, neither Mike or Rita provided an opposition to Alf's sentiments. Rather, Mike agreed that Germany 'haven't done too bad'.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, Schwarz has suggested that in the very moment of decolonisation there 'emerged a conservative sensibility, barely articulated but a presence nonetheless, determined to believe that England, a victor in war, had subsequently had defeat thrust upon her.'<sup>152</sup> Speight foreshadowed Powell in his views. Powell, Schofield has contended, evoked memories of the Second World War in order to recast the English as victims. She has suggested that Powell repositioned the myth of the war in popular politics from 'the myth of

---

<sup>149</sup> *TDUDP*, 20 February 1967.

<sup>150</sup> Speight, *Richer*, p. 158.

<sup>151</sup> *TDUDP*, 19 January 1968.

<sup>152</sup> Schwarz, "'The only white man'", p. 66.



the heroic sacrifice of “the people” to a subsequent ‘myth of sacrifice that revealed the victimisation of the people by the political Establishment’.<sup>153</sup>

Having established their anti-Establishment credentials, Speight’s sitcoms also evidenced a genuine concern with his working-class characters bearing the brunt of immigration. Discussing the issue, Alf complained about the presence of migrants:

I mean look, they’re all over here now ain’t they... lowering our land value, [and] nicking our jobs, it’ll be worse still when we get into the blummin’ Common Market... they’ll be swarming over here [but]... it’s alright for them innit? It’s alright for ‘em, up in their Houses of Parliament... their jobs are safe... none of them foreigners can take their jobs.<sup>154</sup>

The perceived distance between ordinary people and the governing elites was emphasised by Speight’s repeated use of third person pronouns – ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’ – which all served to demarcate an aloof difference and distance and to lump all politicians together as the same. As Tom, a factory worker in *C&C*, surmised: ‘take your Wilson and Heath, how would they like it if a family of wogs moved in next door to them ay? Blimey, if that happened they’d soon be on Enoch’s side.’<sup>155</sup> Speight highlighted how the governing elites were unaffected by their decisions on immigration, whereas Speight’s working-class sitcom characters were confronting greater competition for jobs and housing and, consequently, bearing the brunt of immigration. Similarly, Alf, having experienced treatment on the National Health Service, criticised how everyone had to pay for it and how those who introduced it were unlikely to be using it:

They don’t use it do they mate?... Your lot, the Labour Party, the lot what brought it in... You just imagine old Harold Wilson and his oppos, old Brown an’ old Callaghan, sittin’ up there in a National Health hospital... kindly waiting for three hours eh? And drinking our National Health tea, and eating their rotten fly-blown National health sandwiches... The minute they feel a bit dicky they’re straight up to

---

<sup>153</sup> Schofield, *Powell*, p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> *TDUDP*, 04 July 1966.

<sup>155</sup> *C&C*, 11 December 1969.

Harley Street, ain't they?... Swillin' back the champagne an' scoffing the caviar!<sup>156</sup>

In an interview with the *Sunday Times* in 1967, Speight referenced this quote on the health service and maintained that 'there's a lot of truth in that, isn't there?'<sup>157</sup>

Alongside this attack on distant liberal elites, there was a corresponding focus on the white native population as victims of the contemporary Race Relations legislation, especially in *C&C*. As Joe Rogaly, writing in the *Financial Times*, highlighted, *C&C* was 'widely believed to reflect current social attitudes towards coloured people' and had 'its first showing on the eve of the anniversary of the Race Relations Act (1968)'.<sup>158</sup> It was, as Peter Evans of the *Times*, maintained an 'adventurous sortie... into the field of race relations.'<sup>159</sup> In promotional material for the series, Milligan made the connection between the programme and Powell. He claimed they would have 'Ole Enoch' 'breathing down our necks'.<sup>160</sup> In the first episode of *C&C*, the foreman Arthur asked his colleague Norman how his 'wog mad' views coincided with his status as a 'labourite'. He challenged how Norman could 'call yourself a labourite and you can't stand blacks. You're not a labourite; you're a fascist!'. In response Norman noted that 'I've voted Labour all me life and me father before me, but when it comes to blacks I'm with Eunuch.' He contended that the Labour's Race Relations Bill was a 'Mistake!'<sup>161</sup> Through the Labourite Norman, Speight essentially argued that Labour's introduction of the integrationist legislation had ensured their traditional working-class voters were abandoning the party on such issues of race and immigration, believing themselves to be forgotten and victimised. Indeed, polling immediately after Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech suggested that up to 82% of people supported his views, and of especial significance was the fact that working-class Powellites had higher levels of trade

---

<sup>156</sup> *TDUDP*, 27 June 1966.

<sup>157</sup> Jewell, 'Late developer', p. 52.

<sup>158</sup> Joe Rogaly, 'Society To-Day: Taking a lesson from *Curry & Chips*', *Financial Times*, 25 November 1969, p. 11.

<sup>159</sup> 'Peter Evans', p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> Cashin, 'It's a mixture', p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> *C&C* 04 December 1969. *C&C*, 20 November 1969.

union membership and activity.<sup>162</sup> The pronunciation of Enoch as 'Eunuch' in *C&C*, however, served to undermine support for Powell as it implicitly called into question his masculine status and implied the final impotence of his attempt to stem immigration.

Smelly, a factory worker in *C&C*, was horrified to find that the Irish-Pakistani character, Kevin, had won £250,000 on the pools. Incensed, Smelly proclaimed that 'I don't get the chance' to win because:

...they let the bloody foreigners win it...! Let the bloody blacks win it! Bloody blacks!... Bloody coon!... It won't always be like that mate. Just you wait, just you wait til old Eunuch gets in. Old Eunuch Powell. He'll sort 'em out, he will. He'll have 'em. He'll make 'em pay all their winnings back before he sends 'em home. Just you wait and see.<sup>163</sup>

Smelly believed they ought to send all the 'bloody blacks' home: 'they ought to send good old Eunuch Powell to get their £2,000. Send 'em all home.'<sup>164</sup> Smelly referenced Powell in defence of his wildly racist outburst. In making Smelly and Norman, the most unpleasant and derided characters, the mouthpieces for Powell in *C&C*, Speight undermined support for Powell whilst retaining sympathy for his ideas. This, again, was emphasised by the mispronunciation of 'Eunuch'. Norman, the left-wing union shop steward in the factory, who was after a share of Kevin's winnings, berated Smelly for his jealousy and racial language: 'less of the coon, you stinking old goat... if I hear you saying coon again or calling him any other racial or derogatory term I'll have you up before the Race Relations board, you understand that?' Norman's own retort to Smelly about his use of negative racial stereotypes was highly ironic, as he himself utilised additional offensive terms. Smelly consequently painted himself as the victim, moaning to Kenny:

All I did was call the wog a coon... Bloody red coon lover. He's supposed to be one of us. He's supposed to be Labour. Supposed to be fighting

---

<sup>162</sup> Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870* (London, 2008), p. 309. Schofield, *Powell*, p. 243.

<sup>163</sup> *C&C*, 04 December 1969.

<sup>164</sup> *C&C*, 27 November 1969.

for our rights. Going to report one of his own for calling a bloody wog a coon. It isn't fair is it Sambo?<sup>165</sup>

Speight emphasised again how the Labour Party was supposed, in the eyes of the working class, to be protecting their interests, but instead had failed to do so by promoting the interests of the immigrant community. Labour, as Speight highlighted, was undermining its traditional constituency of support.

When there was a threat of redundancy at the factory, Norman believed it should be a simple case of 'last come first bloody well out' but Arthur believed this would only result in them all being put before 'the Race Relations Board', much to the chagrin of all the other factory workers. They went on strike in the face of losing their job to the immigrant, Kevin.<sup>166</sup> As Fred Lindop has noted, 'there were a significant number of strikes, principally in the Midlands, against the engagement or promotion of black workers.'<sup>167</sup> As Speight highlighted again, Labour's policy was failing to protect its working-class supporters. Indeed, Fielding has maintained that prejudice in employment as a result of the 1968 Race Relations Act was a 'difficult issue for Labour, as it implicated many of its union supporters.'<sup>168</sup>

It was not only Speight's characters who railed against the liberal Establishment, however. Speight, himself, characterised his own critics as 'fascists', most of whom were, accordingly, 'liberal zealots, who attack me and my writing with such fundamentalist fervour, and appear to lack any subtlety of mind.'<sup>169</sup> The BBC and ITA archives reveal that Speight was an awkward colleague and anti-Establishment to his core as he frequently leaked stories to the press if and when he did not get his own way in order to force his employers into submission. For example, Speight disagreed with the BBC's decision to air the episode of *TDUDP*, 'Telephone', before the episode 'Monopoly'. Michael Mills, the Head of Comedy at the BBC, wrote to forewarn colleagues that:

---

<sup>165</sup> C&C, 04 December 1969.

<sup>166</sup> C&C, 18 December 1969.

<sup>167</sup> Lindop, 'Race', p. 81.

<sup>168</sup> Fielding, *Labour*, p. 153.

<sup>169</sup> Speight, *Richer*, p. 143.

...something of a 'dust-up' is about to break with regard to the new series... Mr Johnny Speight has been shouting the odds over the telephone to me... I understand he intends to 'protest... about this'. Knowing his propensity for issuing stories to the newspapers making himself out to be martyred by the BBC, I imagine it will be along such lines.<sup>170</sup>

In similar fashion, the Senior Programmes Officer at ITA wrote to all Regional Officers to notify them of cuts to an episode of *C&C*, which Speight was yet to be made aware of 'so there was always the danger that a press story will leak.'<sup>171</sup> Speight perceived himself as a victim and engaged in a protracted battle with the media establishment. This bore remarkable similarities to his discourse on race and the governing establishment in his sitcoms, whereby his working-class characters were forever stifled and dumped on by a distant elite.

Speight and Milligan publicly expressed their concerns about the ability of the working class to successfully integrate with the new Commonwealth immigrants. In both *TDUDP* and *C&C* the writers explored the victimisation of the working classes as a result of legislation concerned with race and immigration passed down by a distant Parliament. From the opening titles to the scripts, *TDUDP* was firm in its anti-Establishment credentials. Alf and Mike were both ridiculed for their blind-faith, respectively, in the Conservative and Labour Parties. Alf's self-deprecatory and satirical portrayal as a paternalistic, working-class Tory, who adored the Queen, the gentlemanly ethic and Empire, alongside his fervent dislike for Wilson and Labour served to further emphasis Speight's anti-Establishment narrative. Speight and his *TDUDP* characters were convinced that successive post-war governments had ensured Britain did not live up to its status as the victor of the Second World War. In both *TDUDP* and *C&C*, the working classes were cast as the victims of liberal immigration policies. It was seen as a problem dumped in their lap. Whilst not affecting those responsible for the policy approach, it affected the native white working-classes. Speight railed against how the Labour Party, supposedly in existence to

---

<sup>170</sup> Memo: HoC LE TV to CPT and HoP, Subject: *TDUDP*, Johnny Speight, undated, T12/1,321/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>171</sup> Memo: SPO to All RO, Subject: *C&C*, 16 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

protect the interests of people like his comic characters, had abandoned their traditional supporters in favour of the new immigrant communities. It was this that had led them to support Powell, Speight implicitly argued. In *C&C*, however, Speight made the most unpleasant characters the mouthpieces for Powellism in order to evidence his disdain for how the working classes were bastardising Powell's legitimate views about victimhood. Speight even cast himself as the embattled victim fighting against a media Establishment determined to stifle his own discussion about race and immigration.

### **2.3: The conservative response to Speight's sitcoms**

Writing in the *Sunday Times*, journalist Maurice Wiggin concluded that *TDUDP* was 'consistent in its relentless pressure for a radical re-examination of received values.'<sup>172</sup> There is unanimous agreement amongst scholars that Speight's sitcoms were a medium for the exploration of social and cultural change during the 1960s.<sup>173</sup> Brett Mills has suggested that 'the series was seen as responding to the cultural developments of the 1960s in which conservatism grappled with liberalism, the young with the old, and the people with the state.'<sup>174</sup> Contemporary media comment also recorded similar views. An article in the *Radio Times* by Dennis Main Wilson, *TDUDP*'s producer, maintained that Speight was 'able to reflect the changes in modern society's moral and social values' in response to the 'millions who prefer the old values as they were.'<sup>175</sup>

The texts of Speight's sitcoms offered a site of contestation for his characters who debated contemporary issues. Hodenberg's recent intervention, however, has sought to examine the extent to which such televised debates affected the programme's audience. Subscribing to the view of historians, such as Arthur Marwick, that there was a 'Sixties cultural revolution', Hodenberg has argued that *TDUDP* 'hastened value change.'<sup>176</sup> I

---

<sup>172</sup> Maurice Wiggin, 'It's later than you think', *Sunday Times*, 07 January 1968, p. 26.

<sup>173</sup> Bebber, 'Till Death', p. 256. Schaffer, 'Till Death', p. 459.

<sup>174</sup> Mills, 'Till Death', p. 209.

<sup>175</sup> Main Wilson, 'Till Death', p. 59.

<sup>176</sup> Hodenberg, *Television's Moment*, pp. 1 – 2 and 290.

take issue with this progressive version of Speight's sitcoms and, by extension, this reading of the period. I argue that whilst Speight's sitcoms unequivocally offered terrain upon which contemporary social, cultural and political issues could be debated by the principal characters, the audiences' response to the programmes in no way indicated that watching the comedies hastened a change in their values, but rather often evidenced a conservative reaction to the programmes. This was best encapsulated in Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association (hereafter NVALA) campaign against Speight and *TDUDP*. Evidence also suggested that *TDUDP* served to further entrench conservative views. Whilst both Schaffer and Hodenberg have rightly indicated that *TDUDP*'s 'most controversial aspect' was its 'vulgarity', I go further and suggest that the lexicon of vulgarity that emerged in viewers' appraisals was linked to a host of conservative concerns about Speight's sitcoms.<sup>177</sup> Frank Mort has discussed how in the late 1940s and early 1950s a wide range of commentators identified 'vice' as a significant part of London's permissive urban culture. 'Vice' was used as 'an expansive referent for a litany of contemporary problems.'<sup>178</sup> I suggest, in similar terms to Mort, that 'vulgarity' was an expansive term which was inscribed into broader debates about contemporary moral and ethical decline in the 1960s. Ascertaining what was vulgar also offers insights into contemporary popular sensibilities and what was considered unacceptable public discourse. Finally, I argue that the different responses to Speight's sitcoms enabled viewers to draw strong distinctions between themselves and others, particularly in relation to social and race identities.

The principal prism through which both of Speight's sitcoms were interpreted by audiences was that of 'vulgarity'. The characterisation of *TDUDP* as 'vulgar' by its contemporary audience litters the BBC and press archives. Newspaper columnists described it as 'vulgar'.<sup>179</sup> Audience research reports

---

<sup>177</sup> Schaffer, *Vision*, p. 191. Hodenberg, *Television's Moment*, p. 114.

<sup>178</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), p. 41.

<sup>179</sup> T. C. Worsley, 'Five Hours Solid', *Financial Times* (24 August 1966), p. 16. J. E. Hinder, 'Television', *Punch* (21 September 1966), p. 450.

were also full of references to the programme's vulgarity: 'Vulgar it undoubtedly was'; 'vulgarity' was 'characteristic of the programme'.<sup>180</sup> *TDUDP*'s audience described the programme as 'delightfully vulgar' suggesting that some found the vulgarity an attractive, even pleasurable, aspect of the programme.<sup>181</sup> Viewers also went to great lengths to complain to the BBC about how *TDUDP* 'plumbs the depths of vulgarity in its references' and offered a mere 'vulgar intrusion into a low-down row between man and wife'.<sup>182</sup> A large-scale viewer report into the programme in 1973 found that 57% of viewers and 79% of non-viewers considered *TDUDP* to be 'vulgar'.<sup>183</sup> *C&C* was castigated in similar terms. One viewer, Mr Cowell wrote to his MP, to complain that *C&C* was 'even more vulgar than *TDUDP*'.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, five out of six calls received by Granada Television about the *C&C* Boxing Day episode, 'objected to the vulgarity'.<sup>185</sup> Even Bernard Sandell, an ITA executive, characterised it as 'unnecessarily vulgar'.<sup>186</sup> Vulgarity was the key phrase utilised by audiences, critics and institutional officials to characterise Speight's sitcoms and it emerged as an expansive term for a broad range of concerns.

This discourse of vulgarity was extended to incorporate criticisms of *C&C*'s use of bad language. Such offensive language was apparently beyond the realms of acceptable television production in the late 1960s. D. Brown wrote to the ITA to complain that there were 'at least 53 "bloodies" in half an hour last night!', a factor he felt 'definitely not British, sir!'<sup>187</sup> H. Lynch wrote to Lord Aylestone, the chairman of the ITA, addressing him, rather ironically, as an 'arrogant bastard', to complain about the '30 "bloodies" in 30 minutes' and imploring him to 'Take the filthy rubbish off, terminate Speight's contract and put... [Speight] up against a wall and shoot him.'<sup>188</sup> Mr Cowell complained to his

---

<sup>180</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 27 February 1967. ARR: *TDUDP* TX 26 December 1966.

<sup>181</sup> ARR: *Comedy Playhouse Till Death Us Do Part* TX 22 July 1965, R78/2,811/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>182</sup> Letter: H. Buxton, 16 January 1966, T16/727, BBC WAC. Letter: Rev Eric Roberts, 27 December 1966, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>183</sup> Viewing Report VR/73/175.

<sup>184</sup> Letter: A. Cowell to Mr Horden MP, 28 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>185</sup> Memo: Sandie to Peter, Subject: Telephone Conversation with RO NW re: *C&C*, 01 January 1970, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>186</sup> Memo: B. Sandall, Subject: LWT *C&C* TX 26.12.1969, 16 January 1970, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>187</sup> Letter: D. Brown, 13 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>188</sup> Letter: H. Lynch, 22 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.



MP that *C&C* 'consisted of a conversation made up mostly of swear words and derogatory remarks.'<sup>189</sup> The ITA was aware and conscious of the bad language used in the programme. In internal memos, their own staff was described as 'almost without exception critical'; 'some of the bluer parts of the dialogue are not in the best of taste at anytime and that the constant repetition of meaningless swearing is neither justified by the characters or the script.'<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, in letters rationalising the reasons for the series' discontinuance Sendall suggested that bad language was the key issue. He complained that episode five 'was not fit for transmission at any time in the form in which we saw it. Once again this had absolutely nothing to do with race, but simply with language and dirt.'<sup>191</sup> *C&C* was vulgar because of its persistent use of bad language. This was felt to be the case not only by viewers, but the institution responsible for its production too.

*TDUDP* was also reprimanded for its use of offensive language. Hodenberg has suggested that *TDUDP* censored 'swearing and religion'.<sup>192</sup> Whilst it may have done on output, the reception of these issues was critical and represented a backlash against the institutional censoring of bad language. Without exception, all seven extant audience research reports for *TDUDP* recorded viewer complaints about the issue. For example, 'viewers expressed some misgivings about the crude language, the constant abuse, and eternal-shouting.'<sup>193</sup> In sum, according to some viewers, 'The script was crude... with too much swearing and objectionable personal remarks, and the whole show was rowdy, bawdy and in very questionable taste.'<sup>194</sup> Indeed, following the Boxing Day episode of 1966, the BBC received 'over 130 letters complaining that it was... full of bad language' and the audience research report for the episode highlighted viewers' dissatisfaction with 'the swearing and the vulgarity'.<sup>195</sup> Some were also concerned about the impact of such offensive language on

---

<sup>189</sup> Letter: A. Cowell.

<sup>190</sup> Memo: East of England RO to SPO II, Subject: *C&C* Boxing Day, undated, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>191</sup> Memo: SPO to All RO, Subject: *C&C*, 16 December 1969.

<sup>192</sup> Hodenberg, *Television's Moment*, p. 128.

<sup>193</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 06 February 1967.

<sup>194</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 27 March 1967, R9/7/86, BBC WAC.

<sup>195</sup> Memo: Kathleen Hacke to the Secretary, Re: Correspondence about *TDUDP*, 9 January 1967, R78/2811/1, BBC WAC. ARR: *TDUDP* TX 26 December 1966.

others. This ‘third-person effect’, Amy Becker, Michael Xenos and Don Waisanen have maintained, ‘suggests that individuals will perceive that particular forms of mass communication have a greater persuasive effect on others rather than on themselves’, of greatest concern is the negative influence this may have on ‘vulnerable audiences.’<sup>196</sup> Another audience research report recorded viewers’ dissatisfaction with the ‘crude language’ and ‘the eternal abuse’, with one audience member asking: ‘Must we have such language at the time of the evening when children are watching?’<sup>197</sup> Subsequent reports expressed similar concerns about the pervasiveness of bad language ‘at a time when children were sure to be watching.’<sup>198</sup> As at the ITA, concern also pervaded officialdom at the BBC, whose Board of Management sent a directive that ‘future editions should be closely scrutinised to see that there was not an unnecessary amount of bad language.’<sup>199</sup> Indeed, a memo to the show’s producer from senior officials within the BBC complained that ‘continual repetition of the word “bloody” does tend to weaken its effect.’<sup>200</sup>

As the letters and audience research reports in the BBC’s archive attest, it was also *TDUDP*’s irreverence towards the church and the royal family which caused uproar. Speight’s comedies were vitriolic in their criticisms of the Establishment, and its supporters, and if Hodenberg were right, there would be evidence to suggest that such virulently opposed discourses had pushed viewers towards a scepticism about these institutions. However, the opposite was true: a host of evidence attests to the staunch defence many viewers offered both the monarchy and religion, in response to Speight’s comical attacks. Far from accelerating value change in this respect, Speight’s sitcoms attracted a powerful conservative reaction. Complaints about Speight’s handling of monarchy always followed protestations about the sitcom’s ‘vulgarity’. For example, one audience research report noted that viewers felt that ‘Johnny Speight, had,

---

<sup>196</sup> Amy Becker, Michael Xenos and Don Waisanen, ‘Sizing Up *The Daily Show*: Audience Perceptions of Political Comedy Programming’, *Atlantic Journal of Communications* 18:3 (2010), pp. 146 – 147.

<sup>197</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 01 August 1966.

<sup>198</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 27 February 1967.

<sup>199</sup> Extract from Controllers Meeting, 16 January 1967, T12/1,321/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>200</sup> Memo: Michael Mills to Dennis Main Wilson, 24 November 1967, T12/1,321/1, BBC WAC.

perhaps, gone rather too far... royalty – and particularly – religion were hardly subjects for such disrespectful treatment (especially at Christmas).<sup>201</sup> James Burrows, from Selsey, wrote to the *Radio Times* to ask ‘Why must Johnny Speight call in the Almighty and Her Majesty the Queen to try to bolster up a programme... there surely is a standard below which it would be better not to descend.’<sup>202</sup> This was a sentiment shared by the BBC’s upper echelons who, at a Board of Management meeting, complained that ‘the programme had “gone over the edge” in the sequence about Royalty.’<sup>203</sup> In response to the episode in which Alf, following a tussle with Mike, inadvertently sprayed his beloved portrait of the Queen with ink (Figure 30), one viewer confessed that he was ‘horrified and disgusted’ to see a picture of the Queen have ink thrown on it: ‘I am sure I am not alone in decrying what I suppose is the attitude of the BBC to the British Royal Family by this deliberate attempt to make fun of an institution which has benefited this country so very greatly.’<sup>204</sup> He was not alone; A. N. Kirk, from Southwark, wrote to implore the BBC not to ‘degrade one of the remaining few things we cherish... Laugh if we must... but not at the Queen, god bless her.’<sup>205</sup> H. G. Leyshone, a correspondent from Wales, expressed his ‘hope that in future programmes that references to the Queen and the Royal Family... will be cut out... I do not consider these “jibes” as becoming to our country of which we are very proud to belong.’<sup>206</sup> The response to Speight’s treatment of religion and, especially, monarchy, produced a reaction and, evidently, these were subjects, it was felt by audiences, that were not appropriate for comic treatment.

---

<sup>201</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 26 December 1966.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Points from the Post: Alf in dreamland?’, *Radio Times*, 08 February 1968, p. 63.

<sup>203</sup> Board of Management, 15 January 1968, R78/2,811/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>204</sup> Letter: P. Niven, 22 February 1967, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>205</sup> Letter: A. Kirk, undated, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>206</sup> Letter: H. Leyshone, 18 January 1968, T16/727, BBC WAC.



**Figure 30 - Alf's portrait of the Queen gets splattered with ink (TDUDP, 20 February 1967).**

Probing the response to religion, some viewers were also upset that adverts for *TDUDP* were being shown on a Sunday, with a Q. S. Donaldson from Newport writing to complain that '*Morning Service, Meeting Point and Songs of Praise*' were 'desecrated by showing a trailer of that vile Alf Garnett show *Till Death* accompanied by swearing and blasphemy.'<sup>207</sup> In this instance, it was just as much a question of context as content: *TDUDP* was not acceptable, in any form, on the holy day. Reverend Eric Roberts, of Chidwell Valley Methodist Church, complained that in one episode 'the argument concerning the religious aspect of Christmas bordered on the blasphemous.'<sup>208</sup> Similarly, several viewers rang the ITA immediately after an episode to complain about *C&C*'s 'introduction of religion.'<sup>209</sup> Pairing both complaints about language and religion, Olive Pendlebury, who attracted a response from the ITA Chairman, wrote to express her belief that the 'blasphemy' in *C&C* 'was almost beyond

---

<sup>207</sup> Letter: Q. Donaldson, undated, T12/1,321/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>208</sup> Letter: Reverend Eric Roberts, 27 December 1966.

<sup>209</sup> Memo: HPS to DDG (PS), 24 November 1969, 509/2/5, ITA. Undated and untitled document, 509/2/5, ITA.

comprehension'.<sup>210</sup> Thus, Speight's treatment of religion was felt to be a step too far and the extensive criticisms of this by viewers evidences the salience and persistence of conservative forces well into the 1960s.

For some, the vulgarity of the programmes, encapsulated in their use of bad language and their disrespect for Establishment institutions, was emblematic of society's contemporary loss of morality and values. Speight's comedies were cast as symbolic of British decline. Harold Elwes deemed *C&C* embryonic of the decline in 'moral issues' at a time when society could 'well do with suggestions of good behaviour.'<sup>211</sup> Writing about *TDUDP*, Reverend Roberts felt the 'BBC ought to be endeavouring to maintain a true sense of values.'<sup>212</sup> A little over a year later, Roberts wrote again to exclaim 'Surely your job as an organisation is not to pander to the lowest tastes but to point to the highest. Those whose taste is in the gutter and the dustbin should not be catered for by a public corporation...'<sup>213</sup> According to some viewers at a time when British morals were felt to be in terminal decline, sitcoms would have done well not to have reflected this as Speight's sitcoms were perceived to have done.

The vulgarity of Speight's comedies, and the corresponding concerns about morality, were utilised as evidence that television was not being put to good enough use and was itself an agent of contemporary decline. Leyshone insisted that 'This wonderful medium of TV should be used to improve the standards of each one of us, and not be allowed to lower them as in the case of this particular programme.'<sup>214</sup> Similarly, Reverend Derek Buckley, from Derby, complained that 'the magnificent resources which the BBC undoubtedly has available were being prostituted on trivial drivel.'<sup>215</sup> Pendlebury believed that *C&C* represented a 'lowering of British standards of speech and behaviour, when television should surely be directed to the contrary.'<sup>216</sup> Mr Cowell asked

---

<sup>210</sup> Letter: Olive Pendlebury, 29 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>211</sup> Letter: Harold Elwes, 19 January 1970, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>212</sup> Letter: Reverend Eric Roberts, 27 December 1966.

<sup>213</sup> Letter: Reverend Eric Roberts, 13 January 1968, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>214</sup> Letter: H. Leyshone, 18 January 1968.

<sup>215</sup> Letter: Reverend Derek Buckley, 28 March 1967, T16/727, BBC WAC.

<sup>216</sup> Letter: Olive Pendlebury, 29 December 1969.

the ITA ‘what is the justification for the expenditure of thousands of pounds on the “Arts” and “Culture” whilst at the other end of the scale Lord Aylestone’s output dish up slang of the gutter.’<sup>217</sup> Speight’s sitcoms were evidence that television had, in some way, been bastardised and had moved beyond traditional Reithian standards. The concerns expressed by these viewers were paternalistic, but also evidenced a classed reading, informed by higher cultural capital. A particular constituency of viewers believed television should not be utilised in the pursuit of representing working-class culture and manners for mass consumption.

In 1973 the BBC commissioned a detailed Audience Research Report to explore ‘the possibility’ that *TDUDP* ‘might be “backfiring” by strengthening prejudice.’ The report asked if *TDUDP* was altering viewers’ beliefs and values and it concluded that ‘there was little or no attitude change as a direct result of viewing the latest *Till Death* series, but probably some reinforcement of existing views, both liberal and illiberal.’<sup>218</sup> The report further calls into question Hodenberg’s conclusions, as it announced that Speight’s sitcoms did not hasten value change, but rather reinforced and cemented existing beliefs within its audiences, be they conservative or radical and be it for good or ill.

One key character who objected to Speight’s programmes was Mary Whitehouse, a key figure of contemporary popular conservatism, supported by the NVALA. Lawrence Black has highlighted how the NVALA was opposed to ‘the whole gamut of liberal permissiveness’ and, as such, ‘Whitehouse’s crusade targeted sex and violence, suspecting a new establishment that favoured filthy plays and swearing’ and that, in so doing, ‘pricked the visceral instincts of Conservatism’.<sup>219</sup> The NVALA was, Black has contended, ‘firmly declinist’, ‘avowedly traditionalist and critical of progress and modernity’. Consequently,

---

<sup>217</sup> Letter: A. Cowell, 25 January 1970, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>218</sup> ARR: ‘*TDUDP* As Anti-Prejudice Propaganda’, March 1973, R9/757/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>219</sup> Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954 – 70* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 106. Lawrence Black, ‘Whose finger on the button? British Television and the Politics of Cultural Control’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25:4 (2005), p. 560.

Whitehouse emerged as one of the 'populist heroines of the right'.<sup>220</sup> She was a beacon of conservatism and, as such, her organisation and its supporters definitely did not experience the value change Hodenberg promotes as a consequence of watching Speight's sitcoms. Given her opposition to decline, offensive language, modernity and her promotion of traditional conservatism, it was little wonder that Whitehouse should choose Speight and *TDUDP* against which to launch a protracted campaign throughout its run. Whitehouse's biographer highlighted how 'she was furious with Johnny Speight... for his character Alf Garnett' because she believed such 'foul language and such blatant prejudice ought not to be represented on the screen.'<sup>221</sup> She wrote frequently to the Prime Minister throughout the 1960s to complain about how 'dirty, blasphemous and full of bad language' the programmes were and how the broadcast time of *TDUDP* was unsuitable for the family audience: 'We would ask you... to use your position to impress upon the BBC, once again, their obligations in the matter of timing and not giving offence to good taste and decency.'<sup>222</sup> *TDUDP* was utilised by Whitehouse as a *cause célèbre* in her campaign to introduce a viewers and listeners board to oversee and ensure 'a healthy broadcasting service'. She maintained that it was 'quite ludicrous' to interpret the large audiences *TDUDP* was attracting 'as indicating approval of the programme, after all', she swiped, 'there's nothing like a commotion for drawing a crowd.'<sup>223</sup> In an article for *The Listener*, the journalist and NVALA supporter Malcolm Muggeridge maintained that the programme had been 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of secondary modern thinking' and, addressing

---

<sup>220</sup> Lawrence Black, 'There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and Social Movement History', in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 183 – 184. Black, *Redefining British Politics*, p. 107.

<sup>221</sup> Mary Warnock, 'Whitehouse, (Constance) Mary (1910–2001)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2005; online edn, May 2014 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76525>, accessed 13 Sept 2015].

<sup>222</sup> Letter: Mary Whitehouse to Harold Wilson, 12 January 1967, NVLA Archive, Essex. Brian Dean, 'Curfew may fall on Alf Garnett', *Daily Mail*, 04 January 1967, p. 3.

<sup>223</sup> Mary Whitehouse, 'Mary Whitehouse on the need for a viewers' council', *Listener*, 11 January 1968, p. 45.

the institution's annual conference, concluded that if *TDUDP* 'was a reflection of real life, there was nothing left but suicide.'<sup>224</sup>

Never one to shy away, Speight mounted a scathing counter attack on Whitehouse and the NVALA both personally and through *TDUDP*. He launched a verbal assault on Whitehouse on BBC radio's flagship news programme *The World at One* in 1967, for which he was sued for libel by Whitehouse. *The Times*, reporting the settlement, concluded that:

The words used might be considered by some people to imply that Mrs Whitehouse, and those associated with her in the campaign and the associated organisation known as the National Viewers and Listeners Association, were fascists but were hypocritically concealing their fascism under the cloak of a moral campaign and that they held racist views and were like the killers of Christ.<sup>225</sup>

As Black has highlighted, Speight's outburst prompted significant and conflicted debates within the upper echelons of the BBC about how they were to respond. They sought 'no capitulation so far as this lady is concerned' but worried about 'giving Mrs Whitehouse the opportunity to appear in the role of a martyr.'<sup>226</sup> *TDUDP* got its revenge on Mrs Whitehouse, however, when Speight scripted an episode entitled 'Alf's Dilemma (aka Cleaning-Up-TV)'. At the start of the episode, Alf was shown to be engrossed in Whitehouse's book *Cleaning-Up TV*, nodding and smiling as he read it (Figure 31). He defended Whitehouse to Mike on the grounds that 'that woman is concerned with the moral welfare of yer country in't she? The moral fibre that's been rotted away by yer corrupt television'. Alf's very satirical support of Whitehouse was damning, placing her beliefs in line with his detestable right-wing character. Throughout the episode Alf made regular trips to the next door neighbour's toilet as a result of suffering from diarrhoea, always taking Whitehouse's book with him to read whilst he relieved himself. This left the viewer with the tantalising possibility that, when he ran out of toilet paper Alf would use the pages of Whitehouse's book and

---

<sup>224</sup> 'Malcolm Muggeridge', *The Listener*, 10 August 1967, p. 161. 'Screen Writers Awards', *Times*, 10 August 1967, p. 10.

<sup>225</sup> 'Mrs Whitehouse receives apology from BBC', *Times*, 28 July 1967, p. 13.

<sup>226</sup> Black, *Redefining British Politics*, p. 114.



commit the ultimate befouling of her beliefs! The audience research report for the episode highlighted how

...a number of those reporting evidently felt that the subject of tonight's episode – Alf's bug which resulted in frantic dashes to the next door toilet – was hardly in the best taste. Indeed, a few dismissed it as a new 'low' in entertainment – lavatory humour at its worst – and found the whole episode thoroughly distasteful, one [viewer] for instance declaring: 'Subjects in the past have been acceptable but reference to the function of the human bowels, when treated in this fashion, is totally unnecessary'.<sup>227</sup>

Viewers had no issue with the attack on Whitehouse, rather the lowbrow way in which it had been enacted through toilet humour. Blaming foreigners for his illness in the same episode, Alf believed that Whitehouse should not only clean 'up our TV' but should 'go on, and clean up the whole country as well! Get rid of all them dirty foreigners and their bloody diseases!' Clutching Whitehouse's book he broke into a rant about how 'paper breeds disease... Germs breed on paper!' The visual image was striking, suggesting that Whitehouse's book was, itself, a harbourer of disease. This sentiment was given its fullest exposition at the end of the episode when the audience witnessed Rita, who believed Alf's bug had been transmitted to Whitehouse's book, throw it onto the fire in the living room (Figure 32).<sup>228</sup>



**Figure 31 - Alf smiles and nods in agreement as he reads Whitehouse's book (TDUDP, 27 February 1967).**

<sup>227</sup> ARR: TDUDP TX 27 February 1967.

<sup>228</sup> TDUDP, 27 February 1967.



**Figure 32 - Rita throws Whitehouse's book in the fire (*TDUDP*, 27 February 1967).**

Sam Friedman has highlighted how 'strong distinctions exist in the patterning of comedy taste' which consequently 'plays a central role in the expression of middle-class identity... as cultural capital.' He has maintained that 'the culturally privileged... draw remarkably strong aesthetic, moral and personal boundaries on the basis of comedy taste, with some such aggressive judgements arguably constituting a form of symbolic violence.'<sup>229</sup> Audience research reports registered the extent to which individuals drew symbolic, classed boundaries through their appreciation or disdain of *TDUDP*. Mitchell confessed in an interview with the *Illustrated London News* in 1968 that it appealed:

...to the majority of the working class 'because they reckon it's their show. It appeals to the intelligent upper and middle classes because it is about real things. The people who don't like it are the aspiring middle classes. It reminds too many of them of what they've come from.'<sup>230</sup>

One viewer complained: 'It's a pity that, to get a laugh from the riff-raff of the country, religion and royalty have to come into it.'<sup>231</sup> A viewer also wrote to the BBC to complain about the programme and characterised its viewers as

---

<sup>229</sup> Friedman, *Distinction*, pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>230</sup> J. G. 'Warren Mitchell: Master Caricaturist', *Illustrated London News*, 06 January 1968, pp. 12 – 13.

<sup>231</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 26 December 1966.

‘depraved in mind’ whose tastes, he concluded, were ‘in the gutter and the dustbin’.<sup>232</sup> On one side, we witness viewers with higher cultural capital utilising their criticisms of *TDUDP* in order to make judgements about those who enjoy it, as riff-raff and depraved in mind. Conversely, a Works Manager commented: ‘The few who dislike it are snobs’, while another viewer maintained that ‘if the “toffee-noses” don’t like it, they need not watch it.’<sup>233</sup> Viewers who enjoyed the programme criticised those who did not as snobs and ‘toffee-noses’. The contrast between the two readings by two constituencies of viewers is striking. By establishing an opinion of the comedy, be it positive or negative, they were enabled to make distinctions about themselves and those with contrasting views of the programme, establishing their own boundaries of cultural difference through their cultural capital.

Just as viewers drew social boundaries, through their appreciation, they also utilised Speight’s sitcoms to endorse racial distinctions. Many in the mainstream media questioned ‘what our Pakistani fellow-citizens made of it?’<sup>234</sup> Although contemporary migrant responses are elusive, Z. H. Quli, a Pakistani member of Chislehurst Labour Party in Sidcup, wrote to the ITA to complain that ‘the behaviour and manners of Pakistani has been featured as barbarous and primitivised’ and as a consequence complained that *C&C* ‘could not only damage the image of race relations in this country but would also create hatred and despise in the heart of the people of Great Britain [sic].’<sup>235</sup> Two decades later, the Bermudan writer Angela Barry confessed that, when *TDUDP* was first broadcast, she had sat and ‘shed a few silent tears’ as she watched ‘Alf Garnett calling people like me “wogs” and “coons”.’<sup>236</sup> Such oppositional responses, however, were deemed ridiculous by white viewers. Allan Spencer, writing to the *TV Times*, complained that ‘If the “Paddies” and the “Micks” had complained every time anyone told a joke about the Irish, where would they

---

<sup>232</sup> Letter: Reverend Eric Roberts, 13 January 1968.

<sup>233</sup> ARR: *TDUDP* TX 27 February 1967.

<sup>234</sup> Maurice Wiggin, ‘Boxing in the shadows’, *Sunday Times* (04 January 1970), p. 52.

<sup>235</sup> Letter: Z. H. Quli, 5 December 1969, 509/2/5, ITA.

<sup>236</sup> Barry, ‘Black mythologies’, p. 83.

have been?’<sup>237</sup> Expressing a similar sentiment, Stanley Reynolds of *The Guardian* concluded that ‘the coloured people who were complaining, complained because they did not understand the western humour.’<sup>238</sup> Charles Husband has maintained that ‘in Britain there are strong cultural sanctions for those lacking a demonstrable capacity for humour.’<sup>239</sup> Therefore, if you didn’t find the humour funny, it was an indication that you did not belong, that you were un-British. Thus, those immigrants who did not enjoy Speight’s sitcoms were chastised by those who did as ‘other’ and un-British. This exclusion was also evident in the decision to cast British born Lynch and Milligan as immigrant characters in *C&C*, which was defended on the grounds that no other actor or comic, notably not immigrants, could possibly be as funny as them. Lynch, who portrayed Kenny in *C&C*, proclaimed that there were:

...jokes about everyone – the Irish, Poles, English, Germans, Jews – so we’ve got to have our turn as well. And I don’t find them offensive as racial jokes. If they’re funny, they’re funny... People who don’t like black jokes have no sense of humour.<sup>240</sup>

By expressing his willingness to participate in and be the butt of such joking, Lynch thereby demonstrated his capacity to ‘take a joke’ and in so doing appeared to possess that most central facet of British national identity – a decent sense of humour. As viewers’ comments attest, those who didn’t understand the comedy or were not prepared to take the joke were deemed outside the realms of normative Britishness.

Viewing *TDUDP* and *C&C* did not accelerate value change within the audience. Rather, as the popular response to both the sitcoms attests, Speight’s comedies attracted a popular backlash, underpinned by a common lexicon of ‘vulgarity’ which incorporated conservative concerns about offensive language and derogatory attacks on the monarchy and religion. These aspects of the programmes were apparently beyond the realms of acceptable public discourse

---

<sup>237</sup> ‘Letters: *Curry & Chips*’, *TV Times*, 08 January 1970, p. 55.

<sup>238</sup> Stanley Reynolds, ‘Television’, *Guardian*, 20 January 1968, p. 4.

<sup>239</sup> Charles Husband, ‘Racist Humour and Racist Ideology in British Television, or I Laughed Till You Cried’, in, Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton (eds.), *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>240</sup> Pines, *Black and White*, p. 112.

in the late 1960s. Furthermore, the inclusion of these aspects in popular television comedies was a testament to contemporary society's loss of morality and values and a sign that television should be redirected to a greater purpose. The conservative reaction to Speight's sitcoms was best encapsulated in the protracted campaign that the populist heroine of the right, Whitehouse, and the NVALA, launched against *TDUDP* and its writer. Finally, watching Speight's sitcoms enabled viewers to draw distinctive cultural boundaries, articulated in classed terms, in their appreciation of the comedy; if you enjoyed it you were, apparently, depraved and if you did not, you were an elitist. The inability of new Commonwealth immigrants to recognise or appreciate the racial comedy ensured their further distinction from a nation which viewed a good sense of humour as central to its identity.

## **Conclusion**

Examining the public pronouncements of the writers of *TDUDP* and *C&C* on questions of race and immigration, this chapter has moved beyond the limited historiography which had thus far been preoccupied with questions of anti-racist intent. The chapter has highlighted how Speight and Milligan's shared concerns about overpopulation and integration fed into and heavily influenced their comic texts. Indeed, in keeping with broader debates within the left, Speight's sitcoms evidenced a complex and ambivalent relationship towards the problem of immigration and integration in the second half of the 1960s. This was underpinned by his belief in the inability of the white working-classes and new Commonwealth immigrants to culturally integrate owing to fundamental differences between the two groups. Such sentiments were explored in his sitcoms whereby grotesque working-class characters ignorantly cast the immigrant as cultural 'others', who were ill-suited to integrating into the British way of life. This had less to do with colour than with culture. Speight and the television authorities decision to not include overt immigrant voices into both *TDUDP* and *C&C* also evidenced how, in the creative industries, integration had yet to occur on any significant scale.

Whilst the working-classes were posited as part of the cause, in Speight's sitcoms, for the failures of integration, it was distant governing elites who had put the problem of race and immigration into the laps of unsuspecting Britons. His sitcoms were firmly anti-Establishment in their narratives and, consequently, he railed against the victimisation of the white working-classes by those in authority. Speight himself rebelled against the broadcast institutions who he felt were attempting to stifle his ability to speak out on controversial issues through his television programmes. *TDUDP* and *C&C* can be seen to support the agenda of Powellism: the working classes were bearing the brunt of integrationist immigration policies and perceived themselves as having been abandoned by a Labour Party whose ultimate purpose, they believed, was to safeguard their interests. The characters who supported Powell, however, were grotesque characterisations, and their adoption of Powell's ideology to justify their own racial bigotry was comically challenged by Speight in *C&C*.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, viewing *TDUDP* and *C&C* did not serve to accelerate value change among its audience. Rather, the extant evidence points to conservative reactions against Speight's sitcoms. This popular conservative response was underpinned by a lexicon of 'vulgarity' which served as a broad term for a host of contemporary concerns not limited to popular television: offensive language, attacks on monarchy and religion, contemporary moral decline and television failing to live up to its formative, Reithian ethos. All of these aspects, encapsulated in the term 'vulgarity', were considered, by audiences, to be well beyond the terrain of acceptable public discourse in the late 1960s. They were certainly too much for the traditionalist Whitehouse and the NVALA who launched a protracted campaign against Speight and *TDUDP*. Regardless of whether or not viewers enjoyed Speight's sitcoms, by watching them viewers were enabled to make strong distinctions, in both classed and racial terms, about both themselves and others.

### Chapter 3: 'Look at us, we're dregs': *Steptoe and Son's* challenge to affluence and modernity during the early 1960s

#### Introduction

During the *Steptoe and Son* (hereafter *Steptoe*) episode 'The Lodger', broadcast in February 1964, Harold Steptoe emotionally explained to his father, Albert Steptoe, that 'we've got nothing mate, nothing! We're derelicts. We've had it. We're doomed. Look at us, we're dregs, that's what we are. Dregs! The lower depths...'<sup>1</sup> It was Harold and Albert Steptoe's comic status as people of the lowest social status which enabled *Steptoe's* writers, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, to contest and challenge the extent to which, during the 1960s, Britons participated in the culture of post-war affluence and modernity. In this chapter I argue that *Steptoe* offered to a large audience social imagery that was ill-at-odds with the dominant contemporary narratives of the 1960s as modern and affluent, in order to challenge the extent of popular participation in these post-war phenomena. *Steptoe* highlighted the persistence into the 1960s of earlier, notably Victorian, cultural and economic forms and the consequent inability of an outdated minority to participate in aspects of contemporary social life. The Steptoes' status as impoverished rag-and-bone men also challenged notions of mass affluence and brought before viewers the spectacle of persisting pockets of poverty well in advance of poverty's official exposition by sociologists in 1965.<sup>2</sup>

Economic circumstances prevented the Steptoes' participation in affluence and modernity but so too did their culture. Harold attempted to escape both his lowly standing as a rag-and-bone man and the constraints of his father, so redolent of the 'dreg' label Harold desperately wished to shed, through his repeated and frustrated attempts to engage with high culture. Harold's supposed cultural capital was frequently revealed as flawed or left in tatters by the actions of his father and this ensured his exclusion from

---

<sup>1</sup> *Steptoe*, 18 February 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest* (London, 1965).

contemporary society. I argue that, as writers, Galton and Simpson made powerful claims, through *Steptoe*, about a minority, represented by Harold and Albert, to participate in the advances of the 1960s owing to both their economic and cultural circumstances. Throughout the chapter I also highlight how *Steptoe* borrowed heavily from not only genre traits of the sitcom but also from drama. As a result, sympathy and pathos underpinned audience responses to the series as much as laughter did. Indeed, the variegated response of viewers to *Steptoe* suggested their own discomfort with some of the issues explored in the series. The audience could laugh in superiority at the Steptoes' lowly status and occupy the status of partial voyeurs into their low social world. But the viewers' conscience was also pricked by dramatic aspects of the series which explored the darker, less humorous, side of the Steptoes' existence.

No serious historical scholarship exists which examines *Steptoe* in relation to dominant narratives of the period. Extant studies have predominantly emerged from enthusiasts, journalists and biographers.<sup>3</sup> Their texts do, however, offer invaluable interviews with those responsible for the series: the writers, producers and actors. The existing scholarship has been the purview of media and cultural studies and these lack engagement with the texts and performances of the sitcoms themselves and with the rich archival sources held by the BBC, something which is rectified in this chapter.<sup>4</sup> The limited academic studies have most commonly focused on the gendered dimensions of *Steptoe*. Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold have suggested 'the absence of a woman in the family... was the solid core of the piece' and this, David Rolinson

---

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold, *Bring Me Laughter: Four Decades of TV Comedy* (London, 1987), pp. 63 – 67. Christopher Stevens, *The Masters of Sitcom: From Hancock to Steptoe* (London, 2011). Robert Ross, *Steptoe and Son* (London, 2002). Susannah Corbett, *Harry H. Corbett: The Front Legs of the Cow* (Gloucestershire, 2012). Gale Pedrick, *Ray Galton & Alan Simpson's Steptoe and Son* (London, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Kilborn, 'A Golden Age of British Sitcom? *Hancock's Half Hour* and *Steptoe and Son*', in Jürgen Kamm and Birgit Neumann (eds.) *British TV Comedies: Cultural Concepts, Contexts and Controversies* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 23 – 35. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London, 1994), pp. 249 – 261. James W. Martens, 'Come on Over! The African Americanisation of *Steptoe and Son*', in Carlen Lavigne and Heather Marcovitch (eds.), *American Remakes of British Television: Transformations and Mistranslations* (Plymouth, 2011), pp. 211 – 225. Graham McCann, '*Steptoe and Son*', in Annabel Merullo and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003), pp. 157 – 161. David Rolinson, "'You Dirty Old Man!': Masculinity and Class in *Steptoe and Son* (1962 – 74)', *British Television Drama* (02 February 2016).



has suggested, ensured that *Steptoe* was underpinned by ‘a collision between competing definitions of masculinity.’<sup>5</sup> Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik have concurred, suggesting that ‘the absence of women in *Steptoe* lends to the situation a fundamental *instability*’ with women representing ‘a direct threat to the Harold-Albert relationship.’<sup>6</sup> I extend their work to suggest that the absence of a woman in *Steptoe* was directly linked to, indeed responsible, for Harold’s lack of cultural capital which contributed to his low social status and his failure to achieve affluence. I also argue that the absence of a regular female character and only occasional appearances by women, served as a powerful means through which the series promoted Harold and Albert’s social and cultural alienation.

The other principal lens through which *Steptoe* has been studied is that of genre, and how specifically the series borrowed from both comedy and drama in its form. Scholars are in agreement that *Steptoe* was the first full-blooded situational comedy, with far more emphasis on the situation than had previously been evidenced in the handful of sitcoms that had come before, for example *Hancock’s Half Hour*. Graham McCann has highlighted how the series ‘brought to the genre a much deeper sense of self-belief’ and ‘brought real life to the sitcom’. Stressing the centrality of the situation to *Steptoe*’s success, McCann suggested that it was popular because of the ‘realism of the setting: it took viewers away from the lace-curtained cosiness of previous sitcoms and into the gritty, grubby, gloomy working-class milieu of a rag-and-bone man’s ramshackle home in Oil Drum Lane, Shepherd’s Bush.’<sup>7</sup> Indeed, James Martens has read *Steptoe* as an ‘outgrowth of the “Angry Young Men” novels and plays, and the resulting “kitchen sink” films of the period, which saw young English writers and filmmakers address social issues from the view of the labouring classes.’ Consequently, Martens continued, ‘well-heeled Englishmen safe in their homes, were ushered down the alleys of the Big Smoke for a glimpse into

---

<sup>5</sup> Crowther and Pinfold, *Laughter*, p. 65. Rolinson, ‘Masculinity’.

<sup>6</sup> Neale and Krutnik, *Popular*, p. 254.

<sup>7</sup> McCann, ‘*Steptoe*’, pp. 157 – 161.

the lives of working people.’<sup>8</sup> *Steptoe* was also popular because, according to McCann, ‘it featured a daringly dark, tragicomedy “trapped” relationship’ and was premised on ‘compassionate’ writing that ‘was capable of pathos and poignancy as well as sauce and slapstick’ and brought to life ‘by serious, stage-trained actors.’<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Crowther and Pinfold have maintained that its success lay in it being, ‘at heart... not a comedy but a tragedy.’<sup>10</sup> Neale and Krutnik, on the subject of form, have suggested that in *Steptoe*:

...there is a marked non-correspondence between its *situational* “normality” – the stable situation to which each episode returns – and the bourgeois familial “normality” which is the ideological touchstone of the traditional domestic sitcom. In fact, in its lack of regular female characters, its emphatic squalor, and its verbal and physical crudity, *Steptoe and Son* is the *inverse* of such shows: the show’s situational “inside” is the conventional “outside”, and vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter I extend this body of literature to explore, specifically – textually and visually – how the mixing of genres contributed to the broader exploration of affluence and modernity during the 1960s. I also examine, with reference to audience research reports and contemporary media comment, what impact this had on viewers.

The 1960s has attracted an impressive literature. Arthur Marwick has argued that the decade represented a ‘cultural revolution’ which witnessed social, cultural and economic transformations experienced by the majority of British people.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, as Kenneth Morgan has suggested, Britain ‘shed many drab remnants of Victorianism’ during the period.<sup>13</sup> Revisionists, however, have questioned such a characterisation of the decade.<sup>14</sup> No studies of the 1960s, however, have interrogated popular television, and situation

---

<sup>8</sup> Martens, ‘Afro-Americanisation’, p. 213.

<sup>9</sup> McCann, ‘*Steptoe*’, pp. 157 – 160.

<sup>10</sup> Crowther and Pinfold, *Laughter*, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Neale and Krutnik, *Popular*, p. 251.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 - 1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People’s Peace* (Oxford, 2001), p. 314.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (London, 2008), p. 6. Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow, 2005), pp. xii - xiii.

comedies in particular, as reflective and formative of the historical moment. Indeed, in a collection of essays exploring the decade through an analysis of key texts of media and culture, television and comedy did not feature at all.<sup>15</sup> This is symptomatic of a broader problem in the utilisation of sitcom as a historical source. Utilising the sitcom here, I suggest that *Steptoe* actively contested and therefore challenged the extent to which the 1960s can be interpreted as a period of radical social and cultural change. Building on the work of Frank Mort, I argue that *Steptoe* evidences the persistence and salience of earlier, principally Victorian, cultural forms into the 1960s. Mort, in opposition to progressive post-Victorian versions of the period, has highlighted how in 1960s London morality was still heavily influenced by the legacies of the nineteenth-century, as in the case of the Rillington Place murders and the Profumo Scandal. He has suggested that ‘post-Victorian morality displayed complex connections to its nineteenth-century inheritance well into the 1960s, as established value systems remained a strong presence in public life throughout the post-war years.’<sup>16</sup> Mort’s research also ‘set out to challenge the idea that the post-war years marked out the final demise of Victorian social morality and the dawning of a more enlightened era.’<sup>17</sup> Whilst Mort’s frame of analysis was sexual morality, I examine expressions of the Victorian in a popular cultural source to argue that *Steptoe* highlighted how the 1960s were not, for the minority Harold and Albert represented, in any sense post-Victorian.

Revisionist literature on the 1960s has also questioned the universality of participation in the apparent social, cultural and economic ‘revolution’ of the period.<sup>18</sup> Mark Donnelly, for example, has maintained that the ‘Sixties’ ‘was a party that was happening somewhere else.’<sup>19</sup> Despite acknowledging that the

---

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Aldgate, James Chapman and Arthur Marwick (eds.), *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture* (London, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Frank Mort, ‘Scandalous Events: Metropolitan Culture and Moral Change in Post-Second World War London’, *Representations* 93.1 (2006), pp. 123 – 125. Frank Mort, ‘The Ben Pimlott Memorial Lecture 2010: The Permissive Society Revisited’, *Twentieth Century British History* 22:2 (2011), pp. 285 – 297.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London, 1998), p. xii. Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. iii.

'Sixties' remained a matter of speculation for the majority and participation for a minority, historians are yet to consider, in any substantive way, which individuals failed to participate in the changes and why. I argue that *Steptoe* explored how outdated and impoverished individuals failed to participate in the progressive developments of the 1960s.

A dominant historiographical narrative of 1960s Britain is one typified by affluence, mass consumerism and widening material prosperity. Workers could supposedly fall back on the security of full employment and experienced 130% increases in their weekly wage packets between 1955 and 1969. This resulted in increased expenditure on an array of consumer durables from food and drink to household appliances and motor vehicles.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Peter Clarke has concluded that 'it was inescapably apparent that more people could now afford a decent standard of living.'<sup>21</sup> This was the heyday of the so-called 'affluent society' and the dominant historical commonplace was that it was a universal experience. In 1964, Ruth Glass wrote of London that there was 'a gleam of affluence... in an apparently mounting flow of consumption.'<sup>22</sup> Scholarship on this phenomenon has favoured the examination of the 'embourgeoisment thesis' or 'affluent worker' debate and the impact of affluence on notions of class identity and belonging, rather than discussing those who did not share in the new economic prosperity. Recently, however, Selina Todd has highlighted the existence of a majority of 'working-class people who didn't choose the circumstances in which they lived' as 'people continued to experience profound inequalities, in education, at work and in their neighbourhoods.' For Todd, poverty continued to be 'a very real fear for thousands of ordinary workers.'<sup>23</sup> Donnelly has similarly highlighted how in parts of Britain, notably the poorer districts of London, 'millions of people were left behind in the economic advances of the "Golden Age".'<sup>24</sup> Harold and Albert, in their role as rag-and-

---

<sup>20</sup> Marwick, *Sixties*, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 1990* (St Ives, 1997), p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies (ed.), *London: Aspects of Change* (London, 1964), p. xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class, 1910 – 2010* (London, 2014), p. 1, pp. 199 – 246.

<sup>24</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. xiii.

bone men, were emblematic of that constituency of impoverished person who failed to experience affluence.

The study of poverty in post-war Britain has largely been a sociological concern, told through the prism of contemporary analyses and reports into poverty. Indeed, Keith Banting maintained that in Britain 'poverty' is 'essentially a statistical concept' ensuring that the 'poor did not make themselves visible; they were discovered at the bottom of income tables by social scientists.'<sup>25</sup> Vic George and Irving Howards have suggested that in the late 1950s and early 1960s there was little formal interest or concern shown about poverty, it being believed that the new welfare state, full employment and rising wages had all but eliminated want.<sup>26</sup> Such a view was, according to the sociologist Peter Townsend, 'reiterated in parliament and the press and ha[d] gained authority from a stream of books and papers published by economists, sociologists and others' and, consequently, officialdom appeared 'to have called a truce over inequality' owing to 'changing attitudes towards poverty in a society moving towards prosperity, if not affluence.'<sup>27</sup> Poverty was not a pressing political concern for much of the 1960s. It is widely accepted that the state did not recognise the existence of poverty in Britain until its 'rediscovery' in 1965 following the publication of Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith's sociological study, *The Poor and the Poorest*. Their research highlighted how poverty was far more widespread than previously thought; they calculated that 22.9% and 6.1% of the population were, respectively, in relative poverty and subsistence poverty.<sup>28</sup> The book's publication received widespread coverage and, according to Banting, completely overturned 'established images of society' by 'thrust[ing] family poverty into the realms of political consciousness' and 'forc[ing] the issue into political debate.'<sup>29</sup> This chapter, however, highlights how *Steptoe*, in advance of poverty's 'official' exposition in

---

<sup>25</sup> Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Basingstoke, 1979), p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Vic George and Irving Howards, *Poverty Amidst Affluence: Britain and the United States* (Aldershot, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Townsend, 'The meaning of poverty', *British Journal of Sociology* 5:2 (1962), p. 210. Peter Townsend, 'The truce on inequality', *New Statesman*, 26 September 1959, pp. 381 – 382.

<sup>28</sup> Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poorest*.

<sup>29</sup> Banting, *Poverty*, pp. 68 – 69.

1965, provided a cultural rediscovery of poverty for a popular television audience during the years of so-called affluence.

As Pierre Bourdieu highlighted in his influential study of taste and cultural consumption in 1960s and 1970s France, culture played a significant role in the sustenance and reproduction of class. The possession of cultural capital and taste was formative in determining social status and it was through its deployment that the middle classes were enabled to separate themselves from those at lower positions in the social hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> This framework has proved influential for studies of class in Britain.<sup>31</sup> In this chapter, I build on this literature in order to suggest that Harold attempted to escape his backward situation through the utilisation of his apparent cultural capital. His claims to culture, however, were always revealed as flawed or undermined by his father Albert. Just as his economic circumstances prevented his participation in the affluence and modernity of the period, so too did his cultural inadequacies.

Media and cultural scholars have highlighted how cultural competition between Harold and Albert, underpinned by their generational differences, was a key theme of *Steptoe*. For example, Neale and Krutnik have concluded that *Steptoe* represented ‘a *spectacle* of inverted bourgeois decorum for a bourgeois audience’ principally because the ‘Steptoes are *not* the average middle-class family’; they are ‘isolated from the norms of middle-class existence’. Whilst Albert ‘blatantly, often aggressively, reject[ed] middle-class codes of behaviour and sensibility, Harold was continually attempting’, but failing, ‘to “better” himself, to adopt bourgeois attitudes, and to impress bourgeois figures.’<sup>32</sup> As Kilborn has highlighted, the narrative premise of most *Steptoe* episodes was ‘the juxtaposition of two distinct worlds – the ramshackle home that Harold shares with his father and the outside world to which Harold felt constantly

---

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Mike Savage, ‘Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study’, *Sociology* 39:5 (2005), pp. 935 – 946. Ben Jones, *The Working Classes in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012), pp. 52 – 53. Simon Gunn, ‘Translating Bourdieu: cultural capital and the English middle class in historical perspective’, *British Journal of Sociology* 56:1 (2005), p. 54. Mike Savage, ‘Affluence and Social Change in the Making of Technocratic Middle-Class Identities’, *Contemporary British History* 22:4 (2008), pp. 458 – 459.

<sup>32</sup> Neale and Krutnik, *Popular*, p. 251.

drawn, but to which he never succeeded in gaining access.<sup>33</sup> Central to these debates about Harold's desire to leave were the generational differences between himself and his father. For example, McCann also suggested that the generational tensions explored between Harold and Albert 'struck a chord with the British people... when new tensions were emerging between the young and the old, especially in terms of the growing differences between their respective cultural tastes, lifestyles and social aspirations.'<sup>34</sup> This divide, Martens continued, was emphasised through the characterisation of Harold as 'a modern lad who supported the Labour Party and sought to be a success in New Britain' opposed to Albert, the 'old fashioned bigoted Tory who saw the change in his world as a softening of the nation, and as a threat to all he had stood for' and the 'squabbles' between the father and son that result.<sup>35</sup> Thus, whilst scholars have highlighted how Harold was forever longing to escape his father, I want to extend this work to highlight why Harold was intent on departing and, also, why he failed.

In 1961 the comic writers Galton and Simpson were invited by Tom Sloan, the BBC's Head of Light Entertainment, to write ten unrelated half-hour pieces for television under the banner *Comedy Playhouse*. The fourth episode, 'The Offer', was described by the BBC as follows:

'Steptoe and Son' is a rag-and-bone business... They dealt with anything and everything... Their home was an appalling clutter of useless bric-a-brac, to which Albert clings like a leach. Harold, the son, does the collecting on the rounds on the cart... Albert is happy, looking after the yard; but Harold is looking for a chance to break away.<sup>36</sup>

This structure would come to form the backbone of all subsequent episodes. Albert and Harold were portrayed, respectively, by the classically trained actors Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H. Corbett. As the *Radio Times* reported about the *Comedy Playhouse* episode: 'so enthusiastic was the play's reception from

---

<sup>33</sup> Kilborn, 'Golden Age', p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> McCann, 'Steptoe', p. 160.

<sup>35</sup> Martens, 'Afro-Americanisation', p. 214.

<sup>36</sup> Memo: Chief Assistant, General, 21 July 1967, T12/1,298/1, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).

viewers and critics that the authors were asked to build a series of programmes round the pair' of rag-and-bone men.<sup>37</sup> *Steptoe*, which retained its original writers and principal actors, ran to twenty-seven episodes in four series broadcast between 1962 and 1965 and these are the focus of this chapter.<sup>38</sup> Corbett recalled that 'over thirteen million people watched those first episodes in 1962' and by January 1964 the series was being watched by '26 million viewers – a record for light entertainment television.' *Steptoe* had succeeded in pushing *Coronation Street* off the viewing top spot.<sup>39</sup> Not only did the series attract huge popular audiences, it also garnered widespread critical acclaim in the press and won a series of awards. In 1962 the Guild of Television Producers and Directors announced Corbett as best television actor of the year and Duncan Wood as best Light Entertainment producer. This was followed by Brambell and Corbett being named as joint Television Personality of 1963 by The Variety Club of Great Britain. Galton and Simpson were awarded the Writers' Guild Award in both 1962 and 1963, and in 1964 they were presented with the John Logie Baird Award for Outstanding Contribution to Television. *Steptoe* explored a wide array of contemporary social and cultural issues and Corbett agreed to perform as Harold because of his belief that sitcom now offered 'the best opportunity "for good social comment"'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Galton and Simpson conceded that if 'in the process of making people laugh you can advance a point of view or illuminate the human dilemma, so much the better.'<sup>41</sup>

All twenty-seven episodes of *Steptoe* have been examined for this chapter and have all been sourced via YouTube. The textual and performance analysis of the episodes is supported by extensive archival material from the BBC Written Archives Centre, something lacking in all previous studies of *Steptoe*. The archival sources included personnel files for both Corbett and

---

<sup>37</sup> 'Steptoe and Son', *Radio Times*, 31 March 1962, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> A further four series of *Steptoe* were broadcast between 1970 and 1974 but are beyond the scope of my thesis.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Corbett, *Corbett*, p. 241. Douglas Marlborough, 'Steptoe tops Ena', *Daily Mail*, 17 January 1964, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (Oxford, 1995), p. 215.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 60.



Brambell and internal production folders for the series, alongside production folders for twenty-four of the twenty-seven episodes which contain episode synopses, financial details and wardrobe, make-up and setting specifications. Finally, the BBC's archives also held eleven audience research reports which have been invaluable in charting viewers' responses to *Steptoe*. As in all the preceding chapters, the extensive archival material is supported by engagement with contemporary press comment.

Organised into two sections, the first examines Harold and Albert's failure to participate in the 1960s owing to their economic status. It explores their role as rag-and-bone men in relation to both contemporary and nineteenth-century representations of their trade in broader popular culture. Starting with the geographic location of the Steptoes' home the section moves to examine the setting and the *mise-en-scène* of the scrapyards they inhabit. Specifically, I explore the abundance of junk within both their yard and home and how this amalgamation of useless possessions was the consequence of others' rubbished consumption and affluence. The section examines these items in relation to broader debates about rubbish and consumption. It also considers how dirt was utilised in the series in order to signify low social status. Examining the characters' stock costumes, I also suggest that their physical appearance was an extended representation of their economic circumstances. I argue that the cluttered *mise-en-scène* of *Steptoe* alongside the characters' costumes ensured Harold and Albert were recognisable as both Victorian and impoverished. Viewer responses to the series, as detailed in the audience research reports, highlight how popular audiences responded to the series' setting in voyeuristic terms. The section also considers the precise means through which *Steptoe* served as both sitcom and drama.

In the second section I examine the cultural dimensions of Harold and Albert's exclusion from the 1960s. I begin the section with a close analysis of *Steptoe's* first episode, 'The Offer', to set up the key themes in relation to Harold's cultural capital: his desire to participate in contemporary social life and the structural and cultural limitations preventing him from doing so. I argue that the absence of a central female character was fundamental to Harold's lack

of cultural capital and that this, alongside Harold's age, precluded him from participation. In the final part of the section I examine how Harold's desire for modernity was also undermined by his lack of cultural knowledge.

### **3.1: *Steptoe and Son*: Victorian poverty amidst modern affluence**

Discussing *Steptoe* in an interview, Corbett concluded that 'the rag-and-bone trade didn't mean a thing' but 'it gave a perfect format and a set-up to range and slash all over the place.'<sup>42</sup> Despite his protestations to the contrary, the decision to cast Albert and Harold as rag-and-bone men became the fundamental means by which Galton and Simpson contested notions of mass affluence and modernity during the 1960s. The rag-and-bone man was a quintessentially Victorian figure of low social standing. Henry Mayhew, in his contemporary essays on nineteenth-century London, described them as 'the lower sort, both as to means and intelligence'; they were 'low itinerants'. Accordingly, they were just above 'nightsoil men', or shit pickers, in Mayhew's descending order of occupation status.<sup>43</sup> Historian Gareth Stedman Jones built on this description in his study of Victorian London. He highlighted how at 'the bottom of the labour market' were 'scavengers – "bone grubbers", rag-collectors... last resort casual occupations of the old and the broken down, or of the very young' who worked on London streets. Such a role was emblematic of 'the most pathetic and gratuitous forms of economic activity.'<sup>44</sup> In his study of British occupations, Guy Routh highlighted how rag-and-bone dealers were a key constituent of the lowest social class, Class 7, which was comprised of unskilled manual workers: costermongers, hawkers, newspaper sellers and scrapdealers.<sup>45</sup> Despite their traceable roots back to the nineteenth-century, the rag-and bone man persisted into the new Elizabethan age of the post-war period. Their social status, however, remained unaffected and their

---

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Corbett, *Corbett*, p. 226.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Volume Two* (London, 1851), pp. 103 – 106.

<sup>44</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationships Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1971), p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> Guy Routh, *Occupations of the People of Great Britain, 1801 – 1901* (Basingstoke, 1987), p. 49.

characterisation as Victorian persisted. For example, an article published in *The Times* in 1965 described the rag-and-bone men of Portobello Road, Notting Hill, as 'quintessentially Dickensian'.<sup>46</sup> Contrary to Corbett's assertion, then, their decision to cast Harold and Albert as rag-and-bone men was central to the series' exploration of affluence and modernity in the 1960s; from the outset the Steptoes' trade promoted their status as both impoverished and quintessentially Victorian.

The rag-and-bone man remained a figure of much contemporary speculation and discussion throughout the 1960s. During the decade descriptions of the rag-and-bone man in the news media always implicitly discussed their low social status and how, oftentimes, their presence disrupted the perceived norms of British society. *Steptoe* must be interpreted within this historically specific construction of the persona of the rag-and-bone man. An article in the *Illustrated London News* celebrating Sir Winston Churchill's eighty-sixth birthday in 1960 recorded that 'Among callers at Hyde Park Gate were Lord Montgomery', 'Lady Violet Bonham Carter' who delivered 'a basket of violets' and 'A rag-and-bone man drove up with his cart and horse to offer good wishes.'<sup>47</sup> The juxtaposition was clear, the rag-and-bone man was the total inverse of Lords and Ladies, who were of the highest social order, and was utilised to evidence support for Churchill from the lowest in society. Newspapers also frequently intimated the cultural inferiority of the rag-and-bone man, publishing stories throughout the 1960s about 'fiddling "rag-and-bone" men'; rag-and-bone man Henry Corke who was described as a 'self confessed villain' who got his 'living thieving' and had "'graduated" at Borstal, Wormwood Scrubs, Pentonville, Wandsworth and Dartmoor' prisons; and Sidney Hayward who was fined 'for being drunk in charge of a horse and cart.'<sup>48</sup> Such reports constructed, in the imagination of readers, the rag-and-bone man

---

<sup>46</sup> 'Squeezing out the rag men', *Times*, 09 March 1965, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> 'Sir Winston's 86<sup>th</sup> Birthday: Present Reminders of a Great past', *Illustrated London News*, 10 December 1960, p. 1047.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Six Months on the Inside', *Sunday Times*, 25 February 1962, p. 30. Ronald Burns, 'A pony for girl with six months left to live', *Daily Express*, 17 October 1961, p. 4. 'Giddy up, there', *Daily Mail*, 06 October 1964, p. 11.

as lowly, dishonest, corrupt and bacchanalian and, consequently, beyond the realms of acceptable society.

In one incident, which attracted national attention in both *The Times* and *Guardian* during 1966, the residents of Dyne Road, 'a residential boulevard... of parked cars and gaunt red-brick semis' in Kilburn, North London, were enraged at the proposition of Brent Borough Council to move fourteen totters and their horses into 'respectable Dyne Road.' Accordingly, 'the irate bourgeoisie of Dyne Road', formed a protest committee of more than one hundred residents to campaign against the decision. Their leader articulated concerns that 'this sort of business with its dirt and smell, is just not suitable for a residential street. It's unhygienic.' He maintained that he had 'lived here 22 years, and I shan't like living here any more... if I can't go out into the backgarden... because of the odours that come flouting over.' In their reports the journalists cast the rag-and-bone men as lowly aliens whose physical presence and stench invaded and despoiled the spaces of respectable existence. The rag-and-bone men's spokesperson was described emerging from 'a hutch full of old cookers, ski sticks, and the intestines of vacuum cleaners, rolling a cigarette' and stood alongside a friend who 'grinned with one tooth'.<sup>49</sup> The juxtaposition between the two was striking; boulevards of red brick semis versus rubbish and hutches. *Steptoe* brought the experiences of the rag-and-bone man to a massed audience and in so doing, echoed the contemporary press in its portrayal of lowly characters who were ill-at-ease with affluence and modernity.

In deciding to utilise the rag-and-bone man as the preferred trade of their principal characters, Galton and Simpson conformed to a long comic tradition. Neale and Krutnik have maintained that there exists a 'longstanding convention that comedy is – or should be concerned with "low" or "inferior" characters, classes and life.' Consequently,

---

<sup>49</sup> 'Residents object to *Steptoe* and Horse', *Times*, 15 July 1966, p. 13. 'Exit the rag-and-bone man', *Times*, 15 July 1966, p. 15. 'Totter neighbours put Dyne Road in uproar', *Guardian*, 17 July 1966, p. 4.

...comedy was for centuries the most appropriate genre for representing the lives, not of the ruling classes, of those with extensive power, but of the 'middle' and 'lower' orders of society, those whose power was limited and local, and whose manners, behaviour, and values were considered by their 'betters' to be either trivial, or vulgar, or both.<sup>50</sup>

*Steptoe* was a continuation of this comic tradition as it portrayed the lives of two men from the lowest order of society. Writing in *The Sunday Times*, Maurice Wiggin described *Steptoe* as an 'exploration of low-life'.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Harold described himself and his father as 'low life' and 'dregs' who occupied the 'lower depths'.<sup>52</sup>

The Steptoes' role as rag-and-bone men was always highlighted as beyond the pale of acceptable society whenever episodes introduced working-class, usually female, characters. The response of these women to their trade reaffirmed the Steptoes' alienation from mainstream society. Harold's endeavours to bag a girl were always undercut by their disapproval of his occupation. Harold regretted that 'I'm not gonna get married' because every time he met 'a bird and she says to me what do I do and I say "I'm a rag-and-bone man" she don't wanna know...'<sup>53</sup> In a later episode when he found himself waiting to be married, Harold was jilted at the altar by his young bride whose mother concluded her daughter would not have achieved any 'happiness' with a 'common street trader' like Harold.<sup>54</sup> Harold's status as a rag-and-bone man ostracised him from working-class norms, further signalling his low social status.

The Steptoes' scrapyards were located on the physical margins of acceptable society; they were geographically distanced from the affluence and modernity of London. Episodes frequently portrayed Harold travelling to and from central London, on his horse and cart, from the scrapyards. Figure 33 shows Harold travelling to the yard which was on the margins of London, in the distance was the metropolis, as he rode his horse down an unkempt road between two disregarded pieces of land and several broken down cars, before

---

<sup>50</sup> Neale and Krutnik, *Popular*, pp. 3 – 12.

<sup>51</sup> Maurice Wiggin, 'Optimism in Week One', *Sunday Times*, 06 January 1963, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Steptoe*, 18 February 1964.

<sup>53</sup> *Steptoe*, 14 June 1962.

<sup>54</sup> *Steptoe*, 04 October 1965.

heading into a derelict area where the scrapyards were located. Susan Strasser has highlighted the centrality of margins and boundaries in the management of waste: 'Non-trash belongs in the house; trash goes outside' before being taken to physical margins for managing in 'places that are out of the way of all but the poorest citizens.'<sup>55</sup> Harold and Albert inhabited this marginal space alongside the junk they had collected. The Steptoes' yard, in a nod to the nineteenth-century, was located on 'Oil Drum Lane'. Galton recalled that the name 'was our little homage to the fact that in Victorian times anything to do with modernity was captured and put on street signs.'<sup>56</sup> Predominantly, however, episodes were set in the Steptoes' home and scrapyards, rarely did the series venture into central London, further underlining their own physical and social dislocation from mainstream society.



**Figure 33 - Harold riding his horse and cart back to the yard (*Steptoe*, 11 October 1965).**

Having visually established the Steptoes as geographically and physically marginal, the Steptoes' home was shown amidst a scrapyard brimming with the rubbish of other people. Viewers frequently praised the set design, with audience research reports noting the 'incredibly realistic' setting.<sup>57</sup> A Development Engineer concluded that he 'could not praise the setting enough: the scrapyard and the house are masterpieces.'<sup>58</sup> The placing of the series in a dirty junk-filled rag-and-bone scrapyard was central to the portrayal of Harold

---

<sup>55</sup> Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, pp. 39 – 40.

<sup>57</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 05 January 1962, R9/7/56, BBC WAC.

<sup>58</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 11 October 1965, R9/7/77, BBC WAC.

and Albert because it symbolised their dislocation from the apparent social and economic advances of the 1960s. Frank Muir, the English comedian and writer, joked that Galton and Simpson set *Steptoe* in a junkyard just to annoy the props department.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the stock set, used from the first until the last episode of *Steptoe* and identically created each week using master photographs (which have not been preserved), listed an impressive eighty-five separate props used in the junkyard exterior (Figure 34), thirty separate items in the Steptoes' hallway and sixty-eight in the front room (Figure 35). The list was carefully constructed by producers for the prop's department, with each item painstakingly selected in order to contribute to both the realism and the artistic integrity of the programme. Where descriptions of the quality of the desired prop were available in the BBC's archives, thirty-two were described as being 'old' and nine as 'tatty'. Furthermore, the list of items included an abundance of useless items within the Steptoe home: '3 old bicycle frames', '4 dustbin lids', 'five dozen picture frames', '2 dozen old newspapers', 'two 6 foot high piles of magazines and newspaper', '2 sacks of old rags', '3 fireplaces', '1 broken mirror', 'six dozen pieces of bric-a-brac' and '12 walking sticks'.<sup>60</sup> Simpson concluded that by using so many props they hoped to promote the sense that the Steptoes 'lived in a slum'.<sup>61</sup> The sheer volume of items scattered throughout the Steptoes' home served to create a *mise-en-scène* that was both claustrophobic and dark.

The television critic Maurice Wiggin, writing in *The Sunday Times* in 1964, commended the 'creative claustrophobia of that cluttered room.'<sup>62</sup> Similarly, viewers expressed their belief that the producers had successfully demonstrated 'the "encumbrances" of the Steptoe household setting.'<sup>63</sup> Alain Corbin has highlighted how conventionally 'dark, enclosed areas, low ceilings, heavy atmosphere, the stagnation of stench were for the poor.' Once 'inside the dwelling', there was 'crampedness', 'congestion, a jumble of tools, dirty

---

<sup>59</sup> Corbett, *Corbett*, p. 229.

<sup>60</sup> Stock sets, T12/718/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> Maurice Wiggin, 'The latest *Steptoe*', *Sunday Times*, 12 January 1964, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 11 February 1964, R9/7/67, BBC WAC.

linen and crockery.<sup>64</sup> The Steptoe household was on the margins and dark, enclosed and crammed full of junk. The visual dimensions of the set served to promote the notion that the Steptoes were impoverished and living in slum-like conditions.



**Figure 34 - The Steptoes' scrapyard (*Steptoe*, 17 January 1963).**



**Figure 35 - The Steptoes' front room (*Steptoe*, 17 January 1963).**

The stock set also listed a significant number of 'Victorian' items, pointing to the persistence and salience of Victoriana into the 1960s, long before the recycling of vintage was fashionable. Peter Mandler has suggested that there was a 'low opinion' of the Victorian throughout the post-war period and its physical remnants were yet to be 'highly valued'.<sup>65</sup> Despite this, the Steptoes were surrounded by tokens of the nineteenth-century. The props list included '1 penny farthing bicycle', two grandfather clocks, '4 bentwood chairs',

---

<sup>64</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination* (Leamington Spa, 1986), pp. 148 – 152.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, 1997), p. 365 – 371.



two old gramophones with large horn, '2 bentwood hat and coat stands', '4 small stuffed heads of animals', two Victorian flower displays in glass bowls, '2 Victorian armchairs', '2 dozen stuffed heads and birds', 'stuffed fish', '1 stuffed bear' and '1 Victorian "Greek" statue of a draped woman carrying an urn.'<sup>66</sup> The stress on the Victorian was also evidenced in the programmes' scripts. Making the link to the Victorian slum, Harold commented that their home was 'straight outta Dickens' but joked that he did not think even 'Fagan could've lasted more than a couple nights in this doss house.'<sup>67</sup> The Steptoes' home was not post-Victorian because of its contents and slum-like state. Raphael Samuel has highlighted how, throughout the twentieth century, 'Victorian' was used as a 'byword for the repressive, just as "Dickensian" was used as a shorthand expression to describe conditions of squalor and want.'<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Samuel has insisted that to be 'Victorian' was to be 'out-of-date' and 'anything old was suspect and ripe for development.'<sup>69</sup> In sum, it was 'the worst of the nineteenth-century's legacy to modern Britain.'<sup>70</sup>

The Steptoes' possessions were also directly linked to their impoverished status. Strasser has viewed 'trashmaking' as maintaining 'social differences based on economic status' and, in the context of mass affluence, 'it became identified with the poor, people who stood outside that culture' of affluence and was therefore 'cast as an issue of poverty.'<sup>71</sup> Thus, 'Rubbish', Corbin indicated, 'appears to threaten the social order.'<sup>72</sup> As Harold noted in one of his monologues, his and his father's economic existence was characterised, not by contemporary affluence, but by the 'junk and rubbish, the tawdry remains of a tatty consumer society.'<sup>73</sup> Harold reasoned that 'trying to scratch a living out of other people's rubbish' was 'pathetic!'; 'We're like a

---

<sup>66</sup> Stock sets, T12/718/1.

<sup>67</sup> *Steptoe*, 14 January 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume Two: Island Stories, Unravelling Britain* (London, 1999), p. 130.

<sup>69</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume One: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1996), pp. 51 – 59.

<sup>70</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticisms* (New York, 2007), pp. 4 – 6.

<sup>71</sup> Strasser, *Waste*, pp. 9 – 18.

<sup>72</sup> Corbin, *Foul*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Steptoe*, 14 January 1964.

couple of fleas round a dustbin.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Strasser has highlighted how ragpickers ‘process[ed] the detritus of others’ ensuring that ‘waste to one part of the system acts as resources to another; the dead body and excrement of one organism nourishes its neighbour.’<sup>75</sup> For example, Harold’s much prized cocktail and wine collection was comprised of the amalgamated dregs of bottles collected on his round carefully poured into his drink collection, and the new heating system he hoped to install was sourced from others’ scrap.<sup>76</sup> His affluence comprised the refuse of others, rendering it perverse. Whilst Albert maintained that ‘when you’ve lived as long as I have, you’ll know that what’s rubbish is dead handy to others’, Harold maintained that there was no worth in their possessions, rather they just owned ‘the biggest collection of old rubbish I’ve ever seen in my life.’<sup>77</sup>

Scholars have yet to consider the ways in which viewers engaged with the *mise-en-scène* of the Steptoe setting. I suggest that the audience response to *Steptoe*, as evidenced in BBC audience research reports, indicates that viewers became voyeurs into the low social world of the Steptoe’s, intrigued by images of what was the antithesis to their own existence. Indeed, *Steptoe*’s writers, Galton and Simpson, suggested that the series was premised on a ‘bizarre lower-depths type of background which not only gives an added source of comedy but also has the effect of making us all feel safer and superior to them.’<sup>78</sup> An audience research report highlighted how ‘the fantastic articles scattered around the Steptoes’ living quarters intrigued viewers a good deal, it seems, and one or two said that it had been very satisfying to have “a good look at all the junk”.’<sup>79</sup> In another report, it described how viewers were apparently entranced by ‘the Steptoe setting’ which viewers felt ‘looked so like the real thing that I got the urge to poke about’.<sup>80</sup> Viewers noted how this was ‘a

---

<sup>74</sup> *Steptoe*, 05 July 1962.

<sup>75</sup> Strasser, *Waste*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Steptoe*, 07 June 1962. *Steptoe*, 18 October 1965.

<sup>77</sup> *Steptoe*, 28 June 1962.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, pp. 40 – 41.

<sup>79</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 14 June 1962, R9/7/58, BBC WAC.

<sup>80</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 05 January 1962.

wonderful insight into this type of life.’<sup>81</sup> Whilst ‘this type of life’ was not specifically defined, we can infer that it indicates a ‘different’ type of life to that of the viewer. In the context of affluence, viewers were intrigued by the impoverished minority the Steptoes represented.

The costumes that Harold and Albert wore were also pivotal in their representation as poor and outdated. Detailed descriptions of their outfits are held in the BBC’s archives. Harold’s stock outfit was described by producer Duncan Wood, in memos to the BBC’s wardrobe department, as ‘Tatty old overcoat – torn in places, very dirty and battered. It was, even new, cheap and nasty. Dirty old cap... Old sweater... Old vest – rather dirty with great holes in it’ (Figure 36). Just as their junked possessions were described as old and tatty, so too were their clothes, likely the disregarded garments of others. Their physical appearance became an extension of their lowly existence; the junk was permeating and infecting their appearance. ‘Old’ was the cornerstone of Albert’s ‘stock’ costume too: ‘Old woollen mittens. Old striped shirt... Old dirty white silk scarf. Old black boots. Old socks with holes in’ (Figure 37). For both men, the age of their outfits symbolised their outdated existence. Furthermore, Harold and Albert’s clothes were typical of vagrants from a much earlier, typically Victorian, period. The prospect of a woman coming into the Steptoes’ midst was greeted by a change of clothes into something ‘smarter’, but even their best was characterised in similarly soiled and aged terms. Harold’s outfit consisted of a ‘Dirty old woollen scarf’ and ‘Dirty old grey trousers’. Even his best clothes were permeated with filth and age, underpinning his lack of affluence. Albert changed into a suit which was described as ‘40 years old’ accompanied by only a ‘fairly clean’ shirt which was set off with ‘An old and rather stained black tie’ and ‘a pair of old brown and white... pointed shoes, vintage, c. 1933’ (Figure 38).<sup>82</sup> Albert’s tie was a pretence of something respectable but its age and staining exposed the lie to viewers.

---

<sup>81</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 14 June 1962.

<sup>82</sup> Wardrobe, Hair and Make-Up Requirements, 16 May 1962, T12/785/1, BBC WAC.



**Figure 36 - Harold's stock costume (*Steptoe*, 03 January 1963).**



**Figure 37 - Albert's stock costume (*Steptoe*, 03 January 1963).**



**Figure 38 - Albert's best clothes (*Steptoe*, 17 January 1963).**

Central to Harold and Albert's characterisation as impoverished was the stress on Albert's dirtiness. Harold frequently referred to his father in such terms, characterising him variously as 'a horrible little thing', 'disgusting',

‘revolting’, and, simply, ‘dirty, that’s what you are, dirty!’.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, Harold was forever highlighting his father’s physical uncleanliness. He noted how Albert never washed ‘any lower than the neck or any higher than the wrists’.<sup>84</sup> He told him to ‘wash yourself! Look at your neck; it’s disgusting!’<sup>85</sup> Victoria Kelley has highlighted how in Victorian and Edwardian England, cleanliness was deployed to indicate social status.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the lack of cleanliness further emphasised the Steptoes’ impoverished social position. Worrying he and Harold were going to be arrested for buying a large quantity of lead from a suspect character, Albert described himself as feeling ‘cheap and unclean’, much to Harold’s amusement. Linking immorality with physical filth, Harold placed his arm around his father and declared: ‘unclean? You’re not unclean; you’re filthy!’<sup>87</sup> William Cohen has highlighted how ‘filth is a term of condemnation, which instantly repudiates a threatening thing, person, or idea by ascribing alterity to it’. He has maintained that ‘labelling something filthy is a viscerally powerful means of excluding it.’ Therefore, ‘people are denounced as filthy when they are felt to be unassimilably other, whether because perceived attributes of their identities repulse the onlooker or because physical aspects of their bodies do.’<sup>88</sup> The continuous stress on dirt and age in *Steptoe*, in relation to their home, possessions, clothes and bodies, all served to promote their social and economic exclusion.

The mise-en-scène, as emphasised in the setting and costumes, all worked to emphasise the squalor of the Steptoes’ existence. Viewers recognised this in their reviews of the programme, an audience research report in 1963 recorded the audience’s appreciation of ‘the malodorous costumes and settings’ which were, ‘apparently, little short of superb’. One viewer

---

<sup>83</sup> *Steptoe*, 04 October 1965. *Steptoe*, 08 November 1965. *Steptoe*, 21 January 1964. *Steptoe*, 28 June 1962.

<sup>84</sup> *Steptoe*, 04 February 1964.

<sup>85</sup> *Steptoe*, 08 November 1965.

<sup>86</sup> Victoria Kelley, *Soap and Water: Cleanliness, Dirt and the Working Classes in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (London, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> *Steptoe*, 21 January 1964.

<sup>88</sup> William Cohen, ‘Locating Filth’, in William Cohen and Ryan Johnson (eds.), *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis, 2005), pp. ix – x.

commented: 'Marvellous! One can almost smell the junkyard.'<sup>89</sup> Corbin has highlighted how bourgeois images of the masses have always been 'constructed in terms of filth' with a 'bourgeois emphasis on the stench of the poor.' He has suggested that 'the stench of the poor man was attributed to impregnation'; 'the worker's skin and, even more, his clothing, soaked up foul-smelling juices.' This was even more pronounced for the rag-and-bone man because, Corbin has argued, the 'ragpicker brought the linkage between unpleasant odour and occupation to its extreme.' The ragpicker was 'the grimacing face of the rubbish of the masses, he sat on other people's dung'.<sup>90</sup> Smell was implicitly linked in *Steptoe* to the characters' occupation and associated impoverished social status. For example, Harold, in one episode, maintained that 'the smell of that horse and this yard, it hangs over me like a noxious cloud.'<sup>91</sup>

*Steptoe* mixed the genres of situational comedy and social realist drama in its production. Media scholars are unanimous in their characterisation of *Steptoe* as both drama and comedy. Rolinson has highlighted how throughout the 1960s genres other than drama 'made a vital contribution to social realist discourses.' He singled out *Steptoe* as one such example, suggesting that it invoked 'New Wave tropes' through its exploration of themes such as 'social mobility, generational tensions, the interrelationship of domestic and work spaces and the stressing of practical limitations on narratives of escape.'<sup>92</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has contended that the 'New Wave' movement is best understood as a rise in the media exhibiting 'working-class realism', defined by Stephen Lacey as 'reveal[ing] the situation of the working classes at the level of its cultural and everyday practices.'<sup>93</sup> *Steptoe*, however, offered an insight into the real situation of the very lowest social elements. The dramatic underpinnings of the series were evident from its initial commissioning. Tom Sloan, Head of Light Entertainment at the BBC, expressed his belief that *Steptoe*

---

<sup>89</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 03 January 1963, R9/7/62, BBC WAC.

<sup>90</sup> Corbin, *Foul*, pp. 144 – 148.

<sup>91</sup> *Steptoe*, 25 October 1965.

<sup>92</sup> Dave Rolinson, 'Small Screens and Big Voices: Televisual Social Realism and the Popular', in David Tucker (ed.), *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 188.

<sup>93</sup> Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves*, p. 123. Stephen Lacey, *Tony Garnett* (London, 2007), p. 5.

was not 'a purely comedic production' but 'a dramatic piece.'<sup>94</sup> It was notable that the pilot episode was described by Galton and Simpson as a 'play' and the first series of *Steptoe* was listed in the *Radio Times* under 'Plays and Films' rather than 'Light Entertainment'.<sup>95</sup> Corbett and Brambell were also employed by the BBC on 'drama' terms and rates, ensuring their respective pay packets of '150 guineas' and '175 guineas inclusive' were well below the usual rate for stars of a light entertainment programme.<sup>96</sup>

The social realism of *Steptoe* relied heavily on its *mise-en-scène* which legitimated its claims to social authenticity. It also placed great stress on the skills of its dramatic actors. Indeed, Asa Briggs has suggested that 'The quality of acting was closely related to the authenticity of the setting.'<sup>97</sup> Simpson, one of the sitcom's writers, commented that 'We wanted to convey the reality of this situation, and for that we needed actors.'<sup>98</sup> Traditionally, sitcoms had revolved around an existing and well-known comic taking on a character role, but for *Steptoe* they employed two, dramatically trained, actors to take on character roles in a situation comedy. Simpson explained the difference: '*Steptoe* is ours. We've got two good actors but it is our thing, whereas with *Hancock* we were just Tony's scriptwriters.'<sup>99</sup> The acting capabilities of both Brambell and Corbett were consistently celebrated by viewers in the BBC's audience research reports. Viewers were full of 'a tremendous amount of praise for both actors', who were 'first-rate talent', and whose performances had ensured the 'portraiture' 'could not have been better by men actually in the rag-and-bone trade'.<sup>100</sup> In further reports, audiences expressed the view that Corbett and Brambell 'had managed to get under the skin of their parts to such an extent that it was, apparently, hard to imagine them as anyone other than the dirty, disreputable old junk dealer and his son.' This was the consequence

---

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 46.

<sup>95</sup> 'Comedy Playhouse' *Radio Times*, 28 December 1961, p. 50. '*Steptoe and Son*', *Radio Times*, 31 March 1962, p. 42.

<sup>96</sup> Memo: Re: *Steptoe and Son*, 01 February 1962, Artists, Harry H. Corbett, 1955-62, BBC WAC.

<sup>97</sup> Briggs, *Competition*, p. 435.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Stevens, *Masters*, p. 285.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Crowther and Pinfold, *Laughter*, p. 63.

<sup>100</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 14 June 1962.

of viewers who ‘found it difficult to realise that they were acting’: their performances were ‘faultless’.<sup>101</sup>

The striking visual images, offered by the sets and costumes, alongside the powerful performances by dramatic actors, ensured that the *Steptoe* scripts offered pathos and humour in equal measure. This was recognised by those responsible for the programme and the viewers alike. Corbett described the programme as, fundamentally, a ‘tragicomedy’: ‘a marriage of light entertainment and drama’. He maintained that Galton and Simpson had ‘evolved a character drama entirely new to television: deeper, truer, sadder, funnier than anything that has gone before. It’s really tragicomedy, which is the essence of everyday life.’<sup>102</sup> Subsequently, television critics commented that *Steptoe’s* ‘humour had real compassion and pathos’ and that there was ‘a real recognisable human predicament at the heart of the fun; the laughter is sometimes quite near to tears.’<sup>103</sup> Viewers similarly appreciated this eclectic mix of laughter and pathos. An audience research report recorded that ‘a large number felt that this was not only most lively and piquant comedy writing, but also a combination of humour and pathos.’<sup>104</sup> Viewers had come to associate pathos ‘with the dealings between Steptoe and Son’ and some viewers even felt one episode was deemed to be ‘a little too near the sad truth’ to be wholly humorous.<sup>105</sup>

Discussing nineteenth-century London, Stedman Jones has demonstrated that in the 1880s there was a renewed focus on the poor which ‘constituted a disquieting alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty.’<sup>106</sup> In the 1960s, *Steptoe* offered a related vision of Victorian pauperism which challenged the widespread notion of extensive contemporary affluence amongst viewers. According to Harold, he and his father lived like ‘paupers, it is

---

<sup>101</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 03 January 1963. ARR: *Steptoe* TX 07 January 1964, R9/7/67, BBC WAC.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Harry H. Corbett as Harold’, *Radio Times*, 21 June 1962, p. 42. Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, pp. 33 – 34.

<sup>103</sup> Press, T12/788/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>104</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 14 June 1962.

<sup>105</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 10 January 1963, R9/7/62, BBC WAC. ARR: *Steptoe* TX 07 January 1964.

<sup>106</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 1 – 15.



degrading!<sup>107</sup> Throughout the series, Harold and Albert found themselves in financial hardship. For example, in 'The Siege of Steptoe Street', Harold and Albert were in arrears with a number of local creditors who appeared in the scrapyard with a summons and bailiffs. They failed to pay, however, because all they had between them was 'five and four halfpenny', one tin of asparagus tips and a tin of snails which would not cover the debts of '£190 8s 4p.'<sup>108</sup> Harold and Albert did not include any of the junk in the yard and house in their valuation of their possessions, emphasising how worthless it all was.

As a result of their poverty, death as a route out was regularly explored in *Steptoe* and served to emphasise the futility of their impoverished situation. In an episode in which Harold and Albert feared for the health of their horse, Hercules, Harold suggested that if the 'horse snuffs it', the vet 'might as well get his humane killer out and have a go at us an'all'. He continued, in his monologue:

Cos I'm fed up with it Dad, I've had enough. I don't wanna know. What is the point? We stumble along from one crisis to another... Let's all go together, you, me and the horse... let the council pay for the funeral... anything's better than this mate. It don't hurt. Just one wallop with the steam hammer and it's all over, you won't feel a thing... What's wrong with being dead? It's marvellous!... No more worries, no more bills, peace and quiet. No mate, there is nothing wrong with being dead. It's the living bit that frightens me.<sup>109</sup>

The fatalism of Harold's monologue crystallised the futility of their impoverishment and was intended to invoke sympathy from and prick the conscience of the audience. The Steptoes' situation had become so desperate, death was better than life. The horse was the lifeblood of their occupation and their, albeit derisory, economic existence and if the animal was finished so too were they. Such sentiments have strong links to the nineteenth century when, as David Vincent has suggested, 'The loss of a close relation was so bound up with the material problems of life that at worst it seemed no more than an

---

<sup>107</sup> *Steptoe*, 28 June 1962.

<sup>108</sup> *Steptoe*, 25 October 1965.

<sup>109</sup> *Steptoe*, 03 January 1963.

intensification of the misery of existence.<sup>110</sup> Their situation had become so desperate that Harold referenced the inevitability of a council-paid funeral, something which Julie-Marie Strange has highlighted ‘signified abject poverty’, ‘crushed dreams’ and ‘shame’.<sup>111</sup>

In the final part of this section I want to offer a close textual and performance analysis of the *Steptoe* episode entitled ‘The Bath’, broadcast on 10 January 1963, in order to evidence in detail how the themes of Victorianism and poverty, as detailed thus far, versus participation in modernity and affluence were handled in the series.<sup>112</sup> ‘The Bath’ began with a shot of Harold climbing through the scrap yard in front of their home, through the hallway where he dumped a rubber tyre before entering the cluttered living room. Harold was returning from the streets of metropolitan plenty, on his horse and cart, to this outland, on the margins of society, which was filled with the waste of others. The setting showed a mass of broken and outdated items littered throughout the yard and home. Viewers praised how:

...the notion of ‘The Bath’ went forward in the midst of ‘the pick of the junk’ (‘where did they get that lovely bear from?’), and that the Steptoe household settings continue to be full of ‘fascinating’ sights (‘that house would take a lot of beating for clutter’).<sup>113</sup>

During the episode, Harold joked that the rubbish collectors never have anything to collect on their weekly visits because it was all inside of their house. The Steptoes’ participation in the affluence of the decade was on the margins, at the end of the refuse chain, surrounded by the disregarded and worthless rubbish of others.

Whilst the audience saw Harold in his usual dirty and out-dated outfit at the start of the episode (Figure 39), Albert was shown bathing in a tin bath tub before the fire (Figure 40). Questions of odour and filth immediately

---

<sup>110</sup> David Vincent, ‘Love and death and the nineteenth-century working class’, *Social History* 5:2 (1980), pp. 223 – 247.

<sup>111</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, ‘“She cried a very little”: Death, grief and mourning in working-class culture, c. 1880 – 1914’, *Social History* 27:2 (2002), pp. 143 – 150. Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns: Reassessing the pauper grave’, *Past & Present* 178 (2003), p. 150.

<sup>112</sup> *Steptoe*, 10 January 1963. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent quotes and figures in the remainder of this section are taken from this episode.

<sup>113</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 10 January 1963.

predominated as a result; the entire episode was premised on questions of physical cleanliness. Though Albert bathing could serve to dispel the myth of the character as dirty, the very act of bathing in the living room nodded to an earlier period, quintessentially nineteenth century, and his aged and malnourished body, unsightly teeth, his 'cleaning' himself with a dirty rag, his confession to only owning one pair of underwear and his decision to bathe with his socks and pork-pie hat on, only served to reinforce notions of filth and odour. Indeed, Harold was surprised to see Albert bathing at all, questioning if it was his birthday. Harold was alarmed by his father's decision to bathe because he was expecting female company and did not want her 'to see my dad in front of the fire in a tin bath.' Albert asked, why, if Harold was so 'ashamed of his home', he had invited a girl around. To which Harold responded: 'Look I told her not to expect a palace but I didn't say nothing about a scruffy old git having a bath.' He reinforced their social difference and pauper status in his proclamation that 'Other people don't live like that dad, not any more, those days has gone... brings down the whole tone of the place straight away. It is a social stigma these days...'. The studio audience laughed at the incongruity that anything further could be done to bring down the tone of the Steptoes' home. Harold expressed concern that such an occurrence would alienate his working-class date, further emphasising their lowly status; they are below the working-class. Their poverty and outdatedness were prefigured immediately at the start of the episode through the *mise-en-scène*, the narrative focus on dirt and the grotesque figure of the old man in a tin bath tub. 40% of all British homes watched 'The Bath'. Consequently, it raised the issue of poverty with its mass audience well before its official recognition in 1965.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 10 January 1963.



**Figure 39 - Harold's dirty and unkempt clothing (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**



**Figure 40 - Albert bathing in the front room (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

Albert was indifferent to Harold's complaints, however, as he proceeded to set up his evening meal on a board over the bath tub. As he attempted to serve himself some pickled onions from a jar, however, he accidentally spilled them into the bath, prompting hilarity amongst the studio audience. It further dispelled any notion of cleanliness as he further soiled the water, intended to clean his filth, with onions and brine (Figure 41). As Harold re-entered the room, it looked to Harold, and the audience, as if Albert was fiddling with his genitals as he attempted to reclaim the pickled onions from the water. Harold accused Albert of being 'a dirty old man' and, as an argument erupted between father and son, Albert placed the retrieved onions back into the jar. Harold complained that the jar said 'pickled onions in vinegar... not sullied water' and remonstrated that 'to fish pickled onions out of your bath water and put them

back in the jar is an act of extreme *dirty*... dirty, dirty!' The stress on dirt and filth in the costumes, settings and antics of the episode all served to reinforce Harold's earlier proclamation that they weren't like other people, while Harold's labelling of Albert as dirty witnessed his own attempts to differentiate himself from his father.



**Figure 41 - Albert eats his dinner in the bath but loses his pickled onions in the water (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

Viewers enjoyed their momentary insight into the lower depths of the Steptoe's existence. According to the episode's audience research report, it was 'old Steptoe's "uproarious" sitting-room ablutions' and 'such sordid scenes as Albert in the bath that tickled viewers fancy most'. Some, however, 'pronounced the bath scene "revolting" (and the pickled onions episode of Albert's bath-based meal particularly "nauseating").' Viewers praised how Brambell and Corbett had 'marvellous[ly] interpreted' the Steptoe characters.<sup>115</sup>

On arriving at the yard, Harold's date, Delia, appeared taken aback by her surroundings as she entered the house through the scrapyard, muttering 'oh my gawd', indicating how abnormal the surroundings were for those looking, and indeed, stepping in (Figure 42). This was all the more prevalent given the girl's working-class accent, her horror emphasised how the Steptoes were below even the working class. Harold had invited her around for cocktails before they attended the bingo together. This statement prompted laughter from the audience, who noted the incongruity between the metropolitan

---

<sup>115</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 10 January 1963.

promise of cocktails before engaging in the working-class leisure pursuit of bingo.



**Figure 42 - Delia is horrified by her surroundings (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

In 'The Bath', Harold evidently did not know what comprised a Manhattan cocktail after Delia requested one, but desperate to demonstrate his cultural capital he tried and failed to make it correctly, accidentally including the horse liniments that Albert had left on the side (Figure 43). Harold's attempts at modernity and affluence were undermined by both his father and his social status, represented by the occupational need for horse liniments. Taking a sip of the drink, Delia experienced a choking fit before falling into Albert's used and sullied bath water, the bath still present in the middle of the living room though concealed under a tatty table cloth. Consequently, Delia, in her finery, became contaminated by the filth and dirt of the Steptoes' (Figure 44). Albert was an ever-present block on Harold's improvement and desire for finer things. Harold accused his father of 'hold[ing] me back all these years'.



**Figure 43 - Harold struggles to make a Manhattan cocktail (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**



**Figure 44 - Delia falls into Albert's bath water (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

In the next scene, set on the following day, Harold returned from his round with a second-hand bath tub (Figure 45). Marwick has highlighted how 'inside lavatories and properly equipped bathrooms' were a demonstrable aspect of the 'massive improvements in material life' experienced during the 1960s whereby 'large sections of society joined the consumer society and acquired "mod cons"'.<sup>116</sup> The absence of a bathroom in the Steptoes' home was emblematic of their poverty. In the episode, the bath tub became a symbol of

---

<sup>116</sup> Marwick, *Sixties*, p. 18.

Harold's desire to share in the affluence and modernity of the 1960s. In an extended monologue Harold explained to Albert:

I'm not prepared to go on living any longer in a house without a bathroom. I don't think you realise how degrading it is. It's uncivilised... here we are, 1963, the affluent lecherous society, 'never had it so good', do you realise that there are four million houses in this country without bathrooms? Four million, dad. And that don't include the poor devils who ain't even got a house. Well they ain't gonna degrade me no longer mate, the great unwashed, but not any longer, cos I'm gonna build my own bathroom, I'm not waiting for them dad... we got dignity dad.

Harold, here, gave voice to those individuals, like him, who lived in homes with no bathrooms, a demonstrable aspect of the contemporary improvements in material life, at a time of perceived mass affluence. He also expressed his outrage at their neglect by officialdom by challenging Harold Macmillan's much quoted 'never had it so good' soundbite. Robert Ross, the show's biographer, maintained that *Steptoe* 'displayed a rare understanding of the poverty-stricken situation many families faced in Macmillan's "never had it so good" utopia.' He contended that 'The Bath' brought before the national conscience the four million homes without a bathroom and the great unwashed had a champion in *Steptoe*.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, by challenging the notion of universal participation in affluence the series highlighted to viewers the persistence of poverty well in advance of its official exposure. Harold's reference to the persistence of the 'great unwashed' in the early 1960s called into question the perceived modernity of the decade, by reinforcing his own status as a Victorian pauper in terms borrowed from the nineteenth century. It also, again, linked notions of cleanliness to questions of poverty: simply how can the poor escape their designation as the great unwashed when they lack adequate bathing facilities? Harold's bath tub became a symbol for his desire to achieve and to share in the material benefits of contemporary society.

---

<sup>117</sup> Ross, *Steptoe*, pp. 8 – 63.





**Figure 45 - Harold returned home from his rounds with a bath tub (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

Just as Speight's political sensibilities informed his comic discourse, *Steptoe* was also occasionally influenced by its creators' and Corbett's left-wing politics and commitment to the Labour cause. Harold's attack, in his monologue, on Macmillan's 'never had it so good' society was completely attuned with Corbett's, and the scriptwriters', own leftist credentials. Both Galton and Simpson noted, respectively, how, in *Steptoe*, they 'pontificated on what had gone wrong' since 'the wonderful time of change' under Clement Attlee's Labour Government and how their 'job as writers' was 'to question the government of the time.'<sup>118</sup> Most potently in 'The Bath' episode, they challenged the incumbent Conservative government and its apparent disregard for those who had failed to participate in the economic advances of the period. Corbett, as Harold, was a willing accomplice. He had been a 'stalwart' of Joan Littlewood's radical Theatre Workshop and so important were his 'political opinions' that Corbett, apparently, turned 'down parts in non-left wing theatre' prior to accepting the role of Harold Steptoe.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, as has been noted, Corbett viewed the sitcom as 'the best opportunity "for good social

---

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 97.

<sup>119</sup> Colin Sell, 'Corbett, Harry (1925–1982)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, May 2015), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92320>, accessed 28 Jan 2016.

comment".<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1960s Corbett was a committed campaigner for Harold Wilson's Labour Party, addressing meetings and canvassing for votes. Indeed, Galton and Simpson wrote a monologue for Corbett to deliver, in guise as Harold, for Labour's 1964 national election rally at Wembley in which Harold ridiculed Albert's Tory opinions and 'explained at length over the telephone to his father why he was going to vote Labour'. Corbett was described in *The Sunday Times* as 'the star of the day, rivalling Wilson himself'.<sup>121</sup> Simpson has noted how 'Corbett was very much in with the Labour Party and, as with the 1964 election, he was used as a high-profile supporter during the 1966 election.'<sup>122</sup> Alf Morris, the Labour MP for Wythenshawe, surmised that Corbett 'was a very generous person, Wilson loved him.'<sup>123</sup> Throughout the 1960s, Wilson, and other senior Labour figures, maintained close relationships with Galton, Simpson and Corbett, with regular dinner parties and 'glass[es] of sherry' at Downing Street.<sup>124</sup> *Steptoe* utilised Corbett's well-publicised affiliation with the party to comic effect in one 1965 episode when Harold failed to be elected as a Labour council candidate because 'the cloth cap image... tended to work against us' in the face of the 'growing middle class electorate' of Shepherd's Bush. Harold was rejected in favour of 'Dr Stewart' who embodied everything the party 'wish[ed] to project': 'young, university education, respectable practice, the perfect image.'<sup>125</sup> Harold could only dream of such affluence and respectability.

Indeed, in order to obtain his dream of 'a proper bathroom with running water and bath mats and that', in 'The Bath', Harold had to source somebody else's disregarded, tatty and old bathroom suite. Harold's hoped-for affluence was again represented as the consequence of another's junking. The audience also learned how impractical Harold's desires for a bathroom were in the

---

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Briggs, *Competition*, p. 215.

<sup>121</sup> Terry Coleman, 'Labour Party National Rally at Wembley', *Guardian*, 14 September 1964, p. 9. Richard West, 'A funny thing happened at the Labour rally', *Sunday Times*, 13 September 1964, p. 15.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 114.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Corbett, *Corbett*, p. 296.

<sup>124</sup> Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 98. 'Steptoe Junior at No. 10', *Guardian*, 10 December 1965, p. 15. Corbett, *Corbett*, pp. 279 – 295.

<sup>125</sup> *Steptoe*, 08 November 1965.

Step toe's small house, as it would involve moving Albert out of his room and into the cupboard under the stairs, so his room could be converted into a bathroom. Nonetheless, viewers confessed, in an audience research report, that their

...sympathies were engaged by Harold's efforts to provide his father with a more gracious style of plumbing – a well-meaning gesture, it was thought though, naturally, hopeless, since, as might be expected, Albert's wily antics resulted in much chagrin for Harold who had to bear not only the flight of his girl friends from such sordid scenes, but also the collapse of the ceiling of Albert's bedroom in which attempts to rig up a "proper" bath had been made.<sup>126</sup>

Viewers apparently recognised and sympathised not only with Harold's aspirations but also with the fundamental impossibility of their achievement as a result of his outdated and impoverished circumstances.

Having started on the installation of the bathroom, Harold directed Albert's attention to a glossy article entitled 'New Styling', taken from the lifestyle magazine *Home and Beauty*, which was pinned to the wall (Figure 46). It featured a middle-class woman standing in a recently fitted bathroom, the epitome of modernity and affluence. The camera panned out from the magazine article to the Steptoes' bathroom, offering a stark contrast with the room in which Harold and Albert found themselves, with its peeling walls and a rusting second-hand bathroom suite to match (Figure 47). Pointing at the magazine, Harold explained to his father that 'this is what it is going to look like, this is the one I'm copying' and spoke with seeming authority about what was on trend in the world of contemporary bathroom design. Harold desired this glossy and idealised image of affluence, despite the fact, as Albert was sure to point out, that Harold did not have the resources or skills necessary to recreate it in their home.

---

<sup>126</sup> ARR: *Step toe* TX 10 January 1963.



**Figure 46 - Harold admiring an article in *Home and Beauty* (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**



**Figure 47 - The Steptoes' bathroom (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

Though the audience did not get to see the finished bathroom, the final scene of the episode witnessed Harold returning to the yard with another working-class girl. Like his earlier consort, she was horrified to learn that Harold 'lives here' in what 'looks like a junkyard'. Harold now defended it as 'quite nice inside... more what you might call a Mews cottage with stables' and boldly boasted about the new bathroom. He evidently believed that this new symbol of affluence offered him a ticket to better things, principally the interest of the girl who appeared to be impressed with his household modifications. The bathroom apparently now compensated for Harold's low social status and his slum home. The girl, however, entered the living room to find Albert in the bath, it having fallen through the ceiling as a consequence of woodworm (Figure 48). Harold's dream of affluence and modernity, symbolised by his bath and bathroom, had literally been swiped from under his feet, as the ceiling had

literally fallen in on his aspirations. The scene was a powerful metaphor for the shaky foundations upon which Harold attempted to achieve affluence and modernity. The episode ended as it started, with Albert bathing in the living room; affluence out of reach, their Victorian status and their poverty reaffirmed and inescapable (Figure 49).



**Figure 48 - Woodworm has taken hold of the bathroom floor (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**



**Figure 49 - Albert bathes in the living room again (*Steptoe*, 10 January 1963).**

From 1962 to 1965, *Steptoe* persistently challenged the extent to which the 1960s could be characterised by affluence and modernity, enjoyed by the

mass of British people. Rather, *Steptoe* highlighted the persistence of a minority in society who lived in circumstances which were dictated by economic poverty and still heavily influenced by memories and experiences from the nineteenth century. Harold and Albert existed in a state which was far from post-Victorian. The series championed to a large audience the persistence of poverty, well before its formal exposition by sociologists in the middle of the decade. Harold and Albert's poverty was underpinned by their occupation as rag-and-bone men, a role which had its genesis in the Victorian period and had always been associated with the very lowest in society, due to its close relationship to rubbish and filth. *Steptoe* highlighted those who lived, both physically and metaphorically, on the margins of society. Their home, which adjoined a scrapyard, was reminiscent of a Victorian slum, with its abundance of old, tatty and useless pieces of junk. The Steptoes' attempts at 'affluence' were always perverse; they were the amalgamation of others' useless and worthless possessions junked and their economic reliance on rubbish further emphasised their impoverished status. The clothes they wore were characterised by age and dirt and singled them out as poor. Not only were their clothes dirty, but so too were their bodies. The *mise-en-scène* of *Steptoe* was characterised by the dark and cramped condition of their home which, alongside their clothing, ensured the stench of the poor hung over them.

### **3.2: Harold Steptoe: cultural capital and its lack**

Bourdieu, in the context of post-war France, concluded that culture played a vital part in the sustenance and reproduction of class. Culture represented a form of capital – 'cultural capital' – inherited and learned through family and education, and subsequently exchanged as a means of marking social distance from others.<sup>127</sup> Building on Bourdieu's theory, Simon Gunn and Mike Savage, in British case studies, have highlighted the significance of culture in understanding and defining the British middle classes since the nineteenth

---

<sup>127</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

century.<sup>128</sup> Savage, for example, has highlighted how, in the post-war period, as workers achieved freedoms and choices it became difficult for the middle classes to justify their own cultural values in terms of 'culture' and 'civilisation' without appearing snobbish. As a result, there was a significant rethinking of middle class cultural values as they sought to define themselves more in terms of their 'managerial' and 'technical role'.<sup>129</sup> Studies of the working class, for example by Savage and Ben Jones, have also suggested that, during the 1960s, the working classes increasingly came to see class as being less about occupation and, consequently, utilised culture in order to promote their 'ordinariness' in opposition to middle- and upper-class values.<sup>130</sup>

In this section, I build on these studies which have explored culture as a manifestation of social status, to examine how Harold attempted to develop his cultural capital in order to escape his low social and economic circumstances. I argue that Harold attempted to remove himself from his existence as a lowly rag-and-bone man, both physically and imaginatively, through his cultural pursuits in order to participate in the cultural and economic developments of the 1960s. Such a narrative enabled Galton and Simpson to further contest the pervasiveness of affluence and modernity in the 1960s. Harold deployed culture in his vain endeavours to participate, but his low economic and social status as an impoverished rag-and-bone man, and his father's interventions, always undermined his claims to culture. The message from the series was that social mobility was impossible for those who were economically impoverished. In his endeavours to participate, Harold also sought to differentiate himself and to mark social distance, through his utilisation of culture, from his father, who was symbolic of the low cultural and social life he hoped to move beyond.

The very first episode of *Steptoe*, entitled 'The Offer', explored the issue of Harold's exclusion from affluence and modernity and his entrapment in a

---

<sup>128</sup> Gunn, 'Translating Bourdieu', p. 54. Mike Savage, 'Affluence', pp. 458 – 459.

<sup>129</sup> Savage, 'Affluence', pp. 458 – 459.

<sup>130</sup> Mike Savage, 'Working Class-Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology* 39:5 (2005), pp. 935 – 946. Jones, *Working Classes*, pp. 52 – 53.

state of poverty as a rag-and-bone man with his father.<sup>131</sup> The episode's synopsis, provided by the BBC, highlighted how 'Albert is happy... but Harold is looking for a chance to break away. It seems the opportunity to better himself has at last arrived. He has received "The Offer".'<sup>132</sup> The episode was premised on Albert's satisfaction with his social and cultural status, contrasted with Harold's desire for a better life, underpinned by the notion of an 'Offer'. Throughout the episode the 'Offer' was never solidly defined and its indeterminate nature enabled the audience to question whether it was a tangible reality, or whether it remained a flight of fancy on Harold's part. As the episode developed, however, it became evident it was a futile fantasy. The 'Offer's' indefinite status also suggested that social mobility out of poverty was impossible and, therefore, that the pervasive narratives of growth and progress throughout the 1960s were beyond the reach of the impoverished segment of society that Harold represented.

The 'Offer' remained a persistent reference point for Harold throughout the episode, as he told his father 'I've had an offer... and it don't include you or that rotten horse, see!' When Harold discovered Albert had been drinking his gin, he again informed his father 'I'm going to take that offer... that's one thing I'm not standing for, nicking stuff outta my cocktail cabinet, you've gone too far this time, this is final, I'm going to pack everything onto the horse and cart and I'm gunna take that offer...'. In these instances, the 'Offer' represented something better, economically, socially and culturally, than Harold's current lot in life which was symbolised by the horse, Albert and his occupation. The 'Offer' presented Harold, he explained, with the chance of 'breaking away see', of 'strik[ing] out on me own', of 'mak[ing] me mark' away from Albert whom he claimed had 'held me back all these years, you and that rotten horse and the cart, keeping me all the time back.'

As the episode progressed the 'Offer' was linked, by Harold, to notions of cultural capital; the symbol of the 'Offer' apparently represented access to

---

<sup>131</sup> *Steptoe*, 07 June 1962. All subsequent references and figures are to this episode unless otherwise stated.

<sup>132</sup> Memo from Chief Assistant, General, 21 July 1967.



culture, affluence and modernity. As Harold began to pack his things onto the cart, he loaded a chair (Figure 50) and standing back to admire it, proclaimed that it would 'look very nice in my study, that would, I think I'll have it recovered in red leather with brass nails all round here. Yeah, pine panel library I'll have, with books right up to the ceiling'. The camera panned out to reveal Harold looking longingly into the distance with a large grin on his dirty face, looking beyond the junk-filled yard he found himself in (Figure 51). The *mise-en-scène*, with the scrapyard in the background, however, only served to give Harold's dreams a sense of impossible optimism. Indeed, the juxtaposition between the scrapyard and a pine-panelled library was striking; the yard was symbolic of their Victorian impoverishment whilst the library offered a vision of culture and affluence. Harold went into the house to gather his books for his library and emerged carrying four battered books, under his arm, which were tied together with string (Figure 52). These four scruffy books were emblematic of Harold's limited abilities to access the culture he professed to seek. Alongside the books, Harold also returned from the house with a single golf club in a golfing bag (Figure 53). Harold confessed that a golf club was 'essential... all company directors play golf.' Simpson, one of the show's writers, later highlighted how 'This one golf club was his symbol of a better life, a tangible symbol of his need to get away from his father and improve himself.'<sup>133</sup> The golf club symbolised economic prosperity and affluence as a successful company director. Harold also loaded some 'spare tyres' and 'an old battery' Albert had located in the yard onto the cart, determined to keep them 'in my garage so my chauffeur can look after it.' There was a fundamental inconsistency between the demonstrable affluence a chauffeur would offer and the old worn-out tyres and second-hand battery that would service the car. Throughout the episode, Harold's notion of cultural capital was shown to be premised on possessions and their quantity, not their utilisation. These trophies of social mobility counted for nothing because of his lack of real cultural capital, the ability to engage with culture and his lack of accessibility to real opportunities. In these

---

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Corbett, *Corbett*, p. 220.

scenes, *Steptoe* highlighted how social mobility, achieving affluence and modernity, was beyond the reach of the impoverished minority, as represented by Harold, owing, not only to economic inequality, but also to cultural deficiencies.



**Figure 50 - Harold loads the chair for his study onto the cart (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**



**Figure 51 – Harold longingly considers ‘The Offer’ (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**



**Figure 52 - Harold's four battered books tied together with string for his pine panelled library (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**



**Figure 53 - Harold's prized golf club (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**

Until Harold gets his hoped-for chauffeur he has to rely on Hercules the horse and the cart to move his prized possessions out of the junkyard. Albert, a perpetual block on Harold's hoped for advancements, however, refused to lend him the horse and cart: 'No, he's my horse, I'm not giving him to you... you've never liked him... You're not having the horse!' Undeterred by Albert's resistance, Harold resolved to move the cart on his own:

I'll soon have that on the move. I'm sorry it had to end this way. Well, I'll come and see you... when the pressure's off. Cheerio then... I'll be off then. Cheerio. No hard feelings. It's the only way. If you don't look out for yourself you don't deserve to get on. I mean I was in a rut, see, if I can't go now... I'll never go.

With each short burst of speech Harold attempted to lift the cart and leave the yard (Figure 54) and with each pained heave of the cart it became increasingly evident he simply could not move it and leave to take up the 'Offer'.



**Figure 54 - Harold can't move the cart and therefore leave (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**

Harold's physical inability to leave was a powerful metaphor for the structural inequalities that trapped him in poverty with his father. The cart, inherited from Albert and a key symbol of his status as a rag-and-bone man, anchored him to the scrapyards which was so palpable and present in the background of the scene. As the realisation hit that departure was impossible, Harold slumped over the cart and, as the camera zoomed in for a close up, he began crying. He proclaimed 'I can't go, I can't get away' (Figure 55).



**Figure 55 - Harold falls onto the cart and starts to cry as he realises escape is impossible (*Steptoe*, 07 June 1962).**

'The Offer' offered some of the most powerful scenes of *Steptoe* and serves as a further example of the series' genre-mixing. The studio audience fell silent as Harold literally crumbled and cried, unable to get away from his position. Simpson recalled that he watched the recording of the scene with amazement because 'Harry actually broke down and cried and I thought, real tears! This is what it's all about... this is acting! We weren't used to it with writing for comedians... Harry really got hold of that final scene. It was real drama.'<sup>134</sup> The audience research report for the episode recorded similar sentiments from viewers:

this was an extraordinarily sympathetically observed cameo of the relationship between old Albert... and his son... which had the hallmarks of comedy at its very best in that tears were never far from laughter. Here surely was comedy at its most effective, with humour and pathos skilfully interwoven yet with never a hint of crudeness or sickly sentiment.

---

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, p. 33.

The success of the programme, viewers concluded, was due to the actors who had given 'extremely sensitive and sympathetic interpretations of the two characters.'<sup>135</sup>

As Harold fell to the floor, sobbing, Albert placed his arm around him: 'I'll go and put the kettle on then and make a cup of tea, shall I?' Harold remaining determined, but physically and emotionally beaten, cried: 'I'm not staying... I've got to go I'm not staying here, I'm gonna take that offer.' Albert picked Harold up and led him into the house: 'they'll keep that offer open for ya. You can go another day. Or you can stay here with your old dad and wait until a better offer comes along...'. Harold's low social, economic and cultural status was reaffirmed, he returned to the house with Albert. Derek Hill, offering a review of the episode for *The Listener*, concluded that the:

...real surprise is the ending... when the son, desperate to leave the junkyard for finer things, finds it physically impossible to move the cart he has loaded with his possessions... he sobs; and as his shrivelled old dad consolingly leads him back for a cup of tea the play blossoms into a hugely comprehending study of the millions hopelessly pinned down by the sheer weight of the trappings they have accumulated.<sup>136</sup>

Contemporary commentators highlighted how Harold was representative of a sizeable minority of individuals in 1960s Britain who were unable to participate in post-war mass society as a consequence of their low social, cultural and economic status which ensured advancement was impossible. In 'The Offer', the cultural and economic limitations of Harold's existence prevented his participation in the social and economic advances of the 1960s.

Central to Harold's limited cultural capital was his upbringing by his father alone. Media scholars, who have studied *Steptoe*, have all stressed how the absence of a woman in the series was central to the masculine dynamic

---

<sup>135</sup> ARR: *Steptoe* TX 05 January 1962.

<sup>136</sup> Derek Hill, 'Critics on the Hearth', *Listener*, 14 June 1962, p. 1045.

between the two main characters.<sup>137</sup> I would also suggest, however, that the lack of a persistent female character, specifically Harold's mother/Albert's wife, was pivotal to Galton and Simpson's exploration of Harold's lack of cultural capital which was promoted as one cause, alongside economic inequality, for his low status. Indeed, Galton and Simpson have maintained that:

...one of the most interesting things about developing the characters was talking about the mother, who never appeared. She'd been dead thirty years, since Harold was six years old... we made her a teacher, and it came out she had been a bit more middle class than [Albert]... had she been alive [Harold] would have got a proper schooling, he might have gone on and been something in the world.<sup>138</sup>

They made viewers aware of the mother's absence in the second episode and this served as a forceful backdrop to all the subsequent explorations of Harold's lack of cultural capital. Elizabeth Silva has highlighted how in Bourdieu's work a strong emphasis was placed on the role of women in the transmission of cultural capital: 'home and family are central... where women, as mothers and homemakers, play a crucial role in individual early development, and ensure the transmission of particular values of cultural capital, which cannot be guaranteed otherwise.'<sup>139</sup> The centrality of Albert's involvement in Harold's lack of social status was stressed in one episode when Harold stared longingly at a picture of his mother, following an altercation with Albert, and asked her picture 'Why couldn't it have been just you and me? What did you need him to come along and spoil it for?' Emphasising the pathos of the scene, as Harold spoke a violin began to play as there was a slow-fade out into the next scene (Figure 56).<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Crowther and Pinfold, *Laughter*, p. 65. Rolinson, 'Masculinity'. Neale and Krutnik, *Popular*, p. 254.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Stevens, *Masters*, pp. 303 – 304.

<sup>139</sup> Elizabeth Silva, 'Gender, home and family in cultural capital theory', *British Journal of Sociology* 56:1 (2005), p. 84.

<sup>140</sup> *Steptoe*, 17 January 1963.



**Figure 56 - Harold ponders what life would be like had his mother been alive (Steptoe, 17 January 1963).**

The absence of the mother was directly linked by Galton and Simpson to Harold's lack of formal education. As a result of Albert being left to bring-up Harold alone, Harold frequently proclaimed what an awful childhood he had experienced.<sup>141</sup> In this early *Steptoe* episode, the script stressed how Harold was brought up solely by his father and that Harold's schooling, not a priority for Albert, was highly limited because he was put to work at twelve years old. His lack of formal education offered a crucial backdrop against which Harold's flawed cultural capital could be read in subsequent episodes. For example, when Harold discussed cultural advancement through reading, the audience were palpably aware of the limited education that rendered this hard. *Steptoe* constantly emphasised how Harold, as a result his mother's death, has been under Albert's influence ever since and, consequently, had internalised Albert's cultural values. The absent mother can be directly linked to Harold's lack of cultural capital because it was Albert's, rather than the educated middle-class mother's, cultural values which have been transmitted to Harold. It was because of this that Harold sought, so desperately, for cultural capital, in order to create social distance between him and his father.

---

<sup>141</sup> *Steptoe*, 14 June 1962.

Underpinning Galton and Simpson's exploration of the 1960s was Harold's age. Donnelly has maintained that during the period, youth showed 'themselves to be less like their parents than any previous generation in modern times' and as a consequence the decade was characterised by 'generational revolt.'<sup>142</sup> Jonathon Green has acknowledged that this younger generation 'was quite genuinely something new' and was composed predominantly of teenagers and to an extent, everyone under the age of thirty.<sup>143</sup> Whilst scholars have noted that the decade was characterised by a generational conflict between old and young and studies of *Steptoe* have suggested the series was one such cultural manifestation of this conflict, *Steptoe* actually explored the conflicts of a middle-aged man and his consequential inability to participate. Harold, in his late-thirties, can not be categorised as 'youth' as defined in the 1960s literature. For Corbett, the exploration of Harold's age was not only intentional but pivotal to the programme. He explained to the *Radio Times* in 1962 that 'A lot is written about the problems of teenagers and old folk, but the thirties have their troubles too, and to me *Steptoe* is basically an exploration of this theme.'<sup>144</sup> Galton and Simpson concurred:

We decided to make the son in his late thirties as this would heighten the tragic element in the situation of a son still tied to a dependent parent. If the son had been a young man, one would have the feeling that his life was still in front of him, that there was hope that he would eventually get away and create a new life for himself.<sup>145</sup>

Casting Harold in his late-thirties was both central to the dynamic between Harold and Albert and the sense of entrapped fatalism in Harold's situation. Galton and Simpson indicated that Harold could never escape and start a new life free from the shackles of his father and all that he symbolised.

Whereas Albert was at ease with his status as a rag-and-bone man, Harold had ambitions of betterment. Consequently, he constantly attempted to

---

<sup>142</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, pp. 1 – 3.

<sup>143</sup> Green, *Dressed*, p. x.

<sup>144</sup> 'Harry H. Corbett as Harold'.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Ross, *Steptoe*, pp. 20 – 21.



mentally escape his circumstances and differentiate himself from his father through the utilisation of his cultural capital. Media comment on the first series of *Steptoe* acknowledged that this was the premise of the programme; the *Daily Mail* described Harold as 'the son who dreamed of bettering himself' while the *Radio Times* characterised him as 'the frustrated junkman with a yearning for finer things' and 'a man full of vague ambition for a more regarding life which always seems to be just out of reach.'<sup>146</sup> Harold's endeavours to better himself, to experience finer things and to achieve a higher social status were always undermined, variously, by his father and their shared social and economic circumstances.

Harold's cultural capital was repeatedly shown to be entirely flawed. For example, he returned home from the round in one episode with 'some very useful additions to my library' bought from 'some bint [woman]' who 'was having a clear out'. His endeavours to be cultured here, however, were betrayed by his use of the slang-term 'bint'. He maintained that his library comprised 'quite an impressive little collection now'. Harold, however, arranged his books by colour and height: 'this is a very nice volume, I've been looking for one that size' (Figure 57). As in 'The Offer', Harold's culture was shown to be premised on possessions rather than their utilisation. During the scene, the books fell down, pointing again to the literal shaky foundations upon which his claims to cultural capital were placed. They were further undermined when he struggled to pronounce '*Methuselah*' when discussing the George Bernard Shaw volume in his collection and, locating a book by Jean Paul Sartre, he laughed that 'there's a girl here with a bloke's middle name... that's like me being called Harold Gladys.' His well-established lack of education and consequential inability to read suggested he was completely unable to put books to their cultured use. Harold confessed that he had never actually read any of the books he owned: 'I'll have to get round to reading some of these one of these days.'<sup>147</sup> Harold's supposed love of books, however, enabled him to

---

<sup>146</sup> Michael Gowers, 'Teleview', *Daily Mail*, 08 June 1962, p. 3. '*Steptoe and Son*', *Radio Times*, 31 March 1962, p. 42. 'Harry H. Corbett as Harold'.

<sup>147</sup> *Steptoe*, 24 January 1963.

differentiate himself from his father, if only in his own imagination. Albert's opinions on books were in complete opposition to Harold's. He declared that he had 'Never read a book in me life... If I had my way I'd close all the libraries... and leave book reading to those that understand it.'<sup>148</sup> Whereas Harold desired culture through reading, and this was shown to be flawed, Albert appeared to accept his class position, by declaring that it should be left to those who understood books, and believed that Harold should leave it to them too.



**Figure 57 - Harold admires his book collection which is organised according to colour and size (*Steptoe*, 24 January 1963).**

The scripting of Harold's dialogue by Galton and Simpson was central to his characterisation as aspirational because it always, ultimately, betrayed his low class position. In the episode 'Crossed Swords', Harold came into contact with a well-to-do antiques dealer, described in the wardrobe request as an 'upper class type... not only the assistant in the shop but a partner in the firm' wearing 'very smart dark suit, stiff white collar, formal tie' (Figure 58).<sup>149</sup> Harold explained to him that:

...my father and I have recently come into possession of a piece of porcelain of quite outstanding beauty and quality. After browsing through *Country Life*, we thought it might be of considerable interest to

---

<sup>148</sup> *Steptoe*, 28 June 1962.

<sup>149</sup> Wardrobe, 03 September 1965, T12/1,234/1, BBC WAC.

you so we have **brung** it along in order for you, may purport, to have a **butcher's** at it.<sup>150</sup>

Stephen Brooke has highlighted how in post-war Britain, received pronunciation (hereafter RP) was 'the speech of a new, aspiring middle class who believed themselves to belong to a nationwide elite' and utilising the accent 'was little more than a smart career move for the upwardly mobile middle classes' because it was believed that mastery of RP 'put the speaker on the same level as those who wielded power and prestige.'<sup>151</sup> In the 'Crossed Swords' episode, Harold sought to be on the same cultural level as the upper-class antique dealer by adopting an RP accent. Harold's claims to cultural capital were undermined by his utilisation of colloquial regionalisms ('butcher's), a dialectical form of the past participle 'bring' ('brung') and further emphasised by his and his father's visible appearance in their stock dirty and outdated costumes.



**Figure 58 - The upper-class antiques dealer comes into contact with Harold and Albert who betray their lowly status with their appearance and Harold's failed attempts at Received Pronunciation (*Steptoe*, 11 October 1965).**

---

<sup>150</sup> *Steptoe*, 11 October 1965.

<sup>151</sup> Stephen Brooke, *Class: Knowing your place in modern Britain* (London, 1997), pp. 274 – 275.

The exploration of Harold and Albert's contrasting cultural capital was most pronounced in the episode 'Sixty-Five Today'. Broadcast in January 1963, it charted Harold's endeavours to take Albert to the West End of London for his sixty-fifth birthday.<sup>152</sup> Discussing the relationship between father and son in post-war Britain, Mort has suggested that 'it might be more productive to retell the story of the generational battles that traumatised families in mid-twentieth-century Europe... as stories of conflict between competing versions of the self.'<sup>153</sup> Throughout this episode the audience witnessed Harold's desire to pursue modern and affluent experiences but these experiences were forever undermined by both his own and his father's low social status as Harold struggled to develop a self that was cultured. Despite Albert's repeated proclamations that he would have been content in the local pub, The Skinner's Arms, for the evening, Harold resolved that he and his father were going to have a more cultured experience, 'a real night out'.<sup>154</sup> According to the episode's synopsis, Harold had 'booked seats at a theatre, a table at an exclusive restaurant, and they were to start by having drinks at a smart cocktail bar.'<sup>155</sup> The premise of the episode revolved around Harold's desire to engage in affluence, through a series of cultured pursuits, but had the experience ruined by his father who was disinterested.

From the start, Albert did not like the fact he had to 'put [his] best suit on, and a collar and a tie', reasoning, instead, that 'me muffler' would suffice.<sup>156</sup> Albert's outfit for the evening, as described in the producers' notes to wardrobe, was comprised of an 'old brown' suit, 'an ill-fitting but clean white shirt, rather old-fashioned cut... rather battered dark tie with red stripes.' Whilst Albert's outfit was characterised by its out-of-datedness, Harold's was characterised by its cheapness: 'suit... should be smart but not expensive... broad striped modern shirt with rounded collar, again smart but cheap. Smart

---

<sup>152</sup> *Steptoe*, 24 January 1963.

<sup>153</sup> Frank Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 38:3 (1999), p. 369.

<sup>154</sup> *Steptoe*, 24 January 1963.

<sup>155</sup> Synopsis, *Steptoe: "Sixty-Five Today"*, 24.01.1963, T12/625/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>156</sup> *Steptoe*, 24 January 1963.

cheap tie.<sup>157</sup> The Steptoes' physical appearance, once again, immediately signalled how unsuited they were to a night out in the affluent West End to partake in contemporarily popular activities.

Albert was reticent about the evening and resolved that he was better suited, given his social status, to the local pub rather than cocktail bars, restaurants and the theatre. Indeed, in an earlier episode he had suggested to Harold that a posh meal would comprise 'fish and chips... gherkins, and a tin of fruit or something and evaporated milk.'<sup>158</sup> He complained that he 'won't enjoy [the birthday evening out] if it's too posh. They let you in the Skinner's Arms without a collar and tie.' Albert, unlike Harold, was portrayed as resistant to change and affluence, preferring the comfort of the pub. Harold, however, maintained that:

You're just as good as they are, those days is all gone, it ain't Burlington Berties nowadays, all silk scarves and monocles... it's all finished that... these days if you've got the loot then you're in! Can you pay the bill? That's all they want to know. And we can... well, for one night at least. Go on! Go and get ready!<sup>159</sup>

Harold viewed the 1960s as a new era of classlessness, where the ability to spend and consume was a cultural and social leveller. Subsequent scholarship has also endorsed such a view of the period.<sup>160</sup> The Steptoes' experience in 'Sixty-Five Today' contested such a notion. Throughout the episode, Harold sought to imitate the cultured and affluent in dress and manners and the perpetual revelation of his true, uncultured self, undermined his assertion that money was the only requirement of participation. The episode challenged the extent to which consumption would compensate for genuine cultural and social difference.

---

<sup>157</sup> Wardrobe, 10 January 1963, T12/625/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>158</sup> *Steptoe*, 14 June 1962.

<sup>159</sup> *Steptoe*, 24 January 1963.

<sup>160</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. xiv. Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (St Ives, 2010), p. 224. Peter Mandler, 'Two cultures – one – or many?', in, Kathleen Burk (ed.), *The British Isles since 1945* (Oxford, 2003), p. 135. Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1993), p. 69.

The contrast between Albert and Harold's appreciation of popular cultural forms was explored in the episode 'Sunday for Seven Days'. Having resolved to go to the cinema, Albert wanted to go and see *Nudes of 1964* whereas Harold, likely for the sake of differentiating himself from his father, claimed he wanted to watch the surrealist comedy drama *Fellini's 8½* instead, because for Harold 'the cinema is an art form, not a tawdry peep show'.<sup>161</sup> The *Radio Times* preview of the episode highlighted how 'Harold favours the highbrow type of Continental film, while Albert prefers a film which quickly gets down to basic facts – indeed, the less the leading lady wears the better.'<sup>162</sup> At the cinema there was a line of what appeared to be Teddy boys queuing up to see *Nudes of 1964*, the insinuation being that this is the on trend film to go and watch amongst the young, something Harold had failed to recognise. Albert spotted a poster for the movie which featured several topless women (Figure 59):

Albert: Cor, look at her, she's a big girl isn't she?  
 Harold: [embarrassed] Come away dad, people is looking... For the last time will you stop showing me up, we're going to see *Fellini's 8½*.  
 Albert: [still looking at the poster] I'd sooner see her 48½s.<sup>163</sup>

At this innuendo, and the grotesqueness of dirty old man eying-up younger women, the audience broke into hysterical laughter. The audience was aware Harold would far rather see, and likely enjoy more, the lowbrow film premised on nudity than he would *Fellini's 8½*, but his ill-placed desire for culture as a means of participating leads him to the highbrow film instead. Ultimately, the episode ended with Harold and Albert getting removed from the showing of *Fellini's 8½* because of their bad behaviour, and both sneaking in to see *Nudes of 1964*. Thus, Harold's desire for high culture competed with and was beaten by his enjoyment of the popular.

---

<sup>161</sup> *Steptoe*, 04 February 1964.

<sup>162</sup> 'Steptoe and Son', *Radio Times*, 30 January 1964, p. 27.

<sup>163</sup> *Steptoe*, 04 February 1964.



**Figure 59 - Albert spots a promotional poster for *Nudes of 1964* (Steptoe, 04 February 1964).**

A key narrative of the 1960s was modernisation. As Nowell-Smith has articulated ‘the 1960s are to be seen mainly as a great step forward in a process of modernisation which continues uninterrupted up to the present.’<sup>164</sup> Scholars have acknowledged how the ideas of science and meritocracy pervaded political discourses, especially those of Harold Wilson’s Labour Party, as the strategy required to confront the challenges of the future and Britain’s need for modernisation.<sup>165</sup> That modernisation had the power to reverse Britain’s decline was ‘a popular refrain of the day’ throughout the 1960s.<sup>166</sup> *Steptoe* took up this theme in an episode entitled ‘The Economist’, in which Harold believed that by introducing economic modernisation to the rag-and-bone business, he would be assured of affluence. The promotional material released by the BBC for the episode recorded that ‘Harold is convinced that... the rag-and-bone business needs re-organising and modernising’ but ‘this move is strongly resisted’ by old Albert.<sup>167</sup> Once again, Harold’s ambitions were foiled by the

---

<sup>164</sup> Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves*, p. 9.

<sup>165</sup> Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London, 1997), p. 123. Morgan, *Britain*, p. 232. Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. 75. Kevin Jefferys, *Retreat from New Jerusalem: British Politics, 1951 – 1964* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 101.

<sup>166</sup> Sandbrook, *Never*, p. 570.

<sup>167</sup> Memo from Chief Assistant, General, 25 May 1962, T12/787/1, BBC WAC.

contented Albert. The concept of reforming the quintessentially Victorian role of rag-and-bone man for a modern society was itself laughable; viewers were by now well aware of how economically redundant the Steptoes were at a time of affluence. Consequently, the futility of Harold's attempts at modernisation were made clear from the start.

Having read *Economic Planning in a Capitalist Society*, Harold resolved that he and his father 'have been wasting our time' and need to 'change our methods'; 'if you wanna make money you've gotta go for it!' Harold attempted to convince Albert that bulk-buying was the way forward: 'here you are "Bulk Buying", chapter three. The more you buy, the cheaper you get it. That's what we should be doing mate, buying when it's cheap, flogging it when it's up.' Such an approach, developed by Harold whilst surrounded by an abundance of items sourced on the round for cheap if anything at all, seemed little different to their current business model. The Steptoes, however, lacked the capital to kick-start their bulk buying business, so Harold suggested to Albert that he 'better make arrangements to have that horse melted down', much to Albert's distress:

Harold: The horse is a relic of our inefficient past...

Albert: Melt Hercules down? We can't do that! We've had Hercules for over twenty years...

Harold: ...it's all very sad, but that's the way of it, see. It's evolution, see dad, adapt or die... and if he can't adapt he has to go... there's no place for a cart horse in modern industry!<sup>168</sup>

Hercules, like Albert and the rag-and-bone business, in Harold's rationale was an emblem of the inefficient past and an obstruction to progress; modernisation necessitated his destruction, and by extension the disregarding of their rag-and-bone business – and perhaps even Albert. The audience were encouraged to laugh at this macabre humour.

Having earlier resolved to melt the horse down, Harold found that he actually needed Hercules and the cart to go and collect the four thousand pairs of false teeth he had purchased from a dental laboratory as part of his new

---

<sup>168</sup> Steptoe, 28 June 1962.



bulk-buying approach to business. Returning to the yard with a cart full of false teeth, Harold resolved to 'put a few ads in the papers, *The Times*... I should think that's read by more hard-up people than any other. Oh yes! *The Times*...'.<sup>169</sup> The audience laugh, aware of the inherent incongruity in Harold's statement and his betrayed lack of cultural capital whereby he knows of *The Times* but not about it. As the advert for the teeth appeared on the screen, the episode cut to Harold with his golf club, that perennial symbol of his desire for self-improvement and a life away from Albert. He played golf in the yard whilst he awaited the financial windfall that would facilitate his accession to affluence and modernity. Harold, however, was unable to sell the teeth and, consequently his desires for affluence, and the escape this offered, were left in tatters. The penultimate scene of the episode showed the golf club lying on the floor amidst the junk in the yard before cutting to Harold looking miserable on his cart. Harold's attempts at modernisation unsuccessful, the status quo was once again restored. Even the promotional materials for the episode ridiculed Harold's vain hopes of success: 'The only snag in this [bulk-buying] argument is that the commodities that constitute the "bulk" have to be readily sellable – and at a profit, otherwise you are lumbered – and that is exactly what Steptoe and Son are in "The Economist"'.<sup>170</sup>

Savage has suggested that during the 1960s, the middle-classes sought increasingly to define their identity and culture in terms of technical proficiency and expertise, enabling them to differentiate themselves from the 'uncultured' working- and 'thick' upper-classes.<sup>171</sup> In *Steptoe*, Harold attempted to gain technical and managerial status to achieve affluence and modernity. This would have enabled him to differentiate himself further from his father and perhaps provided a means of escape. Harold worked to achieve these things in the episode entitled 'The Diploma' by aspiring to the status of television engineer. As Harold told Albert: 'you can't stop progress, you've got to be with it or get left behind.' The audience were no doubt aware that Harold's age and social

---

<sup>169</sup> *Steptoe*, 28 June 1962.

<sup>170</sup> Memo from Chief Assistant, General, 25 May 1962.

<sup>171</sup> Savage, 'Affluence', pp. 458 – 459.

status were emblematic of the extent to which Harold had already fallen by the wayside. Becoming a television engineer, Harold resolved, would give him 'a profession' in opposition to his current role as 'unskilled labour'. His claims to even unskilled labour, however, were undermined by his impoverished circumstances. Furthermore, it would enable him to escape his father and 'a dying trade' in which too much 'trouble' is gone 'to earn a couple of quid.'<sup>172</sup> The promotional material for the episode highlighted how 'Harold Steptoe is constantly looking for opportunities to break away from his life in the junkyard' and if he succeeded in passing his correspondence course in television engineering 'he sees awaiting him a new career, a four figure income and, of course, a diploma.'<sup>173</sup>

The futility of Harold's plan, as ever, was made evident early in the episode when he maintained a hopeful optimism that he had planned 'two weeks to read the books, a week to get my diploma and a week to pass my driving test.' These plans were undermined by the audience's knowledge of his lack of formal learning. As expected, things did not go smoothly; having dismantled their television set he then struggled to get it to work again. In another highly charged and emotional scene Harold was shown stood bent over the television muttering with determination how 'It's got to go, I've got to get my diploma.'<sup>174</sup> It fell to Albert to get the television working and, as a result of Harold's failure to achieve his diploma, Albert, as ever, suggested a return to the status quo. Despite his best efforts, Harold was unable to advance towards a technical profession in order to fulfil his, unspoken but blatant, dream. His flawed cultural capital, again, rendered participation impossible.

## **Conclusion**

Harold and Albert Steptoes' lack of both economic and cultural capital was a result of and ensured the continuation of their low social status. This precluded

---

<sup>172</sup> *Steptoe*, 05 July 1962.

<sup>173</sup> Synopsis, *Steptoe and Son* TX 05 July 1962, T12/786/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>174</sup> *Steptoe*, 05 July 1962.

the pair from participating in the affluence and modernity of 1960s Britain. Taking the first historical analysis of *Steptoe*, informed by both the textual character of the programmes themselves and the attendant archival material, this chapter has challenged the extent of affluence, modernity and participation during the period. Instead, it has highlighted how *Steptoe* brought before a mass television audience a vision of those who were impoverished and outdated and failing to share in the supposed economic, social and cultural developments of the period.

For Harold and Albert the progressive narrative of the 1960s simply did not happen; they were excluded from it as a result of their social status. Their existence was characterised more by the nineteenth century than it was by the post-war period. The Steptoes' trade as rag-and-bone men had a long history stretching back to the nineteenth-century and the role continued, in the contemporary media of the 1960s, to be characterised as beyond acceptable norms and in outdated quasi-Dickensian terms. Their home was reminiscent of a Victorian slum complete with a sprawling array of nineteenth-century items. Pauperism characterised their existence. Consequently, *Steptoe* contested the notion of the 1960s as being modern and post-Victorian in televisual terms for a popular audience.

Harold and Albert's economic existence was characterised by poverty and through this, *Steptoe* challenged the common perception of the 1960s as affluent. *Steptoe* rediscovered poverty on television well in advance of its official exposition by sociologists in 1965; it brought before viewers images of squalor and material degradation. The Steptoes' trade ensured they lived on the physical margins of London, surrounded by the junk and rubbish of other people. Their possessions were the disused remnants of affluence and consumption which lay strewn, battered, aged and broken, across the Steptoes' home. Viewers became intrigued voyeurs into this low social world. The series' *mise-en-scène* was dark, cramped and dirty and, for viewers, this created a visceral sense of the poor. Their trade and surroundings also impregnated their clothes which were similarly old, worn and dirty and, in some instances, their bodies became saturated too. The Steptoes existed in a state of perpetual

impoverishment, incapable of accessing affluence and thereby challenging a dominant characterisation of the 1960s.

The Steptoes were precluded from participation in the 1960s owing to economic circumstances which defined their low social status. Their distance from high culture also prevented their participation and, instead, only served to further place their social, economic and cultural distance from modernity. Harold may have had the material symbols of affluence, albeit sourced from others', but he could not utilise them. This had much to do with the absence of his aspiring mother, as it was left to Albert to raise Harold and transmit his cultural values to his son. No matter how hard Harold tried to utilise culture to better himself, there was no escaping his life as a rag-and-bone man. Harold's attempts at modernisation and achieving technical capabilities were similarly undermined by his economic class position. Through its mix of drama and comedy, *Steptoe* brought to the fore those who were excluded from affluence and modernity in 1960s Britain.

## Chapter 4: *That Was The Week That Was*: deference, decline and distinction, 1962 – 1963

### Introduction

Writing in May 1963, in response to a complaint from Sir Cyril Black MP about the satirical television programme *That Was The Week That Was* (hereafter *TW3*) (BBC, 1962 - 1963), the Director General of the BBC, Hugh Carleton Greene, declared that ‘the justification for any programme... is to be found not only in its intention but also in its reception by the public.’<sup>1</sup> A memo from the Head of the Secretariat a month later reported that at the end of *TW3*’s first series ‘some 13,500 letters’ about the programme had been received and correspondence about the series accounted for ‘one-fifth’ of the BBC’s total weekly postbag.<sup>2</sup> 470 of these letters have survived in the Corporation’s Written Archives Centre. While *TW3* is frequently referenced in histories of the period, how viewers responded to the programme has been largely ignored by scholars. This extensive collection of letters provides the principal focus for this chapter which offers a rare insight into television audience responses. The chapter also moves beyond the studies of *TW3* which have been preoccupied with the programme’s performers and performances to the detriment of its reception.

The chapter argues that audience responses to *TW3* expressed broader concerns about Britain in the early 1960s which complicate progressive narratives of the decade. The title, occupation, residence, language and writing paper used by correspondents indicate that the majority of the programme’s critics came from the more affluent middle- and upper-classes, although there were also some working-class critics. I highlight how *TW3* generated a strong backlash from this privileged social stratum, which evidenced the persistence

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter: Hugh Greene to Sir Cyril Black MP, 01 May 1963, T16/726, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC).

<sup>2</sup> Memo: Head of Secretariat to Harman Grisewood, Re: *TW3*, 12 June 1963, R44/1,193/1, BBC WAC. Memo: Head of Secretariat to Alasdair Milne, Re: Correspondence about *TW3*, 17 October 1963, R44/1,193/2, BBC WAC.

and salience of powerful seams of conservatism into the 1960s. These conservative voices have been neglected in the available analyses of *TW3* and the contemporary period. I argue that for these well-to-do-viewers, *TW3* emerged as a site of contestation for debates about the Establishment, national decline and taste. Whilst *TW3* ridiculed the Establishment and has been said to have accelerated the death of deference, viewers wrote to the BBC in large numbers to protest against the treatment of leading politicians, the monarchy and religion. Excluded from the progressive forces of the 1960s, these viewers remained wedded and deferential to the Establishment. Many writers condemned attacks on monarchy, religion and politicians as ‘vulgar’ and beyond the realms of acceptable public discourse. These socially distinct viewers argued *TW3* was both cause and symptom of Britain’s apparent post-war decline: globally, economically and, most significantly, morally. Finally, the chapter examines how audiences utilised either their appreciation or criticism of *TW3* in order to make strong claims about both themselves and others, framed in terms of ‘intelligence’ and ‘maturity’. Consequently, *TW3* served as a key site where viewers marked social boundaries and distinctions in the early 1960s.

Many historians cite *TW3* as a potent symbol of the ‘Sixties’ cultural revolution: youthful, irreverent and refreshingly new.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Marwick, for example, maintained that satire posed ‘challenges to established society’ as it made ‘public and explicit important changes in British attitudes and values’ and, consequently, ‘presented in witty and potent form the anti-establishment ideas circulating velocitously.’<sup>4</sup> Whilst *TW3* doubtless performed such a function on output, the volume of criticism it attracted for having done so, calls into question the extent to which all its viewers supported the series’ ridiculing of British society, attitudes and values. Rather, complicating the established story

---

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (London, 2003), p. 97. Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (St Ives, 2010), pp. 581 – 585. Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London, 1998), p. 61. Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain Since 1945: The People’s Peace* (Oxford, 2001), p. 209. Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 50 – 51. Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940* (London, 1997), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958 – 1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 143.

of British satire, I argue that the extensive criticism in the letters highlights the persistence of powerful conservative sensibilities amongst a significant proportion of *TW3*'s, notably higher class, audience. Oft-neglected, these viewers expressed discomfort with the progressive currents of the 1960s. The response of viewers to *TW3* also complicates the conclusions of Christina Von Hodenberg that from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s television comedy 'accelerated and broadened' the contemporary 'wave of sociocultural change' and 'hastened value change' amongst television sitcom audiences.<sup>5</sup> *TW3* may have presented critiques of contemporary Britain to a mass audience, but little evidence exists amongst the correspondence from viewers that this adapted the opinions or sensibilities of all of its audience.

Debates about decline – socio-cultural, political, global and economic – punctuated national life from the mid-1950s, after the Suez crisis dramatically exposed Britain's diminished power. In this period a litany of works emerged which were concerned with the 'state-of-the-nation' and asked questions about 'what was wrong with Britain?'<sup>6</sup> Matthew Grant has described this body of literature as 'a motley collection of books and articles by people often with axes to grind but united by the common belief that something was indeed "wrong" with Britain.'<sup>7</sup> Studies of decline have largely focused on economic issues.<sup>8</sup> Yet comedy programmes frequently served as terrain where questions about decline were broached and debated. Historians such as Jim Tomlinson and Andrew Gamble have highlighted how decline remained a contested and fluid

---

<sup>5</sup> Christina Von Hodenberg, *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 1 – 6.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive list of these works see Matthew Grant, 'Historians, the Penguin Specials and the "State-of-the-Nation" Literature, 1958-64', *Contemporary British History* 17:3 (2003), pp. 50 – 51.

<sup>7</sup> Grant, 'Penguin', pp. 30 – 49.

<sup>8</sup> J. G. Darwin, 'The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline since 1900', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1996), pp. 42 – 43. Richard English and Michael Kenny (eds.), *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke, 2000). Sidney Pollard, *The Wasting of the British Economy: British economic policy 1945 to the present* (London, 1982). W. D. Rubenstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain, 1750 – 1990* (New York, 1993). Jim Tomlinson, 'Inventing "Decline": The Falling behind of the British Economy in the Postwar Years', *Economic History Review* 49:4 (1996), pp. 731 – 757. Jim Tomlinson, 'The Decline of the Empire and the Economic "Decline" of Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 14:3 (2003), pp. 201 – 221. Barry Supple, 'Fear of falling: economic history and the decline of Britain', *Economic History Review* 47:3 (1994), pp. 441 – 458.

term, which relied on a particular historical and political construct.<sup>9</sup> Tomlinson has maintained that decline ultimately ‘led to critiques of British society that went much wider than strictly economic issues’ and decline became linked ‘to almost every facet of British society.’<sup>10</sup> Amongst the assigned causes of decline were the cultural fault lines within British society. Marcus Collins and Peter Mandler, for example, have highlighted how this declinist culture extended to denigrate notions of national character as embodied in the figure of the English gentleman.<sup>11</sup> I extend these arguments by showing how debates about decline played out in audience responses to a comedy programme, in order to unearth popular narratives of decline in 1960s Britain.

Some commentators have argued that the principal cause of decline was to be located within the ineptitude of the British upper-classes who were hostile to industry, enterprise and technology. Kevin Jeffreys has highlighted how the burgeoning ‘state-of-the-nation’ literature of the late 1950s and 1960s claimed that ‘Britain was being ill-served by an old-fashioned and privileged elite, increasingly referred to as the “Establishment”.’<sup>12</sup> Henry Fairlie, a contributor to this literature, defined the ‘Establishment’ as ‘the whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised.’<sup>13</sup> Consequently, David Cannadine has argued that ‘The Establishment’ summoned ‘the image of an interlocking old boy network... which was deemed to be privileged, nepotistic, out of date, inefficient and corrupt’, ‘incompetent’ and amateurish.<sup>14</sup> In this chapter, I follow these usages of the term ‘Establishment’ and focus in particular on how *TW3* presented the Church, Monarchy and prominent politicians, as well as analysing the popular response the programme’s satire generated.

---

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Gamble, ‘Theories and Explanations of British Decline’, in Richard English and Michael Kenny (eds.), *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 1. Jim Tomlinson, ‘Inventing “Decline”’, pp. 731 – 732.

<sup>10</sup> Tomlinson, ‘The Decline’, pp. 202 – 203.

<sup>11</sup> Marcus Collins, ‘The fall of the English gentleman: the national character in decline, c. 1918 – 1970’, *Historical Research* 75:187 (2002), pp. 90 – 111. Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Jeffreys, *Retreat from New Jerusalem: British politics, 1951 – 1964* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Hewison, *Culture*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998), p. 147.



The history of the 'satire boom' offers a familiar narrative of the growth of the satire industry in Britain in the early 1960s, starting with the stage revue *Beyond the Fringe* (premiered in August 1960) and continuing with the launch of the satirical magazine *Private Eye* and the opening of the revue club 'The Establishment Club' in 1961. The boom then reached a crescendo, and ultimately its end, with the broadcasting of *TW3* on the BBC in 1962 and 1963. Extended histories of the 'satire boom', however, have largely been for a popular audience, written by journalists and enthusiasts.<sup>15</sup> Academic studies of *TW3* have focused, predominantly, on the backgrounds of the personalities who performed in *TW3* and how the series' subject matter and content ridiculed British decline at the hands of an effete 'Establishment'. Scholars have stressed how the 1960s satire movement had its genesis in public schools and Oxford and Cambridge Universities, from whence the cast and writers were assembled, with much of the material borrowed from undergraduate revues.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Wagg, for example, has noted that modern satire was distinguished from earlier versions as a result of 'its apparent emergence from *within* the culture of the dominant social classes' (or, in the comic Eric Idle's opinion, orchestrated by 'an effete collection of privileged wankers').<sup>17</sup> These studies, however, have failed to consider the popular response to *TW3*, something rectified in this chapter.

Andrew Crisell believed that the post-war period witnessed 'the development of a more critical disposition among large numbers of people' which resulted in 'a need to question or challenge traditional values or "the received wisdom"; a growing distrust of, even an impatience with, certain notions of authority.' Satire, Crisell has concluded, was one manifestation of

---

<sup>15</sup> Roger Wilmut, *From Fringe to Flying Circus: Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960 – 1980* (London, 1982). Humphrey Carpenter, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom of the 1960s* (London, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Crisell, 'Filth, Seditious and Blasphemous: The Rise and Fall of Television Satire', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London, 1997), p. 147. Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of the Mass Media* (London, 1974), p. 241. Carpenter, *Satire*, p. 209. Stuart Ward, "'No nation could be brokered": the satire boom and the demise of Britain's world role', in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire* (Manchester, 2001), p. 96. Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Wagg, 'You've never had it so silly: The politics of British satirical comedy from *Beyond the Fringe* to *Spitting Image*', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Come On Down?: Popular media culture in post-war Britain* (London, 1992), p. 255. Quoted in Robert Hewison, *Footlights!: A Hundred Years of Cambridge Comedy* (London, 1984), p. vii.

this trend.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars have maintained that *TW3* was symbolic of this maligning of the ‘Establishment’, whom they blamed for Britain’s decline at the start of the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> Christopher Booker, who co-founded *Private Eye* and contributed sketches to *TW3*, contended that ‘the satire movement’ was an extension of the ‘What’s Wrong with Britain?’ journalism.<sup>20</sup> Stuart Ward has argued that *TW3* played an ‘important role in shaping popular attitudes towards an imperial nation in decline’ and, consequently, interpreted the satire movement as a broader expression of ‘the state-of-the-nation’ debates. He has highlighted how *TW3* generated ‘an unprecedented appetite for mockery and ridicule of the manners, pretensions and pomposity of Britain’s ruling elite – the so called “Establishment”.’ Ward has suggested that much of *TW3*’s anti-Establishment fervour ‘was in fact fundamentally rooted in a nostalgic reflection of the imperial past.’ As ‘exemplars of the same privileged elite they parodied’ and having ‘been raised on pre-war and wartime notions of duty and service to nation and empire’, Ward argued that the young satirists ‘were railing against a British ruling elite that had failed to secure the promise of the imperial inheritance.’ He concluded that *TW3* functioned as ‘a lament for the material and political substance that had once underpinned a more exalted image of the “British world”.’<sup>21</sup> Building on this work, I argue that whilst *TW3* undoubtedly, and in keeping with the contemporary state-of-the-nation literature, heaped scorn on the ‘Establishment’, the viewers who wrote to the BBC resented the programme for having done so. *TW3* may have been anti-‘Establishment’, but a significant proportion of its privileged audience, who wrote to the BBC in complaint, were not.

---

<sup>18</sup> Crisell, ‘Television Satire’, p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas-Home* (London, 1996), p. 262. Wilmut, *From Fringe*, pp. 53 – 72. Seymour-Ure, *Political Impact*, pp. 242 – 243. John Ramsden, *Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957 – 1975* (London, 1996), pp. 143 – 144.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: a study of the revolution in English life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London, 1969), pp. 33 – 172.

<sup>21</sup> Ward, ‘Satire’, pp. 91 – 108.

Many historians have agreed with Robert Hewison that *TW3* demonstrated that 'deference was out of fashion'.<sup>22</sup> Ward has argued that 'in subjecting leading political figures and civic institutions to public ridicule', satire 'undermined the automatic deference and respect that had traditionally occupied the core of British civic culture'.<sup>23</sup> Alec Douglas-Home's biographer noted that satire was 'the most tangible evidence of the ending of the age of deference': '*TW3* embodied the abandonment of the old cap-doffing to "the Establishment"'.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, however, I want to complicate this established narrative. In opposition, I argue that the criticisms of *TW3*'s treatment of monarchy, religion and politicians indicated that many Britons in the early 1960s remained conservatively wedded to and supportive of these institutions.

What previous studies of *TW3* lack has been analysis of the series' audience. Indeed, Sam Friedman has contended that 'there is a long tradition of assuming audience reactions to comedy' from 'analysis of comic representation' or 'authorial intention'.<sup>25</sup> Only recently has the first foray into audience responses to *TW3* been made; Matt Crowder, utilising the BBC's audience research reports pertaining to *TW3*, highlighted how the programme's visual style failed to meet viewer expectations of what television entertainment should look and feel like. Consequently, the programme was criticised by viewers as dull and poorly produced, something borne out in my own archival research.<sup>26</sup> I examine audience responses further, however, by examining how contemporary audiences responded to and interpreted the subject and content, rather than the aesthetic dimensions of these programmes, not only in audience research reports but also in correspondence from viewers.

---

<sup>22</sup> Hewison, *Culture*, p. 128. Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London, 1997), p. 247. Carpenter, *Satire*, p. 240. Keith Suter, 'The British Satirical Revolution', *Contemporary Review* 285:1664 (2004), p. 161. Wagg, 'Silly', pp. 266 – 280.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, 'Satire', p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Thorpe, *Douglas-Home*, pp. 253 – 262.

<sup>25</sup> Sam Friedman, *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a "Good" Sense of Humour* (Oxon, 2014), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Matt Crowder, 'A Space and Time for Entertainment: *That Was The Week That Was* and Viewers' Utopian Expectations', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:3 (2014), pp. 420 – 433.

Developing the framework on culture and class laid out by Pierre Bourdieu and extending the work of British sociologists who studied television but ignored comedy, Friedman has studied questions of contemporary taste and distinction vis-à-vis popular British comedy.<sup>27</sup> He has argued that comedy has played a 'central role in British cultural life' and performs 'a key part in the construction of British cultural tastes and identities.'<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Friedman has maintained that 'strong distinctions exist in the patterning of comedy taste' and, consequently, 'humour tends to be a strong marker of class, and is always strongly linked to identity and the drawing of social boundaries.'<sup>29</sup> Friedman's work followed several local studies into the question of comedy and taste in the Netherlands, Finland and Belgium.<sup>30</sup> For example, Giselinde Kuiper's study of Dutch viewing habits concluded that 'humour tends to be a strong marker of class, and is always strongly linked to identity and the drawing of social boundaries.'<sup>31</sup> All of these studies relied heavily on a combination of surveys and in-depth interviews with contemporary viewers of modern comedies. In this chapter I build on this work to explore how historical audiences engaged with *TW3* and how viewers utilised their appreciation or depreciation of the programme in order to draw social boundaries.

Produced by Ned Sherrin and broadcast weekly on Saturday nights, *TW3* offered viewers satirical sketches, debate and music. It was described, ahead of the first episode, in promotional materials, as:

...witty, topical and informal. The programme is based on the premise that we have all lived through the past week, each with widely differing experiences, but the week is nearly over for good or ill, and so viewers

---

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984). Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal and David Wright, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Sam Friedman, 'Legitimizing a Discredited Art Form: The Changing Field of British Comedy', *Edinburgh Working Papers in Sociology* 39 (2009), p. 349.

<sup>29</sup> Friedman, *Distinction*, pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>30</sup> Giselinde Kuipers, 'Television and taste hierarchies: the case of Dutch television comedy', *Media, Culture, Society* 28 (2006), pp. 359 – 378. Pertti Alasuutari, "'I'm ashamed to admit it but I have watched *Dallas*": the moral hierarchy of television programmes', *Media, Culture and Society* 14 (1992), pp. 561 – 582. Nathalie Claessens and Alexander Dhoest, 'Comedy taste: Highbrow/lowbrow comedy and cultural capital', *Participations* 7:1 (2010), pp. 49 – 72.

<sup>31</sup> Kuipers, 'Television', pp. 374 – 375.

are invited to join a group of people who, with impudence, will turn the week upside down and take it to pieces.<sup>32</sup>

Kenneth Adam, the Director of BBC Television, labelled *TW3* 'an onslaught on the Establishment'. Accordingly, the programme took 'a rag to some rather murky windows. It is cant, it is pomposity, it is sham, it is, perhaps above all, lazy thinking that the programme is aiming at.'<sup>33</sup> During a news conference in Blackpool in September 1963, Adam contended that *TW3* had 'a very definite and positive point of view – to make people think about institutions and persons and the state of things in this country.'<sup>34</sup> The series was fronted by a mainly young cast of new television performers: David Frost served as the principal compère alongside Timothy Birdsall, Bernard Levin, Lance Percival, Kenneth Cope, Roy Kinnear, Willie Rushton, Al Mancini, Robert Lang, David Kernan and Millicent Martin. The BBC press office reported that 'from the first audience of 3.5 million, the number of regular viewers has grown steadily... the figure rose to 8.5 million and later, a peak of 12 million was reached.' They concluded that 'such audiences are exceptional for programmes late at night.'<sup>35</sup> Not only did the programme attract huge audiences, but also critical acclaim. In 1963, the Guild of Television Producers and Directors bestowed a special merit award on the show's production team.<sup>36</sup>

The BBC Written Archives Centre offers an abundance of archival material. For the thirty-seven broadcast episodes of *TW3*, there are twenty-six scripts and twenty audience research reports. The sheer volume of audience research for the series points to *TW3*'s controversial nature. The British Film Institute has holdings of six *TW3* episodes which have been viewed. There are twenty-five folders of letters from viewers to the BBC and, oftentimes, the reply returned by the BBC. As the Head of Secretariat acknowledged in June 1963, these letters 'covered the widest imaginable range, their writers varying from

---

<sup>32</sup> 'Late of a Saturday Night', 12 November 1962, T66/103/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>33</sup> Memo: Director of Television to Director General, Re: *TW3*, 21 January 1963. R44/1,193/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>34</sup> Memo: Roland Fox to Baverstock, Milne and Sherrin, 18 September 1963, T32/1,649/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>35</sup> '*TW3* Takes a Break', Undated, T66/103/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>36</sup> '1963 Television Awards', *Times*, 23 November 1963, p. 5.

the lunatic via the outraged to the genuinely perplexed and hurt and the range of subject matter being as wide as that covered by the programme.<sup>37</sup> Five production files offer internal memos about the programme's conception, production and management. Furthermore, there are also two policy folders which provide an insight into the broader institutional management and formulation of satirical output at the BBC in the 1960s. My study is supported by contemporary press comment. Hansard was also studied to ascertain the extent to which *TW3* had captured the attention of British politics in the early 1960s.

In the first section of this chapter I examine three controversial sketches performed on *TW3* about senior politicians, the monarchy and religion. I argue that whilst these satirical items may have been fervently anti-Establishment in their content, and emblematic of declining levels of popular deference, the response of predominantly well-to-do, critical correspondents to the BBC about these items was overwhelmingly conservative. *TW3*'s opponents considered such attacks to be 'vulgar' and in extremely bad taste. Complicating the established progressive narratives of the satirical programme and the period in which it was broadcast, I argue that these viewers were perturbed by such attacks on the British 'Establishment' and remained both wedded and deferential to these institutions. Such a response also evidences how television comedy did not accelerate value change for this section of the audience but, instead, reinforced their conservatism.

The second section highlights how viewers who wrote to the BBC to complain about *TW3* linked their criticisms to broader debates about British decline. Studying audience responses unearths popular narratives of decline in the early 1960s. I argue that, for disapproving viewers, *TW3* was considered both cause and symptom of decline. Significant sections of the audience believed *TW3* was contributing negatively to the permissive society, affecting moral character and harming Britain's international standing and economic

---

<sup>37</sup> Memo: Head of Secretariat to Harman Grisewood, Re: *TW3*, 12 June 1963.

progress. Those who wrote to complain believed that the BBC should be setting its sights higher than satire and should be actively working to reverse decline.

In the final section, I examine how viewers utilised their appreciation or depreciation of *TW3* in order to draw social distinctions about themselves and others. Following repeated declarations that the correspondent could take a joke and/or were 'ordinary', objections to *TW3* principally revolved around questions of viewer 'intelligence' and 'maturity'. Correspondents related their discussions about *TW3* to debates about other forms of popular entertainment and expressed concern about the impact of the programme and its subject matter on other, more vulnerable, social groups. Finally, the decision to cancel *TW3* prompted debate about who controlled public television in the early 1960s.

#### **4.1: Deference**

'Looking back now, the volume of outrage may seem surprising,' reflected David Frost in 1993, 'but [people] had never before seen authority... treated as subjects for humour or mockery... The whole thing was disruptive in the extreme.'<sup>38</sup> In their autobiographies both Frost and Ned Sherrin discussed three key sketches which they considered to be *TW3*'s most significant attacks on the 'Establishment', exemplifying *TW3*'s assault on deference. They were a sketch about Lord Home following his appointment as Prime Minister, a skit entitled the 'Sinking of the Royal Barge', and a satire on the commercialisation of religion entitled the 'Consumer Guide to Religion'.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, these three sketches have become the most frequently referenced in histories of the programme.<sup>40</sup> Yet many viewers found this treatment of authority to be well beyond the bounds of acceptable public discourse. In this section I argue that the overwhelmingly negative response to *TW3*'s handling of politics, monarchy

---

<sup>38</sup> David Frost, *An Autobiography: Part One – From Congregations to Audiences* (London, 1993), pp. 60 – 61.

<sup>39</sup> Ned Sherrin, *Ned Sherrin: The Autobiography* (London, 2005), pp. 124 – 131. Frost, *Autobiography*, pp. 56 – 98.

<sup>40</sup> Carpenter, *Satire*, pp. 248 – 276. Wilmut, *Fringe*, pp. 65 – 70.

and religion, in letters and audience research reports, evidences, not value change amongst those well-to-do sections of the audience who engaged with the BBC about *TW3*, but their resilient popular conservatism too often neglected in accounts of the period.

I first categorised and counted the surviving 470 letters sent to the BBC about *TW3* to identify the issues which were raised by viewers in their correspondence. More often than not, correspondents wrote to record either their general appreciation (69 letters) or criticism (148 letters) of the series. The specific topics which attracted the most letters were *TW3*'s satirical treatment of religion (119 letters), politicians (70 letters) and the monarchy (13 letters).<sup>41</sup> Within each collection of letters, the majority of writers were concerned with the three sketches described above. Notably, no one wrote to the BBC in supportive terms about these sketches. Moreover, in the twenty surviving audience research reports only two individual sketches were ever mentioned by name, the 'Consumer Guide to Religion' and 'Royal Barge' sketches, and neither was singled out for praise.<sup>42</sup> Reviewing the first series, the BBC's audience research department highlighted how 'viewers disapproved of all satirical references to the British Royal Family, foreign Royalties, and religion, and disliked attacks on individual personalities.'<sup>43</sup> Viewers and programme makers thus highlighted the three sketches later identified by Frost and Sherrin.

Just as *Till Death Us Do Part* (hereafter *TDUDP*) and *Curry & Chips* would come to be described in the following years as 'vulgar', this was also the most common negative word used to describe *TW3*. As with Johnny Speight's sitcoms, vulgarity emerged as an expansive term for a litany of contemporary concerns brought to the fore by *TW3*. Viewers found *TW3*'s disrespect for the 'Establishment' to be one of the most 'vulgar' aspects of the series. Audience research reports described the earliest episodes of *TW3* as being characterised

---

<sup>41</sup> No other topic attracted more than six letters, with the exception of the one-off episode in response to the death of President John F. Kennedy (12 letters). Letters ranged from issues about capital punishment to health.

<sup>42</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 12 January 1963, R9/7/62, BBC WAC. ARR: *TW3* TX 02 February 1963, R9/7/62, BBC WAC. No script or ARR exists in the BBC WAC for the episode in which the Home sketch was broadcast.

<sup>43</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963, R9/7/63, BBC WAC.



by 'vulgarity and bad taste' which had 'shocked viewers'.<sup>44</sup> Such a characterisation would remain for the run of *TW3*, with repeated research reports highlighting how viewers believed 'sarcasm and vulgarity have been substituted for satire and wit' and that it was just 'bad taste and cheap vulgarity'.<sup>45</sup> One expansive report highlighted how a majority of the audience felt 'there was more vulgarity and less wit towards the end' of the first series.<sup>46</sup> Viewers similarly wrote to the BBC to describe *TW3* as 'vulgar, cheap... makes a mockery of all social, moral and other standards' and preoccupied with 'vulgarity, obscenity and abusiveness'.<sup>47</sup> One correspondent was quite prepared for 'satire, but let it be clean and not cheaply vulgar'.<sup>48</sup> Letters rarely identified a specific element within a programme that they found particularly vulgar. Rather, the term was used broadly to challenge the BBC with particular reference to *TW3*'s engagement with politics, the monarchy and religion.

Dilwyn Porter has argued the Conservative governments of the early 1960s 'were represented as a party of blimps, permanently stranded in Edwardian England, who had somehow contrived to miss the fast train into the second half of the twentieth century'.<sup>49</sup> Such a representation was only compounded by the decision, in October 1963, to promote the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Home to the office of Prime Minister ensuring, as Cannadine has highlighted, that 'the most authentically genteel Prime Minister took office since the time of Lords Rosebery and Salisbury'.<sup>50</sup> Home appeared an embodiment of the Establishment and his appointment 'seemed to confirm the icy grip of the past in governing circles' when "'the spirit of the times" was anti-aristocratic and anti-traditional; he seemed hardly the man to "modernise" Britain'.<sup>51</sup> *TW3* was

---

<sup>44</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 01 December 1962, R9/7/61, BBC WAC.

<sup>45</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 16 November 1963, R9/7/66, BBC WAC. ARR: *TW3* TX 06 April 1963, R9/7/63, BBC WAC.

<sup>46</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963'.

<sup>47</sup> Letter: Iain Buchanan, 22 April 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC. Letter: B. Mitchell, 01 October 1963, R41/289/12, BBC WAC.

<sup>48</sup> Letter: Rita Garton, 01 October 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>49</sup> Dilwyn Porter, 'Downhill all the way: thirteen Tory years, 1951 – 64', in Richard Coopey, Steven Fielding and Nick Tiratsoo, *The Wilson Governments, 1964 – 1970* (London, 1993), p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1996), p. 666.

<sup>51</sup> John Seed, 'Hegemony postponed: the unravelling of the culture of consensus in Britain in the 1960s', in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds.), *Cultural Revolution?: The Challenge of the*

broadcast on the day following Home's appointment and immediately took exception to his promotion. Frost explained in his autobiography that 'Most people of our age were angry' about it.<sup>52</sup> Sherrin invited Christopher Booker to write an 'appropriate piece' and 'the idea emerged of Benjamin Disraeli writing a letter to his latest successor, which [Frost] would deliver.'<sup>53</sup> In his autobiography, Sherrin maintained that the sketch was 'the nearest I got to mounting a personal pulpit on *TW3*.' He described the monologue as 'not anti-Conservative' but 'a vigorous summary of a Butlerian – or Disraelian – reaction to a retrograde elevation inside the Tory Party.'<sup>54</sup> Written in the style of one of Benjamin Disraeli's 'Runnymede' letters, satirising politicians, Frost read the 'letter':

My Lord: when I say that your acceptance of the Queen's commission to form an administration has proved, and will prove, an unmitigated catastrophe for the Conservative Party, for the Constitution, for the Nation, and for yourself, it must not be thought that I bear you any personal ill-will... You are the dupe and unwitting tool of a conspiracy – the conspiracy of a tiny band of desperate men who have seen in you their last slippery chance of keeping the levers of power within their privileged circle. For the sake of that prize, which can at best be transitory, those men are prepared to dash all the hopes of the Party they profess to serve: or rather the two nations which by their actions they seek to perpetuate...<sup>55</sup>

The monologue foreshadowed both Harold Wilson's later contention that 'the Government party in Britain selected the country's leader through the machinery of an aristocratic cabal' and Iain Macleod's that 'a magic circle' of old Etonians had fixed the succession in favour of one of their own.<sup>56</sup> What was particularly galling for viewers and what, according to Sherrin, fanned the flames most, was 'David Frost's pay off.'<sup>57</sup> Frost ended the monologue with the

---

*arts in the 1960s* (London, 1992), p. 20. Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1998), pp. 293 – 294.

<sup>52</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, pp. 98 – 99.

<sup>53</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, pp. 98 – 99.

<sup>54</sup> Ned Sherrin, *A Small Thing Like An Earthquake* (London, 1983), p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> The script of this episode was not available in the BBC WAC. Quoted in Crisell, 'Filth', p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (London, 2002), p. 334.

<sup>57</sup> Ned Sherrin, 'That Was The Show That Was', *Observer*, 16 January 1983, p. 41.

words: 'So that's the choice before the electorate. On the one side, Lord Home; on the other, Harold Wilson. Dull Alec versus Smart Alec. Good night.'<sup>58</sup> There is no doubt that the sketch was a potent attack on the Establishment; it proffered the view that Home's elevation had been the doing of a small elite, who contrived to retain power for themselves, something which would result in disaster for all.

Whilst undoubtedly effective, many viewers were appalled by the sketch. Sherrin remembered that 'No such savage attack on a politician had previously been delivered on BBC Television and the monologue caused a storm of nearly 600 phone calls and over 300 letters – all in protest.'<sup>59</sup> Frost recalled that the response to the sketch, 'was not discernibly positive' because the 'piece had been savage.'<sup>60</sup> Many correspondents expressed their respect for the unfairly maligned politician. The middle-class P. A. Jackson, of Muswell Hill, London believed the sketch was 'blatant political propaganda of the most crude and vulgar type' and that producers had 'badly misjudged the good taste and inherent decency of the Public in [their] presentation of this appalling feature.' Jackson concluded that 'we now have the unedifying spectacle of third rate buffoons daring to insult and abuse distinguished statesmen.'<sup>61</sup> Plymouth's Dr C. H. Hutchinson felt:

To ridicule politicians who, in possession of the facts, do their best and are, after all, Ministers of the Crown is not satire but treason; and mischievous both nationally and internationally. David Frost's attack on Lord Home on his first day as the Queen's Prime Minister was not only stupid and unfair but won a mark for achieving a new low in disgraceful behaviour which no apology can eradicate.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas *TW3* found Home's elevation a betrayal, Hutchinson believed their response to this was the real betrayal, even treasonous. Donald Kingston, an Engineering Consultant from Buckinghamshire, confessed that he and his wife

---

<sup>58</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, pp. 99 – 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ned Sherrin, 'That Was The Show That Was'.

<sup>60</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, p. 100.

<sup>61</sup> Letter: P. A. Jackson, 20 October 1963, R41/289/8, BBC WAC.

<sup>62</sup> Letter: Dr C. H. Hutchinson, 20 October 1963, R41/289/7, BBC WAC.

were 'disgusted with the appallingly vulgar, impertinent and vicious attack made on Lord Home' and asked 'How these people are allowed to get away with such vile and filthy attacks?'<sup>63</sup> While the condemnation of impertinence suggested a conservative commitment to social hierarchy, even a self-professed 'Trade Union official', A. A. Rignall from West London and serial complainant to the BBC about *TW3*, deplored the Disraeli sketch as 'vicious, dirty and back stabbing' and 'not in keeping with the standard of honour that is found in the ordinary working fellow.'<sup>64</sup> Gloucester's Cassino Joe wrote that 'the stink of this programme is still in my nostrils'.<sup>65</sup> For many, *TW3*'s attack went far beyond the bounds of satire and amounted to, in the words of H. W. Bailey-King (a sales director at a London printing company), 'nothing more than a [shockingly] vicious political attack in the worst possible taste judged by any political standards.'<sup>66</sup> Even Home noted years later that 'it did get under my skin' and that he had found it 'a bit cruel.'<sup>67</sup> Sherrin recalled hearing Home 'say during a television interview' that 'it was the only thing that had hurt him in many years of public service'.<sup>68</sup> Many viewers were appalled at such an unprecedented televisual attack on a statesman and minister of the crown.

Correspondents believed that an attack on Home was unacceptable when he was about to assume the responsibilities of the premiership. Viewers consistently expressed their respect for the office of the Prime Minister. H. F. Eande, from Corner Cottage in Sussex, expressed 'feelings of disgust and anger' at the sketch and felt, now was 'the time, when he is taking over so difficult a job, and when his success or failure will affect our nation and all our lives to give [Home] our support and generosity.'<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Brigadier G. H. N. Todd, from Gloucestershire, felt it a 'disgraceful', 'vindictive, squalid' and 'totally unwarranted attack' against an individual 'about to assume the highest office of

---

<sup>63</sup> Letter: Donald Kingston, 20 October 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>64</sup> Letter: A. A. Rignall, 20 October 1963, R41/289/15, BBC WAC.

<sup>65</sup> Letter: Cassino Joe, 19 October 1963, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>66</sup> Letter: H. W. Bailey-King, 20 October 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Michael Cockerell, *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (London, 1988), p. 98.

<sup>68</sup> Sherrin, *Earthquake*, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> Letter: H. F. Eande, 21 October 1963, R41/289/4, BBC WAC.

state.<sup>70</sup> The well-to-do J. Glass, from Cheshire, felt similarly when he announced that it was:

...not necessary to be supportive of their choice of Lord Home as Prime Minister to deplore the irresponsible interpretation, devoid of wit and grace which denigrated the career and capabilities of a man at the very beginning of his tenure of the highest office in the land.<sup>71</sup>

Correspondents objected particularly strongly to the personal nature of the sketch. F. M. Orange-Bromehead, a retired Colonel in a typed letter sent from the Grade II listed Dernford Hall in Suffolk, felt 'the aim of this attack seems to me to have had as its first objective the demoralisation and destruction of a man' and not only that, but a 'man who leads the country.' Orange-Bromehead advised the BBC: 'if you disagree with a man's policies you have no right to assassinate his character any more than you have the right to assassinate him physically.'<sup>72</sup> In the weeks after the Disraeli sketch, even a BBC audience research report acknowledged that:

...the Tory Prime Ministership had been front page news for some time, but the constant 'harping' on the subject had become very boring and on this occasion, the name of 'Lord Home' had been bandied about to such an extent that they were, they said, left with the feeling that there had been nothing else in the programme. In fact, it was added, the 'victimisation' had been very one-sided lately and some viewers thought the Conservatives should be given a rest. 'Let somebody else have a bashing for a while.'<sup>73</sup>

Another report, published a few weeks later, highlighted how 'the preponderance of material about the Prime Minister, nearly all containing "vicious personal attacks" on him, irritated [viewers] considerably.'<sup>74</sup> The majority of correspondents, many from the middle- and upper-middle classes, were also highly critical of *TW3*'s treatment of the Prime Minister. Criticisms of the Disraeli sketch were infused with respectful references to the role of Prime Minister and accompanied by a lexicon of betrayal in relation to *TW3*'s anti-

---

<sup>70</sup> Letter: Brigadier Todd, 21 October 1963, R41/289/18, BBC WAC.

<sup>71</sup> Letter: J. Glass, 20 October 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>72</sup> Letter: F. M. Orange-Bromehead, 22 October 1963, R41/289/13, BBC WAC.

<sup>73</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 26 October 1963, R9/7/65, BBC WAC.

<sup>74</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 16 November 1963.

Establishment tirade. For the majority of correspondents *TW3* did not encourage a change in values but, rather, the enunciation of popular conservative sensibilities.

Ben Pimlott has argued that ‘Since attacks on the Conservatives were frequently linked to criticism of a social and political “Establishment”, of which the Monarchy was seen as part, it was difficult to avoid being linked in the public mind.’ He conceded, however, that the monarch ‘remained out of bounds’ of the ‘wider social critique’.<sup>75</sup> Rather, as Phillip Ziegler has argued, condemnations of the monarchy were most often directed at the ‘stuffy, narrow-minded and excessively traditional courtiers.’<sup>76</sup> When royalty was criticised by Lord Altrincham in August 1957, he was most concerned about the ‘blandness and servility’ of royal coverage which was ‘alien to Britain’s fundamental traditions of free thought and free speech’ and which he compared to Japanese ‘Shintoism’, the obsessive reverence for the emperor.<sup>77</sup> It was this deferential reporting of the royals that *TW3* was also concerned to ridicule.

‘The Sinking of the Royal Barge’ was written by Ian Lang who, in the 1990s became Secretary of State for Scotland, and was, Frost maintained, ‘perhaps the only example of somebody whose career had combined the two Cambridge trends of the time – satire and membership of Conservative Cabinets.’<sup>78</sup> That the sketch attracted such an uproar was surprising given that it was prefaced: ‘On Thursday the Queen left for Australia – a land famous... for its plain speaking. Dare we hope that [Australians] will give us a lead on the right way to report a Royal tour... [without] cloaking every occasion – whether significant or trivial – in the same reverential hush.’ Frost, mimicking Richard Dimpleby who had reported the royals’ actual departure for Australia, described the scene:

---

<sup>75</sup> Pimlott, *Queen*, pp. 275 – 323.

<sup>76</sup> Phillip Ziegler, *Crown and People* (London, 1978), pp. 131 – 132.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Lacey, *Royalty: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* (St Ives, 2002), p. 201.

<sup>78</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, p. 69.

Good morning from the Pool of London, where, on a cold, wet and windy morning, we are all eagerly awaiting the departure of the Queen...

And as the barge [that will carry them out to the Britannia] moves away from the quayside it is becoming clear that something has gone wrong. The Royal Barge is, as it were... sinking. The sleek, royal-blue hull of the Barge is sliding gracefully, almost regally, beneath the waters of the Pool of London.

...And now the Queen, smiling radiantly, is swimming for her life. Her Majesty is wearing a silk ensemble in canary yellow... And now the Band of the Royal Marines has struck up *God Save the Queen*. And now, what a splendid gesture, the sun is breaking through the clouds.<sup>79</sup>

Sherrin recalled that 'our attitude to the royal family was not to mock the Queen but the reverential, forelock-tugging way they were reported.'<sup>80</sup> Pimlott believed the sketch 'was levelled at the insane sycophancy of BBC coverage of royal events, rather than the monarchy.'<sup>81</sup> Despite the BBC's defence of the item on the grounds that it 'never ridiculed or lampooned the Queen and Royal Family' but 'certainly made fun of the somewhat ridiculous pomp with which certain people surround the Royal Family', an outcry about the sketch ensued.<sup>82</sup>

According to the audience research report for the episode, the item 'provoked considerable comment. A fairly large number of viewers disapproved strongly, regarding it as being in very bad taste, almost ruining the whole show.'<sup>83</sup> Not only had *TW3* placed the Queen in a comedy sketch which some viewers regarded as disrespectful, but the portrayal of a drowning monarch offended many. C. S. Drake wrote to the BBC, on embossed letterhead from Derbyshire, to complain about the 'crude and offensive shaft of "wit" directed against the Royal Family' which had led him to switch 'off in disgust'.<sup>84</sup> Lord Knutsford wrote to the BBC to add his vote of 'disgust' and asked: 'need the Royal Family be touched?'<sup>85</sup> The skit may primarily have lampooned royal

---

<sup>79</sup> *TW3*, 02 February 1963.

<sup>80</sup> Sherrin, *Sherrin*, p. 131.

<sup>81</sup> Pimlott, *Queen*, p. 320.

<sup>82</sup> Letter: Alasdair Milne to Imlay Watts, 25 September 1963, T16/589, BBC WAC.

<sup>83</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 02 February 1963.

<sup>84</sup> Letter: C. S. Drake, 16 November 1963, R41/289/4, BBC WAC.

<sup>85</sup> Letter: Lord Knutsford, 20 December 1963, R41/289/9, BBC WAC.

reporting but viewers still objected and requested that the Queen not be included in any future episodes. Correspondents were overwhelmingly critical, evidencing the persistence of popular support for the monarchy and the limits of anti-Establishment sentiment in the early 1960s.

Callum Brown and Gordon Lynch have maintained that there was ‘a weakening of normative Christian culture in Britain’ after 1945. ‘The world of deference, conformity and respectability came to a stuttering halt’ as a result of the ‘Sixties cultural revolution’ which also caused the ‘sudden and culturally violent event’ of secularisation. Satire and comedy were heralded by Brown and Lynch as sites where ‘deference’ was ‘struck down in the media.’<sup>86</sup> Brown has contended that television ‘fed “swinging London” to the nation, whilst its burgeoning youth comedy ridiculed “Establishment” values’, including religion.<sup>87</sup> I want to complicate this secularisation narrative. *TW3* invited protest from a significant section of people who wrote in support of the Church and religious doctrine at this apparent moment of weakening support for religion. More than the satirical handling of monarchy and politicians, viewers objected to, and found most vulgar, *TW3*’s representation of religion. In an extensive audience research report into viewer responses to the programme’s first series the BBC found that the thing audiences ‘disliked most frequently’ about the programme was that ‘it often joked about religion and Sacred things.’ The report noted that the show’s ‘jokes about religion... was evidently not regarded by many as a virtue deserving special commendation.’<sup>88</sup>

In the post-war period the Church sought to develop new forms and approaches to worship in order to shore-up and broaden its popular appeal. Grace Davie has suggested that the Church sought to ‘shake off its image of belonging essentially to the past’ so that it could emerge as ‘a modern, up-to-date and, above all, relevant church... shaped to face the future.’<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Callum Brown and Gordon Lynch, ‘Cultural perspectives’, in Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (eds.), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 330 – 333.

<sup>87</sup> Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800 – 2000* (Abingdon, 2009), p. 178.

<sup>88</sup> ARR: *TW3* – Enquiry into Winter 62/63 Series, 30 May 1963, T32/1,649/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>89</sup> Grace Davie, ‘Religion in post-war Britain: a sociological view’, in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London, 1994), pp. 167 – 168.



Consequently, as Brown has highlighted, ‘many Christian congregations in Britain’ tried to ‘mimic the forms of youth culture’ whereby they developed ‘new forms of religious worship using guitars and penny whistles, modern dress and a “happy-clappy” atmosphere.’<sup>90</sup> TW3 frequently pilloried these efforts, for example in the ‘Consumer Guide to Religion’. ‘The thrust of the piece’, explained Frost, ‘was that as religion became more and more determinedly earthly in its value judgements and its appeal to the public, it would be judged more and more by earthly standards’.<sup>91</sup> Sherrin noted how the sketch ‘rigorously applied the language and standards of consumer guides to various religions... if religions were seeking to make ever more worldly appeals to their flocks they must not be surprised if they found themselves judged by the standards of the world.’<sup>92</sup> Consequently, Frost performed the sketch in the style of the consumer magazine *Which?*:

We begin by applying three basic tests:

What do you put into it?

What do you get out of it?

How much does it cost?

...In choosing the best buy we rejected Islam as a cut price form of Judaism. We admired Buddhism for its emphasis on personal effort with its resulting low cost, but the product does not travel well and thrives best in a warm climate...

The attraction of the Church of England lies in its Democratic Spirit.

If you want Transubstantiation you can have Transubstantiation. If you don’t want Transubstantiation, well then you don’t have to have it...

And it’s a jolly friendly faith. If you are one, there’s no onus on you to make anyone else join. In fact no one need ever know. It doesn’t interfere with essentials. And it’s pretty fair on the whole. With sins of these products – Roman Catholicism and Judaism for instance – you start guilty from the off. But the C. of E. is English – on the whole, you start pretty well innocent, and they’ve got to prove you’re guilty...

All in all we think you get a jolly good little faith for a very, very moderate outlay and we have no hesitation in proclaiming it the Best Buy.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Brown, *Death*, p. 180.

<sup>91</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, p. 63.

<sup>92</sup> Sherrin, *Earthquake*, p. 83.

<sup>93</sup> TW3, 12 January 1963.

Frost recalled that ‘all Heaven broke loose’ after the sketch’s broadcast.<sup>94</sup> The audience research report for the episode noted how ‘No other single item in the programme made as much stir’ as ‘David Frost’s scrutiny of religion (in its varieties), and the style of a Consumer Research report or Shoppers’ Guide’.<sup>95</sup> Summarising the immediate response of viewers to the episode, the Head of Secretariat also noted how ‘the strongest reaction was aroused by the “Consumer Guide to Religion”’.<sup>96</sup>

Defending the sketch in a letter to a Reverend, the Director of BBC Television highlighted his own religiosity. ‘I started life as a Congregationalist... I am now a practicing Anglican’, before noting that he found ‘this programme has a quite highly serious intention’:

People really must listen to what is being said on the screen. I find that very few complainants about this programme seem to have taken in what was said immediately before and after the item on consumer research in religion. David Frost introduced and concluded it by saying that many people used to think of faith as a deep or simple thing – essentially something that could not be measured by earthly standards. Then he said that nowadays many religious leaders tended to appeal more and more from a worldly point of view, and that the dangers in that approach were that if you used the methods and values of the world to put anything across, those were the values by which you would be judged.

I thought that Peter Simple of the *Daily Telegraph* admirably summed up the intention when he said: “...the item did not set out to mock at religion, but to mock at the idea that religion is a product like any other which can and should be sold to the public by all the arts of commerce.”<sup>97</sup>

In his article, Simple had complained about ‘those “services for teenagers” which employed the methods of commercialised mass entertainment’ and as such were ‘an idea that deserves to be mocked’.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the sketch’s attack on the commercialisation of religion and the BBC’s defence of it on the same grounds, the corporation received a barrage of

---

<sup>94</sup> Frost, *Autobiography*, p. 63.

<sup>95</sup> ARR: TW3 TX 12 January 1963.

<sup>96</sup> Memo: Head of Secretariat to Mr Grisewood, RE: TW3, 12 June 1963.

<sup>97</sup> Letter: Kenneth Adam to The Reverend G. C. N. Naesmyth, 25 January 1963, R44/1,193/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Simple, ‘Mock’, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 1963.

complaints about attacks, in whatever form, against religion. Such subject matter was considered by viewers to be beyond the pale. One unnamed viewer complained that the item had been 'completely inexcusable on any grounds whatever.' Whilst they could 'enjoy and support the guying and "Mickey extraction" of pomposity, priggishness and self-satisfaction and all the other human frailties that invite satire in one form or another', there was 'absolutely no call for this treatment on fundamental issues like religious faiths.'<sup>99</sup> Even Frost's father, a Methodist minister, complained that *TW3* should not have satirised 'the Godhead or theology for the sake of young people who are formulating their creeds... I don't think you should satirise doctrines.'<sup>100</sup> Philip Crome, from Bognor Regis, wrote to the *Daily Mail* in January 1963, to urge 'Christians throughout the land' to 'protest most strongly against the blasphemous sketch involving the Christian faith... We must raise in horror at the vulgar way this disgraceful sketch was allowed to corrupt the peace and hope millions of viewers so desperately need.'<sup>101</sup> Major-General C. M. F. White CB, CBE, DSO wrote to ask if it was now:

...[BBC] policy to allow silly young men to hurt deeply the feelings of a very large number of people of many nations by poking fun and... behaving blasphemously and lewdly in a public performance to an audience of several millions of people. Does it occur to you that the effects of this broadcast are very bad for the state? What but abhorrence and disdain and even hate could be generated against a nation whose Broadcasting Corporation can allow such a programme to be put on. I am, of course, referring only to that part of the programme dealing with religious sects.<sup>102</sup>

Some correspondents viewed religious faith as a privileged aspect of cultural life which should be treated with respect by the mass media.

The sketch attracted explicit comment in Parliament. Speaking in the House of Commons, William Shepherd, Conservative MP for Cheadle, deplored the programme's 'attack upon belief itself'. He believed it was acceptable to

---

<sup>99</sup> Quotes from Letters about *TW3*, 20 May 1963, R44/1,193/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>100</sup> Douglas Marlborough, 'David Frost was wrong, says his clergyman father', *Daily Mail*, 14 January 1963, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> 'Letters', *Daily Mail*, 17 January 1963, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Letter: Major-General C. M. F. White, 15 January 1963, R41/289/20, BBC WAC.

‘attack the unnecessary and sometimes pretentious trappings, but do not try to attack and demean what a man believes in – his faith.’<sup>103</sup> Many correspondents to the BBC shared this view and such support for religion evidences the persistent commitment to the church among many viewers at a time of apparent secularisation.

Historians of the 1960s have utilised *TW3* as evidence of broader socio-cultural shifts in British society during the decade, namely growing anti-Establishment sentiment and the consequential death of deference. Whilst it is beyond doubt that *TW3* adopted such a narrative in its treatment of politics, royalty and religion, the conservative response of so many, mainly middle and upper-class, viewers to this portrayal complicates the progressive version of both the programme and of the 1960s. Many viewers found *TW3*’s lampooning of these institutions ‘vulgar’ and in bad taste, and no favourable response to the three sketches under examination has survived in the archive. A significant and vocal section of the audience disdained the way in which *TW3* attacked Home on his appointment as Prime Minister; they believed respect, and not vicious personal attacks, should have been accorded a statesman on the assumption of such an important post. Despite claims that the ‘Royal Barge’ sketch had challenged royal media coverage and not the monarch herself, viewers believed royalty, and the Queen in particular, should be entirely omitted from *TW3*’s treatment. Of all these institutions, viewers were most perturbed by the series’ lampooning of religion. Satires on faith, doctrines and God were beyond the realms of acceptability. Consequently, correspondence and audience research reports into *TW3* reveal not a wave of anti-Establishment sentiment and value change, but many viewers’ conservative sensibilities evidenced in their continued respect for Parliament, Crown and Church.

---

<sup>103</sup> HC Debate, 14 January 1964, vol 687, cols 65-100.

## 4.2: Decline

In this section I explore how debates about national decline played out in audience responses to *TW3* in order to unearth popular narratives of decline in the first half of the 1960s. Amy Whipple has argued that those writing to Enoch Powell in the aftermath of his 'Rivers of Blood' speech evidenced 'a profound sense of national decline'. Correspondents 'integrated the immigration issue into broader critiques of the nation in the late 1960s... immigration was as much a symptom as a cause of social ills and national weakness.'<sup>104</sup> Audience responses to *TW3* displayed surprising similarities with Powell's correspondents. I argue that whilst *TW3* may have ridiculed British decline, many viewers deemed *TW3* to be both a cause and a symptom of Britain's post-war decline. Consequently, many viewers were dismayed that the BBC was an active agent in this process. Those who were most concerned tended to occupy the middling to upper rungs of the social ladder.

A vocal segment of *TW3*'s audience believed the programme was a cause of British decline in the early 1960s. In one of a series of typed letters, on embossed letterhead, W. S. Pritchard of Scarborough noted that *TW3* was playing a role 'in the decline and decadence of our Country.'<sup>105</sup> Pritchard was evidently a significant figure owing to the fact his letter attracted a reply from the Controller of Television Programmes. Writing from her prestigious address in Kensington, and in yet a further demonstration of *TW3*'s pro-Establishment audience, Miss R. C. Sarsfield Hall felt that *TW3*, in its sneering at the 'Establishment', was 'deliberately aim[ed] at destroying the faith, moral values and integrity on which our nation has been built.'<sup>106</sup> Dr C. H. Hutchinson, from Plymouth, borrowed from Reithian notions of the BBC as a medium intended to 'educate, inform and entertain', to question whether the intention of *TW3* was 'to interest, to educate, to elevate or to amuse? Or to antagonise, demoralise,

---

<sup>104</sup> Amy Whipple, 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell', *The Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009), p. 720.

<sup>105</sup> Letter: W. S. Pritchard, 28 April 1963, R41/289/14, BBC WAC.

<sup>106</sup> Letter: R. Sarsfield-Hall, 07 November 1963, R41/289/16, BBC WAC.

deprave and disgust?’<sup>107</sup> These well-to-do viewers believed that Britain was in decline and that *TW3* was contributing to this process.

During its run on the BBC, *TW3* attracted a considerable response from politicians who, like the series’ popular audience, found the programme to be a cause of decline. The Conservative MP for St Marylebone in London, Sir Wavell Wakefield, wrote that *TW3* fundamentally ‘runs down British achievements, British institutions and British standards of value.’ Wakefield contended that the programme ‘sets out to undermine and denigrate everything that has been built up by our forefathers over the centuries.’ He concluded that *TW3* was ‘destructive and negative’ and ‘oozes out discontent, cynicism and unhappiness.’<sup>108</sup> Speaking in the House of Commons, Ellis Smith, Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent South, maintained that *TW3* ‘was a disgrace to anyone associated with it. It should never have been allowed to be broadcast. It lowered the standards of the British people, and it was undermining confidence in everything and everybody.’<sup>109</sup>

Many of *TW3*’s audience expressed concern that the programme was contributing to increasing immorality and permissiveness at the start of the 1960s. Indeed, Friedman found that when British high-cultural-capital respondents talked about comedy, one of ‘their first weapons of denigration [was] the morally transgressive element’ of its humour.<sup>110</sup> Marwick has defined permissiveness as ‘a general sexual liberation, entailing striking changes in public and private morals and a new frankness, openness, and indeed honesty in personal relations and modes of expression.’<sup>111</sup> He described how ‘a running battle between the advocates of permissiveness and tolerance and those of purity and censorship was joined.’<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Trevor Fisher has argued that the changes in public morality which emerged in the 1960s were preceded by ‘a

---

<sup>107</sup> Letter: Dr C. H. Hutchinson, 20 October 1963.

<sup>108</sup> Letter: Sir Wavell Wakefield, 16 October 1963, R41/289/19, BBC WAC.

<sup>109</sup> HC Debate, 14 January 1964, vol 687, cols 134-139.

<sup>110</sup> Sam Friedman and Giseline Kuipers, ‘The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries’, *Cultural Sociology* 7:2 (2013), p. 186.

<sup>111</sup> Marwick, *Sixties*, p. 18.

<sup>112</sup> Marwick, *Society*, p. 99.

sustained contest between Respectable morality and its critics.<sup>113</sup> For viewers, *TW3* was one such site where immorality was directly linked with decline and the voices of conservative reaction were registered in opposition. Many viewers writing to the BBC about *TW3* wedded their complaints about the programme to broader contemporary debates about moral decline and permissiveness.

Representatives from organised religion featured prominently amongst correspondents about morality. The Reverend Father Brady, from County Antrim, worried that satire would 'destroy...the morals of the nation' and 'corrupt others'.<sup>114</sup> Hassocks Congregational Church's Minister wrote, following a church meeting, to express the parish's collective dismay 'that the general moral tone of programmes is being lowered... at a time when moral precepts were being challenged'.<sup>115</sup> The Reverend James Shelmerdine wrote in January 1963 from St Paul's Congregational Church in Pemberton:

I had always understood that the Charter of the Corporation desired the highest ethical and moral results from its activities, your programme would, I suggest, be in the most direct opposition to such lofty ideals. The BBC has a great potential by which to influence the thoughts and lives of millions of people, the misuses of this is to be deplored.<sup>116</sup>

Secular correspondents frequently deployed a similar moral language. Richard Swindall, from Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, urged the BBC to 'let [*TW3*] die before it does too much more damage to already declining moral standards'.<sup>117</sup> Writing from Lymington, Northamptonshire on an embossed letterhead, K. Pearce Smith, felt that the 'denigration of our declining values at a time when as never before action is necessary to restore them is not only of bad taste but is detrimental to the interests of the country'.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Trevor Fisher, 'Permissiveness and the politics of morality', *Contemporary Record* 7:1 (1993), p. 149.

<sup>114</sup> Letter: Reverend Father Brady, 11 November 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>115</sup> Letter: Reverend Matanle, 16 October 1963, R41/289/12, BBC WAC.

<sup>116</sup> Letter: Reverend James Shelmerdine, 14 January 1963, R44/1,193/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>117</sup> Letter: Richard Swindall, 02 October 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

<sup>118</sup> Letter: K. Pearce Smith, 28 January 1963, R41/289/16, BBC WAC.

Many writers condemned satire as an encouragement to immorality in an increasingly permissive society. Correspondents to the BBC frequently linked their complaints to recent scandals, especially the Profumo affair. C. E. MacKellar, from County Durham emphasised, on embossed letterhead, how 'Surely the indignation roused throughout the whole country by the recent Profumo case shows that the vast majority of the people do not want a lowering of moral standards, and certainly some of the bits in [TW3] reached a nadir that can only encourage a further recession.'<sup>119</sup> For MacKellar, whilst Profumo was the epitome of loosening moral standards, *TW3* was promoting further moral decline. Geoffrey Daukes dismissed *TW3* as 'simply decadent and must strike other countries as in line with the worst they have thought about us after the Profumo Scandal.'<sup>120</sup> The majority of letters received by the BBC about morality and permissiveness arrived around the time of the Profumo scandal.

Although politicians from both major parties criticised *TW3* in parliament, Conservatives wrote more frequently to the BBC about the programme. Lord Brocket, a Baron and previously a Conservative MP, was a serial complainant. He argued that there was 'enough encouragement to immorality and crime in every function at the present time without such a weekly performance as *TW3*.'<sup>121</sup> Patrick Wall, the Conservative MP for Haltemprice in Yorkshire, and another committed critic, questioned whether 'with all this talk of moral standards we have had during the last few months, surely we are entitled to see that a public corporation like the BBC set at least a minimum standard.'<sup>122</sup> In light of the Profumo scandal, segments of *TW3*'s privileged audience viewed the programme as a further invitation to immorality and permissiveness.

Highlighting further such perceptions of *TW3*, Mary Whitehouse attributed the establishment of the 'Clean-Up TV Campaign' in 1964 to, amongst other things, the emergence of 'late-night satire' which was

---

<sup>119</sup> Letter: C. E. MacKellar, 15 June 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

<sup>120</sup> Letter: Geoffrey Daukes, 27 October 1963, R41/289/4, BBC WAC.

<sup>121</sup> Letter: Lord Brockett, 29 September 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>122</sup> Letter: Patrick Wall MP, 30 September 1963,, R41/289/19, BBC WAC.



emblematic of the corruption of British morality.<sup>123</sup> According to her biographer, Whitehouse ‘loath[ed] the political satires of the 1960s.’<sup>124</sup> This was because, Whitehouse confessed, the BBC derided ‘accepted standards of conduct in its current affairs and comment programmes and pillories the moral and religious values of the mass of the people.’<sup>125</sup> Lawrence Black has argued that Whitehouse’s National Viewers and Listeners’ Association was prompted into action by a ‘secular morality – the self-liberation fostered by affluence and permissiveness, trends that culminated in 1963’ with, for example, ‘*TW3*’ and ‘the relaxing of BBC codes.’ Black has argued that Whitehouse personified ‘moral retrenchment against permissiveness’ and offered a ‘firmly declinist’ vision of Britain as she ‘bemoan[ed] the demise of standards.’<sup>126</sup> As a ‘moral entrepreneur’, Black continued, Whitehouse was able to initiate “‘moral panic’” not just *through* the media, but from below and *about* the media.<sup>127</sup> Whitehouse’s opposition to *TW3* underpins the extent to which the programme’s perception as both immoral and permissive generated a conservative backlash. Indeed, Black has contended that Whitehouse, and latterly the NVALA, ‘articulated and liberated visceral elements in popular conservatism’.<sup>128</sup>

Not only did viewers utilise *TW3* to debate moral decline, but complainants to the BBC also used the programme to pass comment on Britain’s questionable economic performance in the early 1960s. Mr Abbott, from Middlesex, in a handwritten letter, believed *TW3* was:

---

<sup>123</sup> Mary Whitehouse, *Quite Contrary: An Autobiography* (London, 1993), p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Warnock, ‘Whitehouse, (Constance) Mary (1910–2001)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2005; online edn, May 2014 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76525>, accessed 13 Sept 2015].

<sup>125</sup> Mary Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV: From Protest to Participation* (London, 1967), pp. 118 – 119.

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence Black, ‘There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association and Social Movement History’, in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 183 – 191.

<sup>127</sup> Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954 – 70* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 108.

<sup>128</sup> Black, *Redefining British Politics*, pp. 126 – 127.

...responsible for the apathy, cynicism and irresponsibility which I as a shop-steward see around me in the mass of men on the shop floor... this attack on character sabotages the responsible workmanship and production in industry, and is at the root of bad industrial relations? This is a time for action sir...!<sup>129</sup>

In Abbott's opinion, *TW3* was affecting productivity and the character of the working classes at work. George Wood, a serial complainant from Aberdeen, commented that 'we sorely need very great economic expansion in Britain' and because 'national character and productivity are linked... it is in the best national interest to eliminate' such 'destructive and corrosive' satirical programmes 'which contribute to national character'.<sup>130</sup> Like Abbott, Wood believed *TW3* was having an adverse effect on national character which was negatively impacting on Britain's already questionable economic productivity.

*TW3*'s damaging effect on 'character' was a frequent reference point. Abbott maintained that this 'damnable programme' was 'constantly attack[ing] and undermin[ing] material character'.<sup>131</sup> A. A. Rignall, a trade unionist from West London, complained that 'the programme is aimed at destroying the character of this nation' because of *TW3*'s 'filthy' attacks on elites: 'the Queen, the Pope, the Premier'.<sup>132</sup> Once again, here is evidence of a viewer who was disdainful of *TW3*'s negative representation of the Establishment.

A principal concern of correspondents was that *TW3* was damaging Britain's reputation abroad. K. D. Belden of 40 Charles Street, Mayfair, London, wrote to the BBC to complain about *TW3* on three occasions, to the Director General and members of the Board of Governors. He was disdainful of *TW3*'s 'deplorable taste' which was 'outrageous' in its treatment of royalty and political personalities. Consequently, he worried that such 'sick and corrosive satire' was 'destructive of the values and loyalties on which the future strength, prosperity and greatness of our country depends, and we cannot afford to have them undermined any longer'.<sup>133</sup> Belden's neighbour Lawson Wood, of 44

---

<sup>129</sup> Letter: F. Abbott, 31 December 1963, R41/289/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>130</sup> Letter: George Wood, 14 November 1963, R41/289/22, BBC WAC.

<sup>131</sup> Letter: F. Abbott, 31 December 1963.

<sup>132</sup> Letter: A. A. Rignall, 05 January 1964, R41/289/15, BBC WAC.

<sup>133</sup> Letter: K. D. Belden, 30 December 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

Charles Street, worried that the 'steady debunking of patriotism, faith and the moral standards from which this or any nation draws its fibre and its creativeness' would have dire consequences for Britain. He said *TW3* reminded him of:

...the well-meaning doctors who prescribed thalidomide for pregnant mothers without knowing what the end results would be.... But we are going to have to wait for all the world to see the end results in distorted character, diminished creativeness, lost craftsmanship, of such men's inroads on faith and virtue before a halt is cried?<sup>134</sup>

The twenty-something-year-old Oxford graduate, John Williams, also from Mayfair, believed Britain had 'enough in front of us, with the nuclear threat, the population explosion, and automation's effect on industry – to name but a few problems' without programmes like *TW3* which, he argued, 'campaigns against the very moral strength that could enable us to answer problems like these.'<sup>135</sup>

Ronald Plumstead, middle class and from Surrey, was concerned that *TW3* created an 'image of Britain in other lands detrimental to her', whilst George Wood proclaimed 'Heaven alone knows what damage such programmes have done to this country's image and standing overseas.'<sup>136</sup> Wood, in a later letter, believed 'we must certainly deal with what is wrong in Britain and the rest of the world' but believed this could 'never be achieved by decrying and destroying what is good and sound into the bargain, or by purveying smutty and second-rate shows like *TW3*.'<sup>137</sup> At a time when the British Empire was being rapidly dismantled and Britain had been surpassed by America and the Soviet Union as the dominant global powers, many correspondents condemned *TW3* as contributing to Britain's diminished world role and offering the international community damaging and disingenuous images of Britain and Britishness.

Consequently, some viewers moved on from expressing concerns about Britain's international role to discuss how television programmes could and

---

<sup>134</sup> Letter: Lawson Wood, 12 November 1963, R41/289/22, BBC WAC.

<sup>135</sup> Letter: John Williams, 29 October 1963, R41/289/21, BBC WAC.

<sup>136</sup> Letter: Ronald Plumstead, 29 December 1963, R41/289/14, BBC WAC. Letter: George Wood, 14 November 1963.

<sup>137</sup> Letter: George Wood, 09 January 1963, R41/289/22, BBC WAC.

should instead champion Britain's global status. Frank Dunn, from Sidcup in Kent, suggested that *TW3* 'could be a clarion call to the World showing what sound government can do and is doing in matters of unemployment, housing, clothing and feeding the world.'<sup>138</sup> Similarly, James Hore-Ruthven, a young man from Victoria, London writing on embossed letterhead, believed that whilst Britain 'may not be as strong economically or militarily' as it once was, 'we could still, by our example, in industry, in politics, in family and community life, give hope to the rest of the world' and it was the BBC's responsibility 'to put out these ideas.'<sup>139</sup>

Mentions of the Second World War abounded in many letters, often as a reference-point for decline. Hore-Ruthven decried that 'during the war, thousands risked their lives to listen to the BBC. It represented hope, freedom for them.'<sup>140</sup> Referencing notions of betrayal, Dunn believed that 'during the War the BBC did a magnificent job building up the morale in Europe and occupied countries' so was therefore incensed that 'the very men who gave their lives that England might be free, are being debunked by the BBC... people who do this are traitors.'<sup>141</sup> Wood could not 'conceive of such a programme being carried in war-time because of its sneering and cynical attitude to so many of the great institutions of British life.'<sup>142</sup> The BBC was criticised for allowing standards to drop at a time when, it was insinuated, Britain was facing a crisis unbeknownst in scale since the war. Viewers praised the BBC's broadcast output during the Second World War which had contributed to victory. Conversely, they noted *TW3*'s contribution to British decline. In the reckonings of these viewers, British morality and character had declined and the new generation of youngsters who just swiped at authority paled next to their forbears.

Believing *TW3* was both a cause and a symptom of British decline, many viewers frequently extended their complaints into criticisms of the BBC for

---

<sup>138</sup> Letter: Frank Dunn, 30 September 1963, R41/289/7, BBC WAC.

<sup>139</sup> Letter: James Hore-Ruthven, 24 October 1963, R41/289/7, BBC WAC.

<sup>140</sup> Letter: James Hore-Ruthven, 24 October 1963.

<sup>141</sup> Letter: Frank Dunn, 30 September 1963.

<sup>142</sup> Letter: George Wood, 14 November 1963.

broadcasting such a programme. Mr Beveridge, in a handwritten letter from Barnett in Hertfordshire, believed *TW3* 'attempts to undermine, misrepresent, distort and discredit the finest institutions and personalities of our society'. He therefore asked: 'Have we lost the high standards as at the formation of the BBC? It seems that we have!'<sup>143</sup> Wood concluded *TW3* was not 'befitting a great national institution like the BBC.'<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Rosemary Crawley, from Surrey, felt that as a result of *TW3* being 'diametrically opposed to a Christian civilisation', that this 'once fine institution, which used to be a respected public servant, is now fast becoming a social menace and a national menace to us and our children... a complete lowering of standards.'<sup>145</sup> Major-General White C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O, the Civil Defence Officer for the County Borough of Brighton, felt 'your corporation can do so much good, and again, so much harm. In this case you have done harm, and been quite unnecessarily cruel to very many decent people.'<sup>146</sup>

Those writing to the BBC conveyed their belief that the corporation should be setting its sights higher than satire in order to reverse British decline. Mr Faber, from South West London and evidently middle-class, believed *TW3* to be 'so cynical and faith destroying that it is a nation-destroying factor in Britain today'. Consequently, he argued that the BBC should be doing 'everything possible... to build up faith and not destroy it.'<sup>147</sup> Keith Beddington reckoned that the BBC had 'special responsibilities' and should therefore 'be a little careful that its new trend does not overstep the mark.' He reckoned that 'Television is a most powerful instrument for good or evil, for national unity or dissension, for kindness or for cruelty. When it wounds, it stabs deeper than any other medium.'<sup>148</sup> Miss Bettie Williams from South East London, and evidently a figure of some standing given her complaints attracted a response from Arthur Fforde, the Chairman of the BBC, argued that Britain needed 'from the BBC the kind of programme that fe[d] faith and buil[t] character into the

---

<sup>143</sup> Letter: R. Beveridge, 17 December 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>144</sup> Letter: George Wood, 29 December 1963, R41/289/20, BBC WAC.

<sup>145</sup> Letter: Rosemary Crawley, 03 October 1963, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>146</sup> Letter: Major-General C. M. F. White, 15 January 1963.

<sup>147</sup> Letter: J. Faber, 06 October 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>148</sup> Letter: Keith Beddington, 10 February 1963, T16/786, BBC WAC.

British people.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, Winifred Harris, in a typed letter from Essex, noted that the BBC could ‘inspire, recreate and lead the people of this country to a new level of greatness.’<sup>150</sup> Put simply, and according to the members of Hassocks Congregational Church, ‘the Corporation should seek to set a high moral tone rather than follow the present trend of moral confusion.’<sup>151</sup>

Viewers of *TW3* found the programme to be both a cause and a symptom of decline and offered popular narratives of decline in response to the series. For this predominantly middle- and upper-class section of the audience, *TW3* was doing a destructive disservice to British achievements, institutions and values. Public moralists, including clerics, politicians and campaigners such as Whitehouse, condemned *TW3* for promoting immorality and permissiveness, their concerns amplified by the context of the Profumo affair. They worried that *TW3* would destroy the nation’s morals and damage Britain’s global standing. Many correspondents argued that by transmitting such ‘filth’ the BBC was not fulfilling the duty of a public broadcaster to elevate the nation’s morals.

### **4.3: Distinction**

In this final section I examine both the positive and critical responses to *TW3* to ask how contemporary audiences utilised the programme in order to make claims about themselves and others. In so doing, I build on and extend the work of sociologists who have examined comedy taste and distinction. Friedman has argued that a key social distinction in early-twenty-first-century Britain existed between ‘the “highbrow” comedy taste of those with privileged cultural capital resources from the largely “lowbrow” tastes of those with less cultural capital.’<sup>152</sup> In this section I explore how *TW3* was intended by the BBC as the epitome of highbrow entertainment. Those who corresponded with the BBC about *TW3* emerged from a predominantly privileged section of British society, and their appreciation and depreciation of the programme revolved around

---

<sup>149</sup> Letter: Bettie Williams, 31 December 1963, R41/289/21, BBC WAC.

<sup>150</sup> Letter: Winnifred Harris, 02 January 1964, R41/289/6, BBC WAC.

<sup>151</sup> Letter: Reverend Matanle, 16 October 1963.

<sup>152</sup> Friedman, *Distinction*, p. 4.

narratives of intelligence, sophistication and maturity. Friedman and Kuipers have highlighted how audience members with higher cultural capital 'extend their judgements beyond the realm of comic objects towards the aesthetic deficiencies of comedy audiences' and, consequently, 'comedy and sense of humour mark a potent boundary not just in terms of aesthetics but concerning personhood' which 'often indicates an intractable social divide.'<sup>153</sup>

Consequently, I reveal how correspondents used *TW3* to make moral judgements about the worth of other forms of contemporary popular entertainment and those who enjoyed them. I highlight how critics of the programme deployed narratives of 'ordinariness' in order to position themselves in opposition to the 'highbrows' of the BBC, both its management and performers. *TW3*'s opponents extended their own concerns about the programme to express anxieties about the damage the series was having on other, more vulnerable, viewers. Finally, I show how the decision to cancel *TW3* attracted an onslaught of criticisms from its supportive viewers directed at the 'Establishment'.

Offering examples of highbrow comedy, Friedman concluded that *TW3* was a 'subversive' comedy which manifested as a self-professed example of 'highbrow' humour.<sup>154</sup> From its inception, *TW3* was indeed developed with a specific audience demographic in mind. The BBC's production files and the autobiographies of the programme-makers revealed how, at all levels of the corporation, the desired audience was to be an 'intelligent' and 'sophisticated' minority of the viewing public. Promotional material announced that it was 'hoped that this will turn out to be an enjoyable and amusing show for viewers who are prepared not to switch off their minds late on a Saturday night.'<sup>155</sup> Sherrin noted how 'the programme was intended simply to be widely watched and appreciated late at night by a lot of intelligent people.'<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Grace Wyndham Goldie, Head of Talks and in editorial control of *TW3* towards the end

---

<sup>153</sup> Friedman and Kuipers, 'Divisive', pp. 182 – 187.

<sup>154</sup> Friedman, *Distinction*, p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> 'Late of a Saturday Night', 12 November 1962.

<sup>156</sup> Extract from Survey (Television) Report, BBC Television Script Department Meeting, 23 January 1963, T32/1,649/2, BBC WAC.

of its run, confessed that BBC satire was to be ‘intelligent topical entertainment’ intended for ‘a small sophisticated audience.’<sup>157</sup> Dame Anne Goodwin, a member of the BBC’s Governing Body, expressed her belief that *TW3* had brought ‘great credit to the BBC’ and had provided entertainment to ‘the more sophisticated section of the community.’<sup>158</sup> Despite the reckonings of Sherrin and the Director General that *TW3* would only attract ‘a fringe metropolitan audience’, rather than ‘a national majority audience’, *TW3* actually attracted an audience of some twelve million people during its run.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, the BBC Secretary noted that whilst *TW3* had been envisaged as ‘an intelligent stimulus to thought about social and political issues as well as a light-hearted entertainment’ it had ‘secured a substantially larger audience than we had hoped to reach in our first planning of the programme.’<sup>160</sup>

In an audience research enquiry into the first series of *TW3*, it was found that ‘middle-class members viewed the series relatively rather more than working-class members did’ and that ‘middle-class viewers tended to be somewhat more enthusiastic than working-class viewers.’<sup>161</sup> Further detail was provided in a report entitled ‘Who Views’ which highlighted that ‘upper-middle class viewing was greatest (27.3%), lower middle class viewing as great (27.3%) and working class viewing least (17.9%). All the same, the audiences of both broadcasts consisted, as to the great majority (63%) of working class people.’<sup>162</sup> It was the upper and middle classes, however, who corresponded most with the BBC about *TW3*.

Friedman has argued that contemporary viewers with higher cultural capital generally ‘characterised the comedy they liked in terms of sophistication. Favourite comedians were “intelligent”, “complex”, “intellectual” and most of all “clever”.’ Accordingly, these viewers ‘were looking for more than “cheap

---

<sup>157</sup> Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics 1936 – 1976* (London, 1977), pp. 223 – 225.

<sup>158</sup> Board of Governors Minutes, 22 July 1965, R78/662/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>159</sup> Sherrin, *Earthquake*, p. 67. Hugh Greene, *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London, 1969), p. 133.

<sup>160</sup> Letter: Secretariat to Mrs C. Hanscomb, 15 November 1963, R41/289/6, BBC WAC.

<sup>161</sup> ARR: *TW3* – Enquiry into Winter 62/63 Series, 30 May 1963.

<sup>162</sup> ARR: *TW3* – Who views?, 07 February 1963, T32/1,649/2, BBC WAC.



pleasure”, comedy that was not just funny.<sup>163</sup> Friedman and Kuipers have argued that ‘middle-class respondents’ emphasised that comedy should ‘never just be funny’ but should be ‘complex and original’ because to “work” for one’s laughter leads to higher levels of comic appreciation.<sup>164</sup> Similar trends were observed in relation to *TW3*’s audience in the early 1960s. Audience members who appreciated the programme described it as intelligent, stimulating and sophisticated and, in so doing, made cultural distinctions about themselves. An audience research report for *TW3* recorded: ‘many contented comments... described as sharp, witty and intelligent by turns.’<sup>165</sup> Reviewing the first series, audience research recorded how several viewers had suggested that ‘in order to appreciate it fully one had to keep up to date with current events, and it stimulated conversation about all kinds of subjects during the following week.’<sup>166</sup> A housewife felt that *TW3* was ‘smart in every way’ but highlighted how ‘viewers who are not conversant with current affairs cannot appreciate it.’ Similarly, a teacher maintained that *TW3* was ‘one of the few programmes which really cater for broad-minded people.’<sup>167</sup> These viewers enjoyed it because it was accessible only to the socially aware. According to another housewife and a flight technician, who also participated in audience research, *TW3* was ‘witty and sophisticated’ and ‘modern and witty, with a good mixture of serious thought-provoking material thrown in.’<sup>168</sup> Viewers who enjoyed *TW3* did so because it was intelligent entertainment which required a level of knowledge from its viewers.

Correspondents frequently defended *TW3* on the grounds of intelligence: the programme was entertaining precisely because it was not just unthinking slapstick. In making such claims viewers were enabled to distinguish themselves as intelligent and culturally aware, unlike those who enjoyed other, apparently lower cultural forms. P. S. Bour, from Huntington, believed ‘It is a

---

<sup>163</sup> Sam Friedman, ‘The cultural currency of a ‘good’ sense of humour: British comedy and new forms of distinction’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 62.2 (2011), p. 359.

<sup>164</sup> Friedman and Kuipers, ‘Divisive’, p. 182.

<sup>165</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 16 February 1963, R9/7/62, BBC WAC.

<sup>166</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963.

<sup>167</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 28 September 1963, R9/7/65, BBC WAC.

<sup>168</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 24 November 1962, R9/7/61, BBC WAC. ARR: *TW3* TX 01 December 1962.

great comfort and reassurance to know that the BBC can still have the courage to screen programmes of honesty and intelligence in the present climate of moronic hypocrisy.<sup>169</sup> D. J. Clarke, writing from Chetham's Hospital School in Manchester, believed that *TW3* forced 'the intelligent viewer out of the net of his complacency to examine his own conscience and that of his fellows.'<sup>170</sup> The *Daily Express* journalist D. Lewin contended that whilst he liked 'fun in my programmes. I want to hear a good joke – no matter what the subject is. But I want it to be on an adult, intelligent level.'<sup>171</sup> Many correspondents explained they enjoyed *TW3* because its humour was adult and intelligent.

Those who labelled *TW3* as intelligent often praised the programme's educational impact on an ignorant population. The patronising expression of such opinions implicitly distinguished the correspondent as part of an enlightened minority. Audience research noted how several viewers 'suggested that [*TW3*] was in some senses educational.'<sup>172</sup> One lecturer contended that 'the programme frequently presents situations of a social or political nature in a way that must surely make some of those viewing see truth for the first time.'<sup>173</sup> Charles Scholes, a Liberal candidate for the 1964 General Election in Ardwick, Manchester, argued that *TW3* stimulated 'a thinking audience and indeed tends to encourage thinking in an audience not normally inclined thereto.'<sup>174</sup> Here was a programme, the Reverend Kew, from Wembley Park Congregational Church, maintained, 'which stirs a lethargic public to comment and decision. It has too captured the interest of numerous people who otherwise pay little heed...'<sup>175</sup> For those who approved of *TW3*, the programme was not only intelligent but also enlightening for others.

Assessments of *TW3*, whether supportive or oppositional, revolved around judgements about what was 'intelligent' and what was 'adult'. For its critics, *TW3* was anathema to intelligent persons. One viewer, quoted in an

---

<sup>169</sup> Letter: P. S. Bour, 29 September 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>170</sup> Letter: D. J. Clarke, 11 December 1962, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>171</sup> D. Lewin, 'That Was The Week That Was', *Daily Express*, 14 January 1963.

<sup>172</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963.

<sup>173</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 21 December 1963, R9/7/66, BBC WAC.

<sup>174</sup> Letter: Charles Scholes, 29 September 1963, R41/289/16, BBC WAC.

<sup>175</sup> Letter: Reverend Kew, 15 November 1963, R41/289/9, BBC WAC.

audience research report, noted how *TW3* was ‘an insult to an intelligent person. It’s the first time I have ever really wanted to smash my television set in anger. I will never watch this programme again – I can’t afford a new set every week.’<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Mrs Phelps from Essex, a serial complainant, felt *TW3* was ‘an insult to people’s intelligence’ and G. L. Marchant, from Surrey, argued that ‘very few people of mature age and reasonable intelligent’ regarded *TW3* ‘with anything but pity and disgust.’<sup>177</sup> Both supporters and critics of *TW3* made claims about intelligence to bolster the authority of their judgements.

Not only were the programmes praised as ‘intelligent’, but many viewers also celebrated how ‘adult’ *TW3* was. Repeated audience research reports evidenced how viewers’ enjoyment emerged from a belief that the BBC was providing ‘Entertainment for adults at last’: ‘At last! An adult programme on television.’<sup>178</sup> One report recorded a viewer’s opinion that *TW3* was ‘a major breakthrough in adult TV viewing.’<sup>179</sup> Many correspondents to the BBC thought similarly, for example, Norman Alexander, a Chartered Accountant from London described *TW3* as ‘civilised and adult’.<sup>180</sup> John Hunt, from west London, wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* to implore readers to be ‘thankful that, at last, there is at least one television programme offering adult and stimulating entertainment.’<sup>181</sup>

In opposition, those who disliked the programme were quick to label it as childish and juvenile. Scholars are agreed that in the late 1950s and early 1960s the young emerged as a significantly powerful group within British society.<sup>182</sup> Mark Donnelly has noted the ‘widening cultural differences between young people and their parents’, when ‘the “youth question”’ became categorised as a ‘social problem that threatened established modes of

---

<sup>176</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 24 November 1962.

<sup>177</sup> Letter: M. G. Phelps, 14 October 1963, R41/289/14, BBC WAC. Letter: G. L. Marchant, 13 October 1963, R41/289/12, BBC WAC.

<sup>178</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 29 December 1962, R9/7/62, BBC WAC. ARR: *TW3* TX 01 December 1962.

<sup>179</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963.

<sup>180</sup> Letter: Norman Alexander, 16 January 1963, R41/289/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>181</sup> ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1962.

<sup>182</sup> Marwick, *Society*, p. 97. Marwick, *Sixties*, p. 17. Morgan, *Britain*, p. 207. Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. 11. Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 1990* (St Ives, 1997), p. 291.

behaviour and moral norms.<sup>183</sup> Marwick has highlighted how ‘the notion of a culture led by individuals of a rather younger age than had hitherto been usual’ emerged in the 1960s, with ‘the age of popular entertainers and fashion-setters’ now ‘fifteen or twenty years younger than they used to be’ which gave ‘youth a particular hegemony’ over certain aspects of popular culture.<sup>184</sup> *TW3* emerged as a site where the question of youth was broached as a social problem.

Critics deemed the programme’s apparently young cast and juvenile humour problematic. The audience research reports abound with references to the ‘juvenile,’ ‘immature,’ ‘typically supercilious adolescents,’ ‘childish rudeness,’ and ‘schoolboy smut’ – it was ‘more or less end of term stuff.’<sup>185</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed in letters to the BBC: ‘juvenile’ and ‘most of it just childish.’<sup>186</sup> Reverend Evans, the Secretary for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in the Lichfield Diocese, described it as ‘hardly worthy of 5<sup>th</sup> form smut’.<sup>187</sup> T. Blair, from Uxbridge in London, complained that it was ‘amateurish’ and offered humour which was ‘scarcely up to the level of the Third Form.’<sup>188</sup> Serial Mayfair complainant K. D. Belden criticised the series’ ‘infantile level of thought’ and the cast’s catering ‘for a mental age of about ten.’<sup>189</sup> Speaking in the House of Commons the Conservative MP for Bristol West, Robert Cooke, believed that *TW3* was ‘part of the current trend for so-called "satire", much of which is nothing of the kind—It is just undergraduate or "prep" school humour.’<sup>190</sup>

Those writing often expressed deep concerns about the age of those performing. One viewer complained that ‘Satire does not come well from folk who look much too young. To be convincing it needs... a good deal of experience of life.’<sup>191</sup> J. Head, on embossed letterhead from Buckinghamshire,

---

<sup>183</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, pp. 2 – 26.

<sup>184</sup> Marwick, *Society*, pp. 97 – 98.

<sup>185</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 06 April 1963. ARR: *TW3* TX 29 December 1962. ARR: *TW3* TX 16 November 1963. ARR: *TW3* TX 27 April 1963. ARR: *TW3* TX 28 September 1963.

<sup>186</sup> Letter: L. F. P. Fox, 13 October 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC. Letter: James Hore-Ruthven, 24 October 1963.

<sup>187</sup> Letter: Reverend Evans, 30 September 1963, R41/289/4, BBC WAC.

<sup>188</sup> Letter: T. Blair, 13 October 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>189</sup> Letter: K. D. Belden, 13 October 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>190</sup> HC Debate, 14 January 1964, vol 687, cols 117-121.

<sup>191</sup> Letter: Unintelligible, 28 January 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

maintained that satire 'is acceptable from the hand of a master such as Swift' but took issue with 'the clumsy, "sixth-form" attempts we have witnessed in this programme.'<sup>192</sup> Miss Sarsfield-Hall, from Kensington, wrote to the Chairman of the Board of Governors to complain: 'The persons taking part in the programme appear to be young irresponsible iconoclastically minded young men who do not know where they are going.'<sup>193</sup> James Geese, from Worcester, wrote about this 'cast of young actors not over-imbued with general awareness in public matters.'<sup>194</sup> Criticisms of *TW3*'s cast were, thus, also related to questions of intelligence and maturity. Mary Wood, the husband of Lawson Wood of 44 Charles Street, protested that 'if the BBC can only afford such a poor type of young man to broadcast, it is time they closed down!... It would seem that the BBC has been at some pains to pick the most unpleasant type of young man to "amuse" the public.'<sup>195</sup>

Having examined three thousand press cuttings relating to *TW3*, the BBC's Head of Publicity surmised that 'the criticism of amateurism and schoolboy humour of a "smutty" texture is loud and strong.' The 'attitude' towards the first series 'could be best summed up by *The Guardian*, who said: "If the BBC boldly discarded the 'auntie' image only to find she had substituted that of the schoolboy, she has time to make him grow up before the autumn".'<sup>196</sup> In a letter to Hugh Greene, Lord Reith, the former Director General, acknowledged that 'Auntie has been transferred overnight into a teenager sans culottes.'<sup>197</sup> A significant proportion of the audience condemned the school-boy humour performed by inexperienced young men, a fact recognised by BBC officialdom, calling instead for mature and intelligent programming.

The critique of *TW3* was not confined to private correspondence and audience research; similar sentiments were expressed by television critics.

---

<sup>192</sup> Letter: J. Head, 18 November 1963, R41/289/6, BBC WAC.

<sup>193</sup> Letter: E. G. Sarsfield-Hall, 13 May 1963, R44/1,193/1, BBC WAC.

<sup>194</sup> Letter: James Geese, 14 November 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>195</sup> Letter: Mary Todd, 10 December 1962, R41/289/22, BBC WAC.

<sup>196</sup> Memo: Head of Publicity to Harman Grisewood, RE: *TW3*, 03 July 1963, R44/1,193/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>197</sup> Letter: Lord Reith, 31 January 1963, R41/289/15, BBC WAC.

*Punch*'s Bernard Hollowood argued that 'much of the material is feebly undergraduate – union debate quality' emanating from 'bright-young-things'.<sup>198</sup> D. Lewin, of the *Daily Express*, felt that *TW3* offered 'jokes I saw written on walls at school' and this ensured that 'Mr Sherrin and Mr Frost' had 'shown themselves to be neither adult nor intelligent.'<sup>199</sup> Maurice Wiggin, writing in the *Sunday Times*, found 'the show a bit juvenile, a bit spiteful; neither mature enough nor witty enough to command the respect I am willing to give.'<sup>200</sup> The unexpectedly large audience *TW3* attracted indicated many people enjoyed the series, but the volume of criticism – both in private and in public – was sizeable, and frequently condemned the programme as exemplifying the new youth problem.

Many viewers justified their enjoyment of *TW3* by making aesthetic judgements about other forms of popular entertainment. In a study of the appreciation of television programmes in Finland, Pertti Alasuutari has demonstrated how 'profoundly moral' the issue of viewing habits and preferences are. He argued that because programmes are valued hierarchically, viewers have a 'compelling need to explain, defend and justify their viewing habits.'<sup>201</sup> As Friedman has highlighted, the 'most notorious style of music hall comedy was the "vulgar" comic' who would combine 'sexual suggestiveness with lavatorial innuendo'. Accordingly, 'such obscene comedy was hugely popular among music hall audiences, but denigrated within high-art cultural circles as an "agent of moral and cultural denigration".' Variety, like music hall, was also largely considered "lowbrow".<sup>202</sup> Viewers of *TW3* made distinctions about the merits of other popular programmes based on their enjoyment of satire. Maurice Lane-Norcott, from Tunbridge Wells, complained that the decision to cancel *TW3* was evidence of the BBC's determination to offer 'programmes that attract vast hordes of morons and kill programmes that appeal exclusively to a minority of intelligent viewers.' He concluded that 'The

---

<sup>198</sup> Bernard Hollowood, 'On the Air', *Punch*, 19 December 1962, pp. 906 – 907.

<sup>199</sup> D. Lewin, 'That Was The Week That Was'.

<sup>200</sup> Maurice Wiggin, 'The wit that was too weak', *Sunday Times*, 16 December 1962, p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Alasuutari, 'Moral hierarchy', p. 561.

<sup>202</sup> Friedman, *Distinction*, pp. 15 – 16.

moronic programmes go on and on and on and are repeated over and over again ad nauseum, and you have killed *TW3*'.<sup>203</sup> Lane-Norcott viewed satire as intelligent programming and his enjoyment of it enabled him to cast aspersions on other cultural forms and their audiences. Throughout the letters, those who enjoyed *TW3* utilised their appreciation of satire in order to castigate variety programmes, American series, and quaint British dramas. An Electrical Engineer expressed dismay at *TW3* being taken off the air when there was to continue 'long in the tooth, dull, plot-less shows such as *Dixon*, *Wells Fargo*, *Billy Cotton*, *Victor Silvester* and *Perry Mason* I do not know. Surely we deserve better than this.'<sup>204</sup> Martin Wiseman wrote to the *Daily Mail* from Kent to complain 'If narrow-minded people cringe at references to fly buttons and other "sinful" subjects I suggest that they stick to the humour of *The Army Game*.'<sup>205</sup> R. M. Blomfield, from Dorset, complained that 'If we want all that is slick, glib, professional, harmless, homogenised and guaranteed not to offend, we have only to turn on the *Jack Benny Show* or *I Love Lucy* or any other half hour of conformist entertainment.'<sup>206</sup> S. Frank, in a handwritten letter from Watford, wrote to ask if 'any other topical up-to-the-minute programme or any other political or semi-serious programme takes its place... or will we always have Westerns and Variety (alternating with Variety and Westerns)?'<sup>207</sup> In the opinion of many members of *TW3*'s middle- and upper-class audience, satire and its supportive viewers were intelligent and highbrow; variety, westerns and serials, and by extension its viewers, were moronic and lowbrow. Appraisals of *TW3* invited critical aesthetic judgements about other forms of popular television entertainment and their supporters.

Conversely, those who disliked the programme championed many of the programmes that fans of *TW3* disdained. Rosemary Crawley criticised *TW3*'s 'lack of moral standards', but noted how it was good to see the BBC 'continue with the favourites in entertainment: *Harry Worth*, *Perry Mason*, *The Lucy*

---

<sup>203</sup> Letter: Maurice Lane-Norcott, 05 December 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

<sup>204</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 16 November 1963.

<sup>205</sup> 'Letters', *Daily Mail*, 13 December 1962, p. 8.

<sup>206</sup> Letter: R. M. Blomfield, 16 April 1963, R41/289/2, BBC WAC.

<sup>207</sup> Letter: S. Frank, 14 November 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

*Show*, and *The Defenders*. They have a standard.’<sup>208</sup> W. R. Cameron from Glasgow believed such material as used in *TW3* ‘would never have been used by my great favourite, Bud Flanagan and Bud, while always being a genius at going far, but no farther, was never offensive.’<sup>209</sup>

Jonathon Green has concluded that *TW3* ‘both delighted and appalled viewers in equal measure’. ‘For the young and sophisticated it was a blast of fresh air in a still stuffy world, for the self-proclaimed moralists it was the epitome of everything they hated about the BBC in general and its Director-General in particular.’<sup>210</sup> *TW3* emerged as a site of cultural contestation at the start of the 1960s between those who supported its fresh liberal outlook and those who disapproved, in conservative terms, about its disrespectful content and damaging impacts. Many viewers agreed with Greene when he later commented that satirical output was symbolic of the ‘BBC’s new look... frank, close to life, analytical impatient of taboos and cant and often very fun.’<sup>211</sup> An apprentice described an early episode of *TW3* as ‘just the “shot in the arm” that TV needs.’<sup>212</sup> Satire offered a ‘modern approach’ that was ‘completely up to date.’<sup>213</sup> For correspondents to the BBC, like Clifford Kenworthy who wrote on embossed letterhead from Keighley in Yorkshire, it was ‘one more instance of the Corporation’s courageous willingness to move forward and to allow adequate freedom.’<sup>214</sup> P. J. Pitman, from the Workers’ Education Association, believed satire ‘a marvellous innovation’ which ‘suggests that the BBC isn’t so stuffy as one imagined.’<sup>215</sup> Pitman was sufficiently notable that his letter attracted a reply from Greene. In an example of an older viewer praising *TW3*, R. M. Blomfield wrote in April 1963 how:

Some of us are thankful to Mr Carleton Greene for opening a skylight in this claustrophobic nightmare of artificiality and letting loose some

---

<sup>208</sup> Letter: Rosemary Crawley, 17 November 1963, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>209</sup> Letter: W. R. Cameron, 14 January 1963, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>210</sup> Green, *Dressed*, p. 64.

<sup>211</sup> Greene, *Third*, p. 134.

<sup>212</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 15 December 1962, R9/7/61, BBC WAC.

<sup>213</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 29 December 1962.

<sup>214</sup> Letter: Clifford Kenworthy, 04 December 1963, R41/289/9, BBC WAC.

<sup>215</sup> Letter: P. Pitman, 10 December 1962, R41/289/14, BBC WAC.



young people who do not bow down before the too numerous holy cows of a country in love with its Victorian past... The impulse came from young writers and performers whose freshness and irreverence some of us find preferable to faultless professionalism... Having lived and listened through the age when reverential snobbery and arrogant complacency were the keynote of the BBC and of neo-Victorian Britain, I for one am thankful to have lived to see this revolution take place.<sup>216</sup>

For these viewers, *TW3* represented a truly modern approach to broadcasting which had helped to shed the BBC's stuffy image. Indeed, Helena Popovic found that contemporary audiences who approved of highbrow forms of comedy described both the programmes and themselves as 'modern, liberal, unconventional [and] open-minded.'<sup>217</sup>

Charles Husband has highlighted how a sense of humour is central to notions of Britishness.<sup>218</sup> Whilst supporters of *TDUDP* dismissed critics of the sitcom as lacking a sense of humour, the correspondents who criticised *TW3* frequently prefaced their complaints with assertions about their own sense of humour. The 'I've got a sense of humour but...' line was a frequent trope. Rita Garton, from Reigate, prefaced her letter 'I enjoy satire and love a bit of fun but...'.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, Mrs Irene Grisebrook, from West Dulwich commented 'Just in case you should think the writer is some sort of late-Edwardian Prude, I am in my early thirties, have a very wide sense of humour and thoroughly enjoy satire cleverly and wittily expressed but...'<sup>220</sup> Whilst many condemned *TW3*, critics worked to defend themselves from accusations of prudishness or that they lacked a sense of humour. After complaining about the threat the series posed to British morality, Keith Beddington concluded: 'I hope I shall not be accused of lacking a sense of humour.'<sup>221</sup> Sherrin recalled that a number of leading politicians, including Reginald Maudling and George Brown, attended recordings

---

<sup>216</sup> Letter: R. M. Blomfield, 16 April 1963.

<sup>217</sup> Helena Popovic, "'Uncivilised' Comedy and its Reception', *Participations* 9:1 (2012), p. 55.

<sup>218</sup> Charles Husband, 'Racist Humour and Racist Ideology in British Television, or I Laughed Till I Cried', in Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton (eds.), *Humour in Society* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>219</sup> Letter: Rita Garton, 01 October 1963.

<sup>220</sup> Letter: Irene Grisebrook, 14 November 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>221</sup> Letter: Keith Beddington, 10 February 1963.

of *TW3* in order to show that they were able to take a joke.<sup>222</sup> The BBC, itself, actively labelled those who did not enjoy the programme ‘humourless.’ An audience research report from January 1963 noted how there was ‘nothing in the script likely to arouse a commotion (in an unfavourable sense) or that could be taken to heart by anyone with a reasonable sense of humour.’<sup>223</sup> Whilst critics of *TW3* may have defended themselves on the grounds of possessing a sense of humour, the BBC championed the programme on the basis that no one with a sense of humour could object to its content. The controversy over *TW3* revealed how humour was a deeply contested marker of social distinction and belonging in 1960s Britain.

Critics were concerned about the impact the BBC’s satirical output was having on other people. Amy Becker, Michael Xenos and Don Waisanen have described ‘the third-person effect’ whereby viewers worry about the persuasive impacts of mass entertainment on other, most notably vulnerable, members of its audience. Generally, when the media content being evaluated is considered socially undesirable, the greater the popular estimate of a third-person effect.<sup>224</sup> Given the negative reaction to *TW3* in the BBC’s postbag it is unsurprising that viewers were concerned about the programmes’ impact on others. Justice of the Peace, Keith Beddington OBE, expressed himself concerned about the ‘cumulative effect of criticism (and satire) on the man in the street.’<sup>225</sup> Lord Knutsford explained that he frequently came ‘into contact with people who are tremendously influenced by television’ and ‘take everything they see and hear as facts’ so felt the BBC should ‘very carefully review’ the continuance of broadcast satire.<sup>226</sup> Squadron Leader Bill Miller, from Hampshire, a serial complainant to the BBC, worried about the ‘corrupting influence of this handful of so-called “brilliant”, sick, frustrated, destructive

---

<sup>222</sup> Sherrin, *Sherrin*, p. 138.

<sup>223</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 12 January 1963.

<sup>224</sup> Amy Becker, Michael Xenos and Don Waisanen, ‘Sizing Up *The Daily Show*: Audience Perceptions of Political Comedy Programming’, *Atlantic Journal of Communications* 18:3 (2010), pp. 146 – 147.

<sup>225</sup> Letter: Keith Beddington, 13 February 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

<sup>226</sup> Letter: Lord Knutsford, 04 May 1963, R41/289/9, BBC WAC.

young left-wing writers, producers and performers.<sup>227</sup> A JP, Viscount and military official suggests a patrician concern about the impact of satire on those socially below them.

Whilst elites were concerned for the man on the street, the archive revealed a sustained anxiety about the impact of satire on the younger generations, an audience perceived as especially 'vulnerable' and impressionable. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn have emphasised how there is a long tradition of employing an image of the vulnerable child audience in need of protection as 'a canny emotional ploy to win support for increased censorship.'<sup>228</sup> Winifred Harris, for example, warned that 'Television has great power over people's minds, especially the young and impressionable, and it will either help to take this country forward, or drag it down.'<sup>229</sup> A number of educators worried that *TW3* was undermining formal education. One teacher recorded his belief that *TW3* 'undoes all the good work of school and parental teaching.'<sup>230</sup> Rignall, the trade unionist from London whose wife was a school teacher, believed *TW3* would 'harm the nation, especially the young people' and would undermine and 'cancel out everything... teachers do.'<sup>231</sup>

Critics also expressed concern that unquestioning younger viewers would be negatively influenced by *TW3*'s anti-Establishment message which would breed contempt for British institutions. These complaints were also often couched in terms of 'intelligence' and 'maturity'. Richard Swindall, a viewer from Hampshire who attracted a response from the BBC's Director of Television Programmes, worried that *TW3* was 'doing harm in its present form to the attitude of many impressionable people... a great number of people assume that its content is a true indication of how young people should behave and think.'<sup>232</sup> Colonel Roberts, a member of the BBC's West Regional Advisory Council and Land Steward to the Duchy of Cornwall who had responsibility for

---

<sup>227</sup> Letter: B. Mitchell, 01 October 1963.

<sup>228</sup> Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn, 'Moral panic and censorship: The vulnerable audience', in Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds.), *The Audience Studies Reader* (London, 2003), p. 51.

<sup>229</sup> Letter: Winnifred Harris, 20 October 1963, R41/289/6, BBC WAC.

<sup>230</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 28 September 1963, R9/7/65, BBC WAC.

<sup>231</sup> Letter: A. A. Rignall, 29 September 1963, R41/289/15, BBC WAC.

<sup>232</sup> Letter: Richard Swindall, 02 October 1963.

the royal estates across the West of England, expressed his opposition to ‘all this carping at authority in an age when the young seem to have little respect for the establishment, including the Monarchy, the Government...!’ He therefore expressed his view that *TW3* was ‘only encouraging lack of respect among young people of school or university age’.<sup>233</sup> Mr Beveridge, in a handwritten letter from Barnett in Hertfordshire, similarly expressed concern that the programme’s anti-Establishment messages would ‘result in the younger generation accepting this as a way of life, and disrespecting such institutions.’<sup>234</sup> Ronald Plumstead, a serial complainant from Surrey, worried too that *TW3* would ‘encourage lawlessness and a disregard for authority’ amongst the young.<sup>235</sup> All of these viewers condemned how *TW3* treated the ‘Establishment’ and extended these criticisms of the programme’s content into a concern about *TW3*’s impact on British youth.

*TW3*’s accessibility as a mass entertainment form intensified such anxieties. As Christopher Hilliard has suggested in his study of the obscenity charges brought against *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, ‘the question of who could be trusted to read what, was a question about social difference.’ Hilliard argued that the:

...*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* trial was the last sortie of a convention that had held since the nineteenth century: that material the authorities would ban if it were produced for a mass audience did not necessarily warrant prohibition if it was directed toward a privileged readership in whose judgement the courts could have more faith.<sup>236</sup>

The easy availability of a cheap paperback version of the book to women, the young and the working classes brought the issue to a head. In much the same way there was an expressed belief in the 1960s in relation to satire, that what was permissible on the London stage could not possibly be permissible on

---

<sup>233</sup> Memo: Controller, West Region to DTel, RE: West Regional Advisory Council, 14 January 1963, T16/589, BBC WAC.

<sup>234</sup> Letter: R. Beveridge, 17 December 1963.

<sup>235</sup> Letter: Ronald Plumstead, 29 December 1963.

<sup>236</sup> Christopher Hilliard, “‘Is It a Book You Would Even Wish Your Wife or Your Servants to Read’”: Obscenity Law and the Politics of Reading in Modern England’, *American Historical Review* 118:3 (2013), pp. 653 – 678.

national television, especially when it attracted far more viewers than the minority it had been intended for. Indeed, Keith Suter has suggested that *TW3* prompted worries amongst elite figures who believed that ‘the masses were not really “adult” and sophisticated enough to cope with’ satire. He suggested their problem with *TW3* ‘was not the satire but its availability to the masses.’ Satire ‘in *Beyond the Fringe* and “The Establishment Club” was fine because it was limited to a small number of upper class people who went to such places’, but *TW3* posed a problem because ‘satire became available to the masses’.<sup>237</sup> For example, Lord Shackleton, speaking in the House of Lords during the Television Bill debate, confessed his belief that ‘both the more offensive representations of some of the religious questions and some of the pure smut, which might have been amusing in a smoking concert, really were not funny in a programme that was broadcast to millions of homes.’<sup>238</sup> For the privileged section of commentators Shackleton represented, the young, the impressionable and even the working classes could not be trusted with satire.

Consequently, television’s penetration into the home also made its influence particularly dangerous. Tim O’Sullivan has described how ‘the development and mass availability of television suffused the private domain with a new order of experience’ which was to be ‘intrinsically worthwhile and improving’. Television emerged as ‘the dominant component of leisure time’ and a central part of viewers’ domestic routines.<sup>239</sup> Critics of *TW3*, however, believed the programme was infecting their domestic space. Addressing one of his five letters about *TW3* to the Home Secretary, Edward Poulton, from Hounslow, Essex, wanted ‘to make the strongest protest possible... at the filth, befoulment and callous bad taste that the BBC is sending into millions of homes.’<sup>240</sup> Put simply, satire was just ‘sewage, piped into millions of homes by the BBC.’<sup>241</sup> His relative Ivan Poulton, of the same address, complained in similar terms highlighting, with heavy irony, how one of the ‘notable

---

<sup>237</sup> Suter, ‘Satirical Revolution’, p. 166.

<sup>238</sup> HL Debate, 29 July 1963, vol 252, cols 1011 – 1013.

<sup>239</sup> Tim O’Sullivan, ‘Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing 1950 – 1965’, in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London, 1991), pp. 163 – 171.

<sup>240</sup> Letter: Edward Poulton, 20 January 1964, R41/289/14, BBC WAC.

<sup>241</sup> Letter: Edward Poulton, 04 November 1963, R41/289/14, BBC WAC.

achievements' of the 'affluent society' was that 'we can now have the contents of the sewer piped back into every home.'<sup>242</sup> Such denunciations were echoed by many prominent Conservative politicians. The Conservative MPs Sir Walter Bromley-Davenport and Sir Cyril Osborne argued, respectively, that the BBC had 'no right' to place 'such muck into the homes of decent people' and that *TW3* served to bring the 'gutter sweepings... into our homes.'<sup>243</sup> In often emotive language, satire was described as polluting, dirtying and infecting viewers' domestic space.

Mike Savage's study of social class in the 1960s demonstrated how an individual's recourse to a declaration of 'ordinariness' functioned as a means of indicating an individual 'without any special advantages in life' and emphasising how they were the 'inverse of the public "elites" class'.<sup>244</sup> Critics of *TW3* repeatedly self-represented as 'ordinary', as if to establish distance between themselves and the BBC's elite programme-makers and performers. Viewers who emphasised their 'ordinariness', however, were predominantly members of at least the middle class. It appears that these middle-class viewers also utilised narratives of 'ordinariness' in order to position themselves against this highbrow programme. Bettie Williams pleaded that:

...somebody, somewhere must have the guts and the patriotism to show Messrs. Carleton-Greene, Kenneth Adam, Frost and the others, that the debunking... and the promotion of immorality and the downright filth does not pay. Anyone or any group who takes a stand publicly against this and similar programmes will get the support, I am convinced, of millions of ordinary people like myself.<sup>245</sup>

Williams criticised those responsible for *TW3* and rendered them an alien elite through her recourse to the 'ordinary'. Winifred Harris from Essex wrote to complain that 'the ordinary decent people don't want this stuff'.<sup>246</sup> Similarly,

---

<sup>242</sup> Letter: Ivan Poulton, 03 November 1963, R41/298/14, BBC WAC.

<sup>243</sup> Letter: Sir Walter Bromley Davenport MP, 17 April 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC. Letter: Sir Cyril Osborne MP, 07 November 1963, R41/289/13, BBC WAC.

<sup>244</sup> Mike Savage, 'Working-Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology* 39:5 (2005), pp. 935 – 938.

<sup>245</sup> Letter: Bettie Williams, 27 October 1963, R41/289/21, BBC WAC.

<sup>246</sup> Letter: Winnifred Harris, 20 October 1963.

Squadron Leader Mitchell implored the BBC not to 'ignore those opinions of ordinary decent people, with teenage families.'<sup>247</sup> Sir Cyril Osborne, Conservative MP for Louth in Lincolnshire, wrote to the BBC in November 1963. He suggested that the BBC's public relations department was not offering 'a true picture of the reactions of the ordinary people to [TW3]' because 'in the pubs and clubs, as well as in the Churches and Chapels, the ordinary people hate these smart alocs to whom nothing is sacred.' He suggested that the BBC may 'care to send a man with me into my constituency' so that Osborne could 'take him round' to 'get first-hand knowledge of the utter disgust that is felt at the whole show.' Osborne described himself as a 'Private soldier in the First World War in the front line' and declared that 'the ordinary soldier of those days would have vomited at the filth that seems to go for cleverness in that programme.'<sup>248</sup> The highly decorated Major-General White from Sussex, asked the BBC: 'What redress have we ordinary people with ordinary feelings against such abuse?' and Ronald Plumstead believed it took 'exceptional circumstances to compel a member of the ordinary public to write to you, as I do now, on this subject of the TW3 programme.'<sup>249</sup> 'Ordinariness' was thus utilised in opposition to the BBC and to mark distance between disgruntled viewers and the corporation. Furthermore, viewers utilised references to the 'ordinary' in order to give the impression they were speaking on behalf of a silent majority against authority.

Conversely, those who supported the programme labelled TW3's critics as members of an 'Establishment' who were conducting a conspiracy. What stirred many people to write to the BBC in favour of the programme was the decision to cancel it owing to the impending General Election in 1964. The general tone of such letters was the belief that the BBC had kow-towed to an 'Establishment', be it the BBC's own governing body, politicians or moral campaigners, in order to deprive intelligent viewers of their satirical programmes.

---

<sup>247</sup> Letter: B. Mitchell, 01 October 1963.

<sup>248</sup> Letter: Sir Cyril Osborne MP, 07 November 1963.

<sup>249</sup> Letter: Major-General C. M. F. White, 15 January 1963. Letter: Ronald Plumstead, 29 December 1963.

Viewers complained that ‘we are only allowed to see what the Establishment thinks is good for us’ and that ‘pompousness wins again.’<sup>250</sup> Maurice Lane-Norcott, felt the BBC lacked ‘the courage to stand up to the more fuddy-duddy members of your Board of Governors, who are kow-towing to the Establishment.’<sup>251</sup> In a later letter, Lane-Norcott complained that the decision to cancel the series favoured ‘the canters, humbugs, and hypocrites against whom the programme was originally designed.’<sup>252</sup> The staff at Whitehall Secondary School thought it the fault of ‘the Primrose League, a number of politicians and several newspaper proprietors.’<sup>253</sup> A. T. Kitching, on embossed letterhead from Wimbledon, contended that ‘permanent cancellation of the programme would be interpreted by virtually everyone, whether rightly or wrongly, as the result of behind-the-scenes government or “Establishment” pressure; and could do much harm to the BBC’s reputation for independence.’<sup>254</sup> Winston Churchill’s son, Randolph, sent a telegram to Greene to urge him not to ‘suppress this because of windiness of politicians in an election year, query your advisory council is biggest body of spoil sports in country.’<sup>255</sup> Robin Page’s short letter exposed the strong emotions the programme generated: ‘How dare you suspend *TW3*? The hypocrites and humbugs are now given full reign for election year. It is an utterly deplorable decision. Damn you!’<sup>256</sup>

*TW3* was intended for a small, metropolitan audience comprised of intelligent viewers. That it came to attract such a large audience, including so many working-class viewers, shocked the BBC. Regardless of whether they supported or condemned the programme, many correspondents deployed the same set of contested terms to explain their assessment of the programme, notably ‘intelligence’, ‘sophistication’ and ‘maturity’. Predominantly well-to-do critics of *TW3* worried, often in paternalistic and condescending terms, about

---

<sup>250</sup> ARR: *TW3* TX 16 November 1963.

<sup>251</sup> Letter: Maurice Lane-Norcott, 17 November 1963, T16/726, BBC WAC.

<sup>252</sup> Letter: Maurice Lane-Norcott, 05 December 1963.

<sup>253</sup> Letter: Whitehall Secondary School, 19 November 1963, R41/289/5, BBC WAC.

<sup>254</sup> Letter: A. T. Kitching, 05 February 1964, R41/289/9, BBC WAC.

<sup>255</sup> Telegram: Randolph Churchill, 08 December 1963, R41/289/3, BBC WAC.

<sup>256</sup> Letter: Robin Page, 13 November 1963, R41/289/14, BBC WAC.



the adverse impact the programme was having on more vulnerable segments within society, especially the young. Whilst critics considered themselves 'ordinary' in order to distance themselves from the apparently elite BBC and its young satirists, those who supported the programme blamed its cancellation on an 'Establishment' conspiracy.

## **Conclusion**

Conventional progressive narratives of British satire and the decade itself, have argued that British society became increasingly anti-Establishment and decreasingly deferential during the 1960s. *TW3*'s mockery of the Establishment has often been raised as marker of that transformation, a symbol of the spirit of the 'Sixties'. This chapter has complicated this account of socio-cultural change by revealing the oft-neglected scale of conservative opposition to the programme's irreverent treatment of politicians, religion and the monarchy, institutions towards which many viewers remained respectful and even deferential. Many correspondents condemned the programme's attacks on the Establishment as 'vulgar' and, consequently, beyond the boundaries of acceptable taste. Viewing *TW3* did not accelerate change for this section of the programme's audience, but rather reaffirmed their existing conservative support for the 'Establishment'.

Disdainful of *TW3*'s treatment of the 'Establishment', many viewers believed the programme was both cause and symptom of Britain's post-war decline. Predominantly from the middle and upper classes, many correspondents condemned *TW3* as a destructive force undermining British morality, character, economic performance and global standing. For many, satire was a further encouragement to immorality and permissiveness in the aftermath of the Profumo scandal. The programme generated a conservative backlash from politicians, church leaders and activists such as Whitehouse.

British television comedy in the 1960s was a site of cultural contestation. Whilst working-class voices were all but absent from the archive, well-to-do viewers wrote in large numbers to the BBC. In so doing they related their

appreciation or criticism of *TW3* in order to make strong claims about social identity and taste, in terms of 'intelligence', 'sophistication' and 'maturity'. *TW3* emerged as a site for debates about 'ordinariness', whereby viewers utilised such narratives in order to establish social distance from others. Correspondents also expressed anxieties about television satire's negative impacts on more vulnerable social groups.

## Conclusion

This thesis has offered a sustained historical study of the content, meanings and reception of a diverse range of popular television comedy programmes broadcast in Britain during the 1960s: the doyens of Light Entertainment Morecambe and Wise, the sitcoms *Till Death Us Do Part* (hereafter *TDUDP*), *Curry & Chips* (hereafter *C&C*) and *Steptoe and Son* (hereafter *Steptoe*), and the late-night satirical programme *That Was The Week That Was* (hereafter *TW3*). In so doing it has both extended research which has focused on television's institutions and policy and moved beyond the popular histories of British television comedy written, predominantly, by enthusiasts, journalists and scholars working in media and cultural studies. The thesis has demonstrated comedy's value as a legitimate and productive source for historical enquiry, showing both how the production of 1960s comedies reflected and responded to the historical moment in which they were broadcast and how popular audiences engaged with them. My research has reconstructed viewing experiences from the past and highlighted the active role viewers performed in watching comedy programmes. Far from being passive dupes of television's messages, I have highlighted how viewers of British television comedy contacted the broadcasting bodies in large numbers in order to debate the cultural and social character of the comedy programmes they watched. Consequently, my thesis has asked how television comedy and its responses negotiated and contested key contemporary questions of liberalism, value change, taste, cultural participation and social identity during the 1960s.

Through both my textual analysis of the programmes and my examination of audience responses I have predominantly probed the progressive historical narratives of the 1960s, which have been characterised by expansive cultural modernism, post-Victorian liberalism and the rejection of established values. The thesis has highlighted how the comedy programmes I have analysed and the viewers' responses I have engaged with offered vigorous debate around and demonstrated uneasiness with progressive discourses

throughout the decade. Consequently, my thesis has made five principal contributions to our knowledge and understanding of Britain in the 1960s.

First, I have challenged histories which characterise the decade as modern by highlighting how themes, topics and comic styles characteristic of an earlier period persisted in 1960s television comedy. Towards the end of the decade, Morecambe and Wise's television programmes were significant cultural events, attracting extensive audiences. The thesis has contended, however, that the comic duo owed their success, less to innovation and experimentation, but to comic and cultural forms with an extensive historical genealogy. Their styles of entertainment offered audiences a visual, structural and textual reversion to the music hall and variety theatre of the earlier twentieth-century. Similarly, I have argued that *Steptoe* highlighted the prominence of Victorianism in the Britain of the early 1960s. The world of Harold and Albert was Dickensian and far removed from narratives of post-Victorian modernity. Their status as rag-and-bone men, alongside their attendant Victorian pauperism, aged possessions and clothing, vividly displayed their lack of modernity. In both Morecambe and Wise's light entertainment and *Steptoe*, mass audiences were offered images at odds with modernity.

Second, my thesis has offered a forgotten story of the 1960s, one not wholly characterised by progressive liberalism and value change but by the persistence of strong currents of popular conservatism in critical responses to television comedies. Consequently, I have suggested that watching British comedy appears not to have altered the values of many viewers, or accelerated their acceptance of socio-cultural change. *TDUDP* and *TW3* both explored contemporary social, cultural and political issues, but the audiences' responses to these programmes, preserved in archives, included a significant conservative reaction. The BBC itself acknowledged that *TDUDP* largely reinforced the existing beliefs of its audiences rather than changing them. Furthermore, whilst *TW3* and *TDUDP* may have been vociferously anti-Establishment, many viewers, notably from the middle and upper classes, did not become less deferential as a result of watching the programmes; rather, many expressed their continued respect for, variously, Prime Minister, Queen and Church. The extent of the

conservative response to 1960s television comedies was best evidenced in Mary Whitehouse's protracted campaigns against Speight's sitcoms and her opposition to *TW3*. The findings of this thesis invite further research into the dimensions and discourses of popular conservatism which moves beyond high politics and its prominent social actors.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis also highlighted how Speight's sitcoms railed against contemporary liberalism, namely the elite liberal Establishment who, it was argued, had dumped the issue of immigration in the laps of the unsuspecting white working-classes. Consequently, Speight promoted narratives of victimhood in both *TDUDP* and *C&C*. I have suggested that *C&C* served as a popular cultural response to Enoch Powell and his 'Rivers of Blood' speech and, in so doing, evidenced sympathy with Powell's opposition to liberalism. Speight cast his working-class characters as victims of the political elite and, in *C&C*, as victims of Labour's progressive and liberal Race Relations legislation.

I have highlighted how popular comedy served as a key site where questions about acceptable public discourse were debated. 'Vulgarity' emerged as an expansive term for a litany of conservative complaints relating to taste. A disavowal of prudishness, however, prefigured many criticisms of television comedy during the 1960s. For viewers in the 1960s, as evidenced in the responses to *TDUDP* and *C&C*, offensive language and irreverence towards the church and royal family were beyond the pale. Such sentiments were most pronounced in response to *TW3* whose viewers labelled the programme 'vulgar' as a consequence of its anti-Establishment content. For them, mass entertainment was not to proffer attacks on prominent politicians, the monarch or religious doctrine. Consequently, the 'taste' of many viewers was implicitly linked with their conservative sensibilities in relation to 1960s television comedies.

Third, throughout my thesis I have argued for a more complicated narrative of the period, one which posits that there was no single national or

---

<sup>1</sup> Clarisse Berthezène and Jean-Christian Vinel (eds.), *Postwar conservatism, a transnational investigation: Britain, France and the United States, 1930 – 1990* (Cham, 2017). E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002).

homogeneous experience of the 1960s. I have suggested that television comedy presented several different 'versions' of experience during the decade and offered traces, both in content and reception, of those who were left behind or resisted the apparent social, cultural and economic advances of the 1960s. When viewers sat down *en masse* to watch Morecambe and Wise they were arguably not participating in contemporary social transformations but rather, temporarily, participating in more traditional cultural forms. Those who wrote in protest about *TW3*'s anti-Establishment content were opposed to British society's death of deference. *Steptoe* highlighted the plight of those like Harold and Albert who were excluded from participating in the progressive developments of the 1960s owing to their out-of-datedness, impoverishment and attendant low economic and social status. More historical work needs to be completed to further consider who was precisely excluded from the apparent progressive developments of the 1960s and why.

Television comedy also served as a site where debates about mass consumerism and widening material prosperity occurred. Far from evidencing extensive participation in affluence, the comedies studied displayed a degree of uneasiness about this phenomena. Morecambe and Wise disavowed any claims to material wealth off-screen for fear that it would dispel their 'ordinariness'. *Steptoe* offered to its audience social imagery that was ill-at-odds with dominant narratives of the decade as a 'Golden Age' of affluence. I have argued that *Steptoe* highlighted the persistence of economic poverty into the 1960s, well in advance of its official 'rediscovery' by sociologists in 1965. *Steptoe* provided a vision of Victorian pauperism which challenged, for viewers at home, notions of universal participation in contemporary prosperity.

Fourth, my thesis has argued that popular television comedy played a significant role in debates about social identity and its reaffirmation throughout the 1960s. These predominantly revolved around questions of 'ordinariness', cultural capital and race. Extending work on the cinema star and television personality, I argued that Morecambe and Wise's popularity relied on their projection, in both the broader media and their television performances, as 'ordinary'. They did so because the majority of television viewers in the 1960s

increasingly understood class in terms of discourses of 'ordinariness' and deemed television personalities to be members of a distinct and alien elite class. In the popular responses to *TW3* viewers also self-identified as 'ordinary' in order to distance themselves from the BBC's elite programme-makers and performers. Morecambe and Wise offered a case study for delineating the dimensions of 'ordinariness' during the 1960s and I have argued that to be 'ordinary' relied on long established working-class discourses of struggle, hardship and sacrifice, alongside a disavowal of both a privileged status and its associated economic benefits. In their performances, Morecambe and Wise emerged as champions of 'ordinariness' through their debunking of cultural pretension.

In *Steptoe*, the exploration of the limitations of Harold's cultural capital was also utilised not only for comic effect, but also to further emphasise Harold's low social status. Harold attempted to remove himself, both physically and imaginatively, from his existence as a rag-and-bone man through his cultural pursuits. He believed this would enable him to participate in the progressive changes of the 1960s and mark social distance from his father. Harold's endeavours to accumulate or display cultural capital, however, were always revealed as flawed or thwarted by his father's actions. The young Steptoe yearned for the symbols of high culture, affluence and modernity which he was unable to access. *Steptoe* highlighted how social mobility remained an unreachable fantasy for the economically and culturally impoverished.

In my thesis, I have explored how sitcoms, as a mass cultural form, broached and responded to contemporary questions about post-war race and immigration. I examined how Speight's personal pronouncements, explicitly about race and immigration, corresponded with and influenced his sitcoms. My research highlighted how Speight, as a committed socialist, was nervous about overpopulation and the impact of immigration on the white working-classes. Consequently, his sitcoms railed against Labour's contemporary integrationist policies. *TDUDP* and *C&C* highlighted, through discourses of cultural 'otherness', how the integration and assimilation of the new immigrant community was problematic. For Speight this was as a result of the inherent

differences in cultural habits and characteristics between the white working-classes and the immigrant community, such differences apparently compounded by working-class ignorance. In *TDUDP* and *C&C* race and colour were identifying categories; the cultural disparity between these two groups was the real determinant of difference and no matter how fluid identity was or how hard the immigrant may try, for Speight, assimilation was difficult.

Fifth, and building on the fourth, I have offered in this thesis a sustained examination of historic audiences in order to ask what viewers did with comedy programmes in the 1960s. In the multitude of responses to television comedy from its popular and critical audiences, I have highlighted how popular audiences utilised the comedies in order to make claims to social distinction for both themselves and others. Those who viewed and enjoyed *TDUDP* and *Steptoe*, did so because of the social realist traits of the programmes and the fact that they could feel superior to and laugh at these low down characters and, in the case of *TDUDP*, comic personalities they considered to be monstrous. Members of *Steptoe's* mass audience became voyeurs of Harold and Albert's impoverished and out-dated social world.

Discourses of 'intelligence', 'sophistication' and 'maturity' pervaded debates about the merits of 1960s British television comedy. For a vocal and predominantly well-to-do section of the audience, the comic enjoyment of both *TDUDP* and *TW3* necessitated intelligent and mature programming. Many viewers confessed that they enjoyed *TW3* precisely because it demanded a level of pre-existing knowledge and offered mature and adult content. Conversely, its critics deemed *TW3* anathema to intelligent people and therefore childish. For these viewers, the programme offered juvenile humour from a much-too-young cast. In the case of *TDUDP*, its audience also utilised their viewing of the programme to endorse racial distinctions; if members of the immigrant community could not accept the supposed humour of their portrayal they were, in some way, un-British. Littered through the responses of viewers were powerful cultural codes about the importance of a British 'sense of humour'. These discourses saturated the preserved letters to the BBC about *TW3* and highlighted how humour was a contested marker of social distinction.



Sociologists are increasingly utilising contemporary media audiences as subjects of research. Historians should build on their work and the frameworks laid out here to excavate the responses of popular audiences to television as they were contemporaneously expressed. Such research should not be limited to just mass entertainment forms, such as comedy, but a diverse range of television programming to ascertain how viewers coded their responses to a host of different television genres and what their critical evaluations of programmes tells us about broader social, cultural and economic issues. My thesis has evidenced the extent and quality of the archival materials available for such studies and the potential to produce more empirical and forensic analyses of historic audiences. Whilst this thesis has suggested that one of the dominant characteristics of viewers who engaged with television comedy, through audience research and correspondence, was higher social status, future studies must probe further who, specifically, was participating. What regions were they writing from, how old and what gender were they and what were their levels of education and professional competence? Studies of this sort would better enable assessments of how different social groups approached issues of taste and morality and contemporary questions of social, cultural and economic change in response to popular mass entertainment forms. In taking up this challenge, historians would benefit from engaging with the theoretical frameworks and approaches historians have adopted in their studies of the participants of Mass Observation.<sup>2</sup>

Writing in 1963, Mrs B. M. Mitchell wrote to the BBC about *TW3* in order to urge them not to 'ignore [the] opinions of ordinary decent people.'<sup>3</sup> I hope historians build on the frameworks laid out here so that, in future, they pay greater attention to popular cultural forms and their audiences. The important role comedy and viewers like Mrs Mitchell have played in responding to and igniting debates about twentieth-century Britain deserves appreciation and begs for further study.

---

<sup>2</sup> James Hinton, *Seven lives from mass observation: Britain in the late twentieth century* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Letter: B. M. Mitchell, 01 October 1963, R41/289/12, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham.

## **Bibliography**

### A. Unpublished Manuscripts and Collections

#### **BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham**

Artists, Harry H. Corbett, File 1, 1955 – 1962.

Morecambe and Wise, North Region Artists, 1949 – 1965.

R9/7/56: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, January and February 1962.

R9/7/58: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, May and June 1962.

R9/7/61: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, November and December 1962.

R9/7/62: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, January and February 1963.

R9/7/63: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, March and April 1963.

R9/7/65: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, September and October 1963.

R9/7/66: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, November and December 1963.

R9/7/67: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, January and February 1964.

R9/7/77: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, September and October 1965.

R9/7/82: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, July and August 1966.

R9/7/84: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, November and December 1966.

R9/7/85: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, January and February 1967.

R9/7/86: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, March and April 1967.

R9/7/91: Audience Research Reports, Television, General, Chronological, January and February 1968.

R9/7/100: Audience Research Reports, Television, General Chronological Reports, July and August 1969.

R9/757/1: Viewing Report VR/73/175, *Till Death Us Do Part* as Anti-Prejudice Propaganda.

R41/289/1: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, A-AZ.

R41/289/2: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, B-BZ.

R41/289/3: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, C.

R41/289/4: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, D-E.

R41/289/5: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, F-GZ.

R41/289/6: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, HA-HE.

R41/289/7: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, HF-HZ.

R41/289/8: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, I-J.

R41/289/9: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, K.

R41/289/12: Programme Correspondence, TW3, A-Z, M-MZ.

R41/289/13: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, N-O.

R41/289/14: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, P-PZ.

R41/289/15: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, R-RZ.

R41/289/16: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, SA-SM.

R41/289/17: Programme Correspondence, TW3, A-Z, SN-SZ.

R41/289/18: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, T-U-V.

R41/289/19: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, WA.

R41/289/20: Programme Correspondents, TW3, A-Z, WB-WH.

R41/289/21: Programme Correspondents, *TW3*, A-Z, WI.

R41/289/22: Programme Correspondents, *TW3*, A-Z, WJ-Z.

R44/1,193/1: PR, File 1, *TW3*, December 1962 – June 1963.

R44/1,193/2: PR, File 2, *TW3*, July 1963 –.

R78/662/1: Entertainment Programmes, Satire.

R78/2,811/1: *Till Death Us Do Part*, October 1965 – 31 December 1974.

T12/334/1: TV Light Entertainment, *Running Wild*, File 1, Nos. 1 and 2, 1954.

T12/334/2: TV Light Entertainment, *Running Wild*, File 2, Nos. 3 and 4, 1954.

T12/625/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'Sixty-Five Today', TX 24 January 1963.

T12/718/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'The Stepmother', TX 17 January 1963.

T12/785/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'The Bird', TX 14 June 1962.

T12/786/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'The Diploma', TX 05 July 1962.

T12/787/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'The Economist', TX 28 June 1962.

T12/788/1: Light Entertainment, *Steptoe and Son*, General, 1962 – 1964.

T12/1,234/1: *Steptoe and Son*, 'Crossed Swords', TX 11 October 1965.

T12/1,298/1: Light Entertainment, *Steptoe and Son*, Repeats, July – December 1967.

T12/1,321/1: Light Entertainment, General, *Till Death Us Do Part*, Folder 1.

T12/1,321/2: Light Entertainment, General, *Till Death Us Do Part*, Folder 2.

T16/589: TV Policy, Programme Policy, *TW3*, 1962 – 1964.

T16/726: TV Policy, Programme Correspondents, *TW3*, A-Z, 1962 – 1963.

T16/727: TV Policy, Programme Correspondence, *Till Death Us Do Part*, A – Z, 1966 – 1968.

T32/1,649/2: *TW3*, General, 1963 – 1964.

T66/103/1: TV Press Office, TW3, 1962 – 1963.

### **British Film Institute, London**

File PBS33524.

File PBS36710.

File PBS57926.

### **Hansard**

HC Debate, 14 January 1964, vol 687, cols 65-139.

HL Debate, 29 July 1963, vol 252, cols 1011 – 1013.

### **Independent Television Authority, Bournemouth University**

509/2/5: *Curry & Chips*, London Weekend Television, November 1969 –.

### **National Viewers and Listeners' Association, University of Essex**

Letter: Mary Whitehouse to Harold Wilson, 12 January 1967, NVLA Archive, Essex.

### **Theatre and Performance Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London**

THM 303/1/10: Howard and Wyndham Collection.

## **B. Published Primary Sources**

### **Publications**

Abel-Smith, Brian and Townsend, Peter, *The Poor and the Poorest* (London, 1965).

Booker, Christopher. *The Neophiliacs: a study of the revolution in English life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London, 1969).

Braben, Eddie. *The Book What I Wrote: Eric, Ernie and Me* (London, 2004).

- Frost, David. *An Autobiography: Part One – From Congregations to Audiences* (London, 1993).
- Glass, Ruth. 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies (ed.), *London: Aspects of Change* (London, 1964), pp. xiii – xlii.
- Goldie, Grace Wyndham. *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics 1936 – 1976* (London, 1977).
- Greene, Hugh. *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London, 1969).
- Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor: Volume Two* (London, 1851).
- Morecambe, Eric; Wise, Ernie and Freedland, Michael. *There's No Answer To That!!: An Autobiography by Morecambe and Wise* (Kent, 1981).
- Morecambe, Eric; Wise, Ernie and Holman, Dennis. *Eric & Ernie: The autobiography of Morecambe & Wise* (London, 1974).
- Morecambe, Joan and Leitch, Michael. *Morecambe and Wife* (London, 1985).
- Pedrick, Gale. *Ray Galton & Alan Simpson's Steptoe and Son* (London, 1964).
- Sherrin, Ned. *A Small Thing Like An Earthquake* (London, 1983).
- Sherrin, Ned. *Ned Sherrin: The Autobiography* (London, 2005).
- Speight, Johnny. *For Richer, For Poorer: A Kind of Autobiography* (London, 1991).
- Speight, Johnny. *It Stands to Reason: A Kind of Autobiography* (London, 1973).
- Townsend, Peter. 'The meaning of poverty', *British Journal of Sociology* 5:2 (1962), pp. 210 – 227.
- Townsend, Peter. 'The truce on inequality', *New Statesman*, 26 September 1959, pp. 381 – 382.
- Whitehouse, Mary. *Cleaning Up TV: From Protest to Participation* (London, 1967).
- Whitehouse, Mary. *Quite Contrary: An Autobiography* (London, 1993).
- Wise, Ernie. *Still On My Way To Hollywood* (London, 1990).

## **Newspapers, Magazines and Periodicals**

*Daily Express*

*Daily Mail*

*Daily Mirror*

*Daily Telegraph*

*Financial Times*

*Guardian*

*Illustrated London News*

*Independent on Sunday*

*Observer*

*Punch*

*Radio Times*

*Sunday News*

*Sunday Times*

*The Listener*

*The Times*

*TV Times*

## **Websites**

'Alf Garnett will be played by Fast Show's Simon Day', *Mail Online*, 29 March 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513539/Alf-Garnett-played-Fast-s-Simon-Day-Till-Death-returns-TV-screens-ll-just-sexist-racist-misogynist-ever.html>, accessed 22 May 2018.

'Comité International of Pipe smokers clubs', <http://cipc.pipeclubs.com/united-kingdom/>, accessed 28 February 2018.

'Curry and Chips – 1969', *British Classic Comedy*, 01 October 2015,  
<https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/naughty-but-funny>, accessed 22 May 2018.

'Eric and Luton Town FC',  
<http://www.morecambeandwise.com/viewpage.aspx?pageid=60>, accessed 28 February 2018.

'Labour Party Manifesto 1966: "Time for Decision"',  
<http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab66.htm>, accessed 25 May 2018.

'The Nation's Favourite Beatles Number One for ITV',  
<http://www.atvtoday.co.uk/72956-itv/>, accessed 14 February 2018.

### C. Media

'1966 Interview', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzFrhuthx9Y>, accessed 29 June 2017.

*British Pathé* (1960).

*Curry & Chips* (LWT, 1969).

*Eric and Ernie* (ITV, 2011).

*Eric and Ernie Behind the Scenes* (BBC, 2011).

*Eric and Ernie's Home Movies* (BBC, 2018).

*Eric and Little Ern* (Theatre, 2013).

*Morecambe* (Theatre, 2009).

*Morecambe and Wise in Pieces* (BBC, 2014).

*Morecambe and Wise: the whole story* (BBC, 2013).

'Morecambe and Wise Watney's Advert',  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPqqARNBqts>, accessed 28 February 2018.

*Steptoe and Son* (BBC, 1962-5).

*That Was The Week That Was* (BBC, 1962-3).



'The Beatles at the Morecambe & Show – 02/12/63',  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysfvM9uhFdg>, accessed 14 February 2018.

*The Morecambe and Wise Show* (BBC, 1968-9).

*The Morecambe and Wise Story: Look Back in Laughter* (Chanel 5, 2017).

*The Play What I Wrote* (Theatre, 2001).

*Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC, 1965-8).

*Two of a Kind* (ATV, 1962).

#### D. Published Books and Articles

Alasuutari, Pertti. "'I'm ashamed to admit it but I have watched *Dallas*": the moral hierarchy of television programmes', *Media, Culture and Society* 14 (1992), pp. 561 – 582.

Aldgate, Anthony; Chapman, James and Marwick, Arthur (eds.). *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture* (London, 2000).

Ang, Ien. *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London, 1991).

Ang, Ien. *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London, 1996).

Ayres, Pat. 'Work, culture and gender: the making of masculinities in post-war Liverpool', *Labour History Review* 69:2 (2004), pp. 153 – 167.

Bailey, Peter. 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 144 (1994), pp. 138 – 170.

Bailkin, Jordanna. *The Afterlife of Empire* (London, 2012).

Banting, Keith. *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Basingstoke, 1979).

Barfe, Louis. *Turned Out Nice Again: The Story of British Light Entertainment* (London, 2008).

Barker, Clive. 'The "image" in show business', *Theatre Quarterly* 8 (1978), pp. 7 – 11.

- Barry, Angela. 'Black mythologies: representations of black people on British television', in John Twitchin (ed.), *The Black and White Media Book* (Staffordshire, 1992), pp. 83 – 102.
- Bebber, Brett. 'The Short Life of *Curry and Chips*: Racial Comedy on British Television in the 1960s', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11:2 (2014), pp. 213 – 235.
- Bebber, Brett. '*Till Death Us Do Part*: Political Satire and Social Realism in the 1960s and 1970s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:2 (2014), pp. 253 – 274.
- Becker, Amy; Xenos, Michael and Waisanen, Don. 'Sizing Up *The Daily Show*: Audience Perceptions of Political Comedy Programming', *Atlantic Journal of Communications* 18:3 (2010), pp. 144 – 157.
- Bennett, James. *Television Personalities: Stardom and the Small Screen* (Oxon, 2011).
- Bennett, James. 'The television personality system: televisual stardom revisited after film theory', *Screen* 49:1 (2008), pp. 32 – 50.
- Bennett, Tony; Savage, Mike; Silva, Elizabeth; Warde, Alan; Gayo-Cal, Modesto and Wright, David. *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London, 2009).
- Berthezène, Clarisse and Vinel, Jean-Christian (eds.). *Postwar conservatism, a transnational investigation: Britain, France and the United States, 1930 – 1990* (Cham, 2017).
- Black, Lawrence. *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954 – 70* (Basingstoke, 2010).
- Black, Lawrence. 'There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and Social Movement History', in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 182 – 200.
- Black, Lawrence. 'Whose finger on the button? British Television and the Politics of Cultural Control', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25:4 (2004), pp. 547 – 575.
- Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1998).
- Bonner, Frances. *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV* (London, 2003).
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

Bourke, Joanna. *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890 – 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 2004).

Bourne, Stephen. *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television* (London, 2001).

Bowling, Benjamin. 'The Emergence of Violent Racism as a Public Issue in Britain, 1945 – 1981', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain, 1840 – 1950* (Leicester, 1996), pp. 185 – 215.

Briggs, Asa. *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (Oxford, 1995).

Brooke, Stephen. *Class: Knowing your place in modern Britain* (London, 1997).

Brooke, Stephen. 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History* 34:4 (2001), pp. 773 – 795.

Brooker, Will and Jermyn, Deborah (eds.). *The Audience Studies Reader* (London, 2003).

Brooker, Will and Jermyn, Deborah. 'Moral panic and censorship: The vulnerable audience', in Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds.), *The Audience Studies Reader* (London, 2003), pp. 51 – 53.

Brown, Callum. *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800 – 2000* (Abingdon, 2009).

Brown, Callum and Lynch, Gordon. 'Cultural perspectives', in Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (eds.), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 329 – 351.

Buettner, Elizabeth. "'Going for an Indian": South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008), pp. 865 – 901.

Butler, Jeremy. 'Introduction', in Jeremy Butler (ed.), *Star Texts: Images and Performance in Film and Television* (Detroit, 1991), pp. 7 – 16.

Cannadine, David. *Class in Britain* (New Haven, 1998).

Cannadine, David. *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1996).

Carpenter, Humphrey. *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom Of The 1960s* (London, 2000).

Claessens, Nathalie and Dhoest, Alexander. 'Comedy taste: Highbrow/lowbrow, comedy and cultural capital', *Participations* 7:1 (2010), pp. 49 – 72.

Clarke, Peter. *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 1990* (St Ives, 1997).

Cockerell, Michael. *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (London, 1988).

Cohen, William. 'Locating Filth', in William Cohen and Ryan Johnson (eds.), *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis, 2005), pp. vii – xxxvii.

Colley, Linda. 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31:4 (1992), pp. 309 – 329.

Collie, Hazel; Irwin, Mary; Moseley, Rachel; Wheatley, Helen and Wood, Helen. 'Researching the History of Television for Women in Britain, 1947-1989', *Media History* 19:1 (2013), pp. 107 – 117.

Collins, Marcus. 'Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 40:3 (2001), pp. 391 – 418.

Collins, Marcus. 'The fall of the English gentleman: the national character in decline, c. 1918 – 1970', *Historical Research* 75:187 (2002), pp. 90 – 111.

Comedy Classics, *Morecambe & Wise: Bring Me Sunshine* (London, 2010).

Cook, William. *Eric Morecambe Unseen: The Lost Diaries, Jokes and Photographs* (London, 2005).

Cook, William. *Morecambe & Wise Untold* (London, 2007).

Corbett, Susannah. *Harry H. Corbett: The Front Legs of the Cow* (Gloucestershire, 2012).

Corbin, Alain. *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination* (Leamington Spa, 1986).

Corner, John. 'Finding data, reading patterns, telling stories: issues in the historiography of television', *Media, Culture & Society* 25:2 (2003), pp. 273 – 280.

Crisell, Andrew. 'Filth, Sediton and Blasphemy: The Rise and Fall of Television Satire', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London, 1997), pp. 145 – 158.

Crowder, Matt. 'A Space and Time for Entertainment: *That Was The Week That Was* and Viewers' Utopian Expectations', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:3 (2014), pp. 420 – 433.

Crowther, Bruce and Pinfold, Mike. *Bring Me Laughter: Four Decades of TV Comedy* (London, 1987).

Curran, James and Seaton, James. *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (St Ives, 2000).

Darwin, J. G. 'The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline since 1900', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1996), pp. 27 – 43.

Davie, Grace. 'Religion in post-war Britain: a sociological view', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London, 1994), pp. 165 – 178.

de Leon, Charles L. Ponce. *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890 – 1940* (North Carolina, 2002).

Donnelly, Mark. *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow, 2005).

Double, Oliver. *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Basingstoke, 2012).

Dunkley, Christopher. 'Morecambe and Wise', in Annabel Merullo and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003), pp. 126 – 129.

Dyer, Richard. 'Heavenly Bodies', in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London, 2014), pp. 85 – 89.

Ellis, John. 'Stars as a Cinematic Phenomenon', in Jeremy Butler (ed.), *Star Texts: Images and Performances in Film and Television* (Detroit, 1991), pp. 300 – 315.

Ellis, John. 'Television and history', *History Workshop Journal* 56 (2003), pp. 278 – 285.

English, Richard and Kenny, Michael (eds.). *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke, 2000).

Farnes, Norma. *Spike: An Intimate Memoir* (London, 2003).

Fielding, Steven. 'Brotherhood and brothers: Responses to "coloured" immigration in the British Labour Party, c. 1951 – 1965', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3:1 (1998), pp. 79 – 97.

Fielding, Steven. *The Labour Governments 1964 – 1970, Volume 1: Labour and Cultural Change* (Manchester, 2003).

Fisher, Johnny. *Funny Way To Be A Hero* (London, 1973).

Fisher, Trevor. 'Permissiveness and the politics of morality', *Contemporary Record* 7:1 (1993), pp. 149 – 165.

Fiske, John. 'Moments of television: Neither text nor audience', in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991), pp. 56 – 78.

Francis, Martin. 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender & History* 19:1 (2007), pp. 163 – 185.

Francis, Martin. 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002), pp. 637 – 652.

Freedman, Des. *Television Policies of the Labour Party 1951 – 2000* (London, 2003).

Friedman, Sam. *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a "Good" Sense of Humour* (Oxon, 2014)

Friedman, Sam. 'Legitimizing a Discredited Art Form: The Changing Field of British Comedy', *Edinburgh Working Papers in Sociology* 39 (2009), pp. 347 – 370.

Friedman, Sam. 'The cultural currency of a "good" sense of humour: comedy and new forms of distinction', *The British Journal of Sociology* 62:2 (2011), pp. 347 – 370.

Friedman, Sam and Kuipers, Giseline. 'The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries', *Cultural Sociology* 7:2 (2013), pp. 179 – 195.

Gamble, Andrew. 'Theories and Explanations of British Decline', in Richard English and Michael Kenny (eds.), *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 1 – 22.

Gatrell, Vic. *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2006).

George, Vic and Howards, Irving. *Poverty Amidst Affluence: Britain and the United States* (Aldershot, 1991).

- Geraghty, Christine. *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the "New Look"* (London, 2000).
- Grant, Matthew. 'Historians, the Penguin Specials and the "State-of-the-Nation" Literature, 1958-64', *Contemporary British History* 17:3 (2003), pp. 29 – 54.
- Green, E. H. H. *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002).
- Green, Jonathon. *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London, 1998).
- Gunn, Simon. 'Translating Bourdieu: cultural capital and the English middle class in historical perspective', *British Journal of Sociology* 56:1 (2005), pp. 49 – 64.
- Hackett, Nan. 'A Different Form of "Self": Narrative Style in British Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography', *Biography* 12:3 (1989), p. 208 – 226.
- Hall, Stuart. 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andy Lowe and Paul Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972 – 1979* (London, 1980), pp. 128 – 138.
- Hampshire, James. 'Immigration and race relations', in Peter Dorey (ed.), *The Labour Governments, 1964 – 1970* (Abingdon, 2006), pp. 309 – 329.
- Hewison, Robert. *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940* (London, 1997).
- Hewison, Robert. *Footlights!: A Hundred Years of Cambridge Comedy* (London, 1984).
- Hilliard, Christopher. "'Is It a Book You Would Even Wish Your Wife or Your Servants to Read": Obscenity Law and the Politics of Reading in Modern England', *American Historical Review* 118:3 (2013), pp. 653 – 678.
- Hills, Dick. 'Morecambe, Eric (1926–1984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31464>, accessed 21 Dec 2014.
- Hinton, James. *Seven lives from mass observation: Britain in the late twentieth century* (Oxford, 2016).
- Holmes, Su. "'Torture, Treacle, Tears and Trickery": Celebrities, "Ordinary" People and *This Is Your Life* (BBC, 1955-65)', in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London, 2014), pp. 156 – 170.

- Hunt, Leon. *Cult British TV Comedy: From Reeves and Mortimer to Psychoville* (Manchester, 2013).
- Husband, Charles. 'Racist Humour and Racist Ideology in British Television, or I Laughed Till You Cried', in, Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton (eds.), *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 149 – 178.
- Huxley, David and David, James. 'No other excuse: Race, class and gender in British Music Hall comedic performance 1914 – 1949', *Comedy Studies* 3:1 (2012), pp. 17 – 28.
- Jefferys, Kevin. *Retreat from New Jerusalem: British Politics, 1951 – 1964* (Basingstoke, 1997).
- Jermyn, Deborah. "'Bringing out the ★ in you": SJP, Carrie Bradshaw and the evolution of television stardom', in Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (eds.), *Framing Celebrity: New directions in celebrity culture* (London, 2006), pp. 67 – 85.
- Johnson, Catherine and Turnock, Robert. *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years* (Maidenhead, 2005).
- Jones, Ben. *The Working Classes in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012).
- Kamm, Jürgen and Birgit Neumann (eds.) *British TV Comedies: Cultural Concepts, Contexts and Controversies* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 23 – 35.
- Kamm, Jürgen and Neumann, Birgit. 'Introduction: The Aesthetics and Politics of British TV Comedy', in Jürgen Kamm and Birgit Neumann (eds.), *British TV Comedies: Cultural Concepts, Contexts and Controversies* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 1 – 20.
- Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticisms* (New York, 2007).
- Kavanagh, Jacqueline. 'The BBC's written archives as a source for media history', *Media History* 5:1 (1999), pp. 81 – 86.
- Kelley, Victoria. *Soap and Water: Cleanliness, Dirt and the Working Classes in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (London, 2010).
- Kilborn, Richard. 'A Golden Age of British Sitcom? *Hancock's Half Hour* and *Steptoe and Son*', in Jürgen
- King, Laura. *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1914 – 1960* (Oxford, 2015).



- King, Laura. 'Now You See a Great Many Men Pushing Their Pram Proudly', *Cultural and Social History* 10:4 (2013), pp. 599 – 617.
- Kuipers, Giselinde. 'Television and taste hierarchies: the case of Dutch television comedy', *Media, Culture, Society* 28 (2006), pp. 359 – 378.
- Lacey, Robert. *Royalty: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* (St Ives, 2002).
- Lacey, Stephen. *Tony Garnett* (London, 2007).
- Langer, John. 'Television's "personality system"', *Media, Culture and Society* 3:4 (1981), pp. 351 – 365.
- Langhamer, Claire. 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), pp. 341 – 362.
- Lewisohn, Mark. *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy* (London, 1998).
- Lindop, Fred. 'Racism and the working class: strikes in support of Enoch Powell', *Labour History Review* 66:1 (2001), pp. 79 – 100.
- Lockyer, Sharon and Pickering, Michael (eds.). *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour* (Basingstoke, 2005).
- Lusted, David. 'The Glut of Personality', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London, 2000), pp. 251 – 258.
- Malik, Sarita. *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television* (London, 2002).
- Mandler, Peter. *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006).
- Mandler, Peter. *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, 1997).
- Mandler, Peter. 'Two cultures – one – or many?', in Kathleen Burk (ed.), *The British Isles since 1945* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 127 – 156.
- Mandler, Peter. 'What is "national identity"? Definitions and applications in modern British historiography', *Modern Intellectual History* 3:2 (2006), pp. 271 – 297.
- Marshall, David. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minnesota, 1997).
- Martens, James W. 'Come on Over! The African Americanisation of *Steptoe and Son*', in Carlen Lavigne and Heather Marcovitch (eds.), *American Remakes of*

*British Television: Transformations and Mistranslations* (Plymouth, 2011), pp. 211 – 225.

Marwick, Arthur. *British Society since 1945* (London, 2003).

Marwick, Arthur. *Culture in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1993).

Marwick, Arthur. *The Sixties: The Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 – 1974* (Oxford, 1998).

McCann, Graham. *Morecambe & Wise* (London, 1998).

McCann, Graham. 'Steptoe and Son', in Annabel Merullo and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003), pp. 157 – 161.

McCann, Graham. 'Wise, Ernie (1925–1999)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2006), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72134>, accessed 21 Dec 2014.

Medhurst, Andy. *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London, 2007).

Medhurst, Andy. 'Every Wart and Pustule: Gilbert Harding and Television Stardom', in Edward Buscombe (ed.), *British Television: A Reader* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 248 – 264.

Medhurst, Andy. 'Music Hall and British Cinema', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London, 1996), pp. 168 – 188.

Merullo, Annabel and Wenborn, Neil (eds.). *British Comedy Greats* (London, 2003).

Midwinter, Eric. *Make 'Em Laugh: Famous Comedians and Their Worlds* (London, 1979).

Mills, Brett. *Television Sitcom* (London, 2005).

Mills, Brett. 'Till Death Us Do Part and All in the Family', in Glen Creeber (ed.), *Fifty Key Television Programmes* (New York, 2004), pp. 208 – 212.

Moran, Joe. *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in front of the TV* (London, 2013).

Morecambe, Gary. *Eric Morecambe: Life's not Hollywood, it's Cricklewood* (London, 2003).

- Morecambe, Gary. *You'll Miss Me When I'm Gone: The life and work of Eric Morecambe* (London, 2009).
- Morecambe, Gary and Sterling, Martin. *Morecambe and Wise: Behind the Sunshine* (London, 1995).
- Morgan, Kenneth O. *Britain Since 1945: The People's Peace* (Oxford, 2001).
- Morley, David. 'Changing paradigms in audience studies', in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991), pp. 16 – 43.
- Morley, David. *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London, 1992).
- Morley, David. *The "Nationwide" Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London, 1980).
- Mort, Frank. *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010).
- Mort, Frank. 'Scandalous Events: Metropolitan Culture and Moral Change in Post-Second World War London', *Representations* 93.1 (2006), pp. 106 – 137.
- Mort, Frank. 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 38:3 (1999), pp. 353 – 384.
- Mort, Frank. 'The Ben Pimlott Memorial Lecture 2010: The Permissive Society Revisited', *Twentieth Century British History* 22:2 (2011), pp. 269 – 298.
- Mundy, John and White, Glyn. *Laughing Matters: Understanding film, television and radio comedy* (Manchester, 2012).
- Nathan, David. *The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London, 1971).
- Neale, Steve and Krutnik, Frank. *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London, 1994).
- Nightingale, Virginia (ed.). *The Handbook of Media Audiences* (West Sussex, 2011).
- Novick, Jeremy. *Morecambe & Wise: You can't see the join* (London, 1997).
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (London, 2008).
- O'Sullivan, Tim. 'Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing 1950 – 1965', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London, 1991), pp. 159 – 181.

- Peach, Ceri; Rogers, Alisdair; Chance, Judith and Daley, Patricia. 'Immigration and Ethnicity', in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 128 – 175.
- Pickering, Michael. *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot, 2008).
- Pimlott, Ben. *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (London, 2002).
- Pines, Jim. *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* (London, 1992).
- Pollard, Sidney. *The Wasting of the British Economy: British economic policy 1945 to the present* (London, 1982).
- Popovic, Helena. "'Uncivilised" Comedy and its Reception', *Participations* 9:1 (2012), pp. 43 – 67.
- Porter, Dilwyn. 'Downhill all the way: thirteen Tory years, 1951 – 64', in, Richard Coopey, Steven Fielding and Nick Tiratsoo, *The Wilson Governments, 1964 – 1970* (London, 1993), pp. 10 – 28.
- Powell, Chris and Paton, George E. C. (eds.). *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (Basingstoke, 1988).
- Pugh, Martin. *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870* (London, 2008).
- Ramsden, John. *Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957 – 1975* (London, 1996).
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester, 1997).
- Rixon, Paul. *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism* (London, 2011).
- Rolinson, Dave. 'Small Screens and Big Voices: Televisual Social Realism and the Popular', in David Tucker (ed.), *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 172 – 211.
- Rolinson, David. "'You Dirty Old Man!": Masculinity and Class in *Steptoe and Son* (1962 – 74)', *British Television Drama* (02 February 2016).
- Ross, Karen and Nightingale, Virginia. *Media and Audiences: New Perspectives* (Berkshire, 2003).
- Ross, Robert. *Steptoe and Son* (London, 2002).

- Routh, Guy. *Occupations of the People of Great Britain, 1801 – 1901* (Basingstoke, 1987).
- Rubenstein, W. D. *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain, 1750 – 1990* (New York, 1993).
- Samuel, Raphael. *Theatres of Memory, Volume One: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1996).
- Samuel, Raphael. *Theatres of Memory, Volume Two: Island Stories, Unravelling Britain* (London, 1999).
- Sandbrook, Dominic. *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (St Ives, 2010).
- Savage, Mike. 'Affluence and Social Change in the Making of Technocratic Middle-Class Identities', *Contemporary British History* 22:4 (2008), pp. 457 – 476.
- Savage, Mike. 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology* 39:5 (2005), pp. 929 – 946.
- Schaffer, Gavin. 'Fighting Thatcher with Comedy: What to Do When There Is No Alternative', *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016), pp. 374 – 397.
- Schaffer, Gavin. 'Race on the Television: The Writing of Johnny Speight in the 1970s', in Laurel Forster and Sue Harper (eds.), *British Society and Culture in the 1970s: The Lost Decade* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 107 – 118.
- Schaffer, Gavin. *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960 – 1980* (Basingstoke, 2014).
- Schaffer, Gavin. 'Till Death Us Do Part and the BBC: Racial Politics and the British Working Classes 1965 – 1975', *Journal of Contemporary History* 45:2 (2010), pp. 454 – 477.
- Schofield, Camilla. *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).
- Schwarz, Bill. "'The only white man in there": the re-racialisation of England, 1956 – 1968', *Race and Class* 38:1 (1996), pp. 65 – 78.
- Schwarz, Bill. *The White Man's World* (Oxford, 2011).
- Scudamore, Pauline. *Spike Milligan: A Biography* (London, 1985).

Seed, John. 'Hegemony postponed: the unravelling of the culture of consensus in Britain in the 1960s', in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds.), *Cultural Revolution?: The Challenge of the arts in the 1960s* (London, 1992), pp. 15 – 44.

Segal, Lynn. 'Look Back in Anger: Men in the 50s', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (London, 1988), pp. 68 – 97.

Seiter, Ellen; Borchers, Hans; Kreuzner, Gabriele and Warth, Eva-Maria (eds.). *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London, 1991).

Sell, Colin. 'Corbett, Harry (1925–1982)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press, May 2015), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92320>, accessed 28 Jan 2016.

Sellers, Robert and Hogg, James. *Little Ern!: The authorised biography of Ernie Wise* (London, 2011).

Sendell, Bernard. *Independent Television in Britain, Volume 2: Expansion and Change, 1958 – 1968* (London, 1983).

Seymour-Ure, Colin. *The Political Impact of the Mass Media* (London, 1974).

Silva, Elizabeth. 'Gender, home and family in cultural capital theory', *British Journal of Sociology* 56:1 (2005), pp. 83 – 103.

Sinfield, Alan. *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London, 1997).

Skeggs, Beverley and Wood, Helen. *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value* (London, 2012).

Smart, Billy. 'The BBC Television Audience Reports, 1957 – 1979: Recorded Opinions and Invisible Expectations', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34:3 (2014), pp. 452 – 462.

Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, 1992).

Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationships Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1971).

Stevens, Christopher. *The Masters of Sitcom: From Hancock to Steptoe* (London, 2011).

Strange, Julie-Marie. 'Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns: Reassessing the pauper grave', *Past & Present* 178 (2003), pp. 148 – 175.

Strange, Julie-Marie. “‘She cried a very little’”: Death, grief and mourning in working-class culture, c. 1880 – 1914’, *Social History* 27:2 (2002), pp. 143 – 161.

Strasser, Susan. *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York, 1999).  
Strinati, Dominic and Wagg, Stephen (eds.). *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain* (London, 1992).

Summerfield, Penny. ‘Patriotism and Empire: Music-Hall Entertainment, 1870 – 1914’, in John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 17 – 48.

Supple, Barry. ‘Fear of falling: economic history and the decline of Britain’, *Economic History Review* 47:3 (1994), pp. 441 – 458.

Suter, Keith. ‘The British Satirical Revolution’, *Contemporary Review* 285:1664 (2004), pp. 161 – 166.

Thompson, Andrew. *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century* (Harlow, 2005).

Thorpe, D. R. *Alec Douglas-Home* (London, 1996).

Thumin, Janet. ‘Introduction: Small screen, big ideas’, in Janet Thumin (ed.), *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London, 202), pp. 1 – 18.

Thumin, Janet (ed.). *Small Screen, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London, 2002).

Todd, Selina. *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910 – 2010* (London, 2014).

Tomlinson, Jim. ‘Inventing “Decline”: The Falling behind of the British Economy in the Postwar Years’, *Economic History Review* 49:4 (1996), pp. 731 – 757.

Tomlinson, Jim. ‘The Decline of the Empire and the Economic “Decline” of Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 14:3 (2003), pp. 201 – 221.

Trentmann, Frank. *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (St Ives, 2010).

Turner, Graeme. *Understanding Celebrity* (London, 2004).

Turnock, Rob. *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London, 2007).

Verma, Gajendra. 'Attitudes, Race Relations and Television', in John Twitchin (ed.), *The Black and White Media Book: Handbook for the study of Racism and Television* (Staffordshire, 1992), pp. 123 – 129.

Vincent, David. 'Love and death and the nineteenth-century working class', *Social History* 5:2 (1980), pp. 223 – 247.

Von Hodenberg, Christina. *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2015).

Wagg, Stephen (ed.). *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference* (London, 1998).

Wagg, Stephen. 'You've never had it so silly: The politics of British satirical comedy from *Beyond the Fringe* to *Spitting Image*', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Come On Down?: Popular media culture in post-war Britain* (London, 1992), pp. 254 – 284.

Ward, Stuart. "'No nation could be broker": the satire boom and the demise of Britain's world role', in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 91 – 110.

Warnock, Mary. 'Whitehouse, (Constance) Mary (1910–2001)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2005; online edn, May 2014 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76525>, accessed 13 Sept 2015].

Waters, Chris. "'Dark Strangers" in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947 – 1963', *Journal of British History* 36:2 (1997), pp. 207 – 238.

Webster, Wendy. 'Domesticating the Frontier: Gender, Empire and Adventure Landscapes in British Cinema, 1945 – 59', *Gender & History* 15:1 (2003), pp. 85 – 107.

Webster, Wendy. *Englishness and Empire, 1939 – 1965* (Oxford, 2005).

Wheatley, Helen (ed.). *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television History* (New York, 2007).

Whipple, Amy. 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell', *The Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009), pp. 717 – 735.

Wills, Abigail. 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England, 1950 – 1970', *Past & Present* 187 (2005), pp. 157 – 185.

Wilmot, Roger. *From Fringe to Flying Circus: Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960 – 1980* (London, 1982).



Wilmot, Roger. *Kindly Leave the Stage: The Story of Variety 1919 – 1960* (London, 1985).

Ziegler, Phillip. *Crown and People* (London, 1978).

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Two of a Kind* (ITA)

Written by:  
Dick Hills and Sid Green

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Script	Recording	ARR
1	1	30 June 1962		✓	
	2	07 July 1962		✓	
	3	14 July 1962		✓	
	4	21 July 1962		✓	
	5	28 July 1962		✓	
	6	04 August 1962		✓	
	7	11 August 1962		✓	
	8	18 August 1962		✓	
	9	25 August 1962		✓	
	10	01 September 1962		✓	
	11	08 September 1962		✓	
	12	15 September 1962		✓	
	13	22 September 1962		✓	

#### *The Morecambe and Wise Show* (BBC)

Written by:  
Dick Hills and Sid Green (Series 1)  
Eddie Braben (Series 2 onwards)

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Script	Recording	ARR
1	1	02 September 1968			✓
	2	09 September 1968			
	3	16 September 1968			✓
	4	23 September 1968			
	5	30 September 1968			
	6	07 October 1968			✓
	7	14 October 1968			
	8	21 October 1968			✓
2	1	27 July 1969		✓	✓
	2	10 August 1969		✓	
	3	24 August 1969		✓	
	4	07 September 1969		✓	
Christmas Special		26 December 1969		✓	✓

***Till Death Us Do Part*** (BBC)

Written by:  
Johnny Speight

Cast:  
Alf Garnett – Warren Mitchell  
Else Garnett – Dandy Nicholls  
Rita Rawlins – Una Stubbs  
Mike Rawlins – Tony Booth

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Title	Script	Recording	ARR
Pilot		22 February 1965	<i>Comedy Playhouse: Till Death Us Do Part</i>			✓
1	1	06 June 1966	Arguments, Arguments		✓	
	2	13 June 1966	Hair Raising		✓ [audio]	
	3	20 June 1966	A House With Love in It	✓		
	4	27 June 1966	Intolerance		✓ [audio]	
	5	04 July 1966	Two Toilets?... That's Posh!		✓ [audio]	
	6	18 July 1966	From Liverpool with Love		✓ [audio]	
	7	01 August 1966	Claustrophobia		✓ [audio]	✓
2	1	26 December 1966	Peace and Goodwill		✓	✓
	2	02 January 1967	Sex Before Marriage		✓ [audio]	
	3	09 January 1967	I Can Give It Up Any Time I Like	✓		
	4	16 January 1967	The Bulldog Breed		✓ [audio]	
	5	23 January 1967	Caviar on the Dole		✓ [audio]	
	6	30 January 1967	A Woman's Place Is In The Home		✓ [audio]	
	7	06 February 1967	A Wapping Mythology		✓ [audio]	✓
	8	13 February 1967	In Sickness and In Health	✓		
	9	20 February	State Visit		✓	

		1967				
	10	27 February 1967	Alf's Dilemma (aka Cleaning Up TV)		✓	✓
Easter Special		27 March 1967	Till Closing Time Us Do Part		✓	✓
3	1	05 January 1968	The Phone			✓
	2	12 January 1968	The Blood Donor		✓	
	3	19 January 1968	Monopoly	✓	✓ [audio]	
	4	26 January 1968	The Funeral		✓ [audio]	
	5	02 February 1968	Football	✓		
	6	09 February 1968	The Puppy (aka The Dog)	✓		
	7	16 February 1968	Aunt Maud	✓		

### ***Curry & Chips*** (BBC)

Written by:  
Johnny Speight

Cast:  
Kevin O'Grady (Paki-Paddy) – Spike Milligan  
Arthur Blenkinsop (foreman) – Eric Sykes  
Norman (shop steward) – Norman Rossington  
Kenny (factory worker) – Kenny Lynch  
Smellie (factory worker) – Sam Kydd  
Mrs Bartok (landlady) – Fanny Carby

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Script	Recording	ARR
1	1	21 November 1969		✓	
	2	28 November 1969		✓	
	3	05 December 1969		✓	
	4	12 December 1969		✓	
	5	19 December 1969		✓	
	6	26 December 1969		✓	

### ***Steptoe and Son*** (BBC)

Written by:  
Alan Simpson and Ray Galton

Cast:  
Harold Steptoe – Harry H. Corbett  
Albert Steptoe – Wilfrid Brambell

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Title	Script	Recording	ARR
Pilot		07 June 1962	The Offer		✓	✓
1	1	14 June 1962	The Bird		✓	✓
	2	21 June 1962	The Piano		✓	
	3	28 June 1962	The Economist		✓	
	4	05 July 1962	The Diploma		✓	
	5	12 July 1962	The Holiday		✓	
2	1	03 January 1963	Wallah-Wallah Catsmeat		✓	✓
	2	10 January 1963	The Bath		✓	✓
	3	17 January 1963	The Stepmother		✓	
	4	24 January 1963	Sixty-Five Today		✓	
	5	31 January 1963	A Musical Evening		✓	
	6	07 February 1963	Full House		✓	
	7	14 February 1963	Is That Your Horse Outside?		✓	
3	1	07 January 1964	Homes Fit for Heroes		✓	✓
	2	14 January 1964	The Wooden Overcoats		✓	
	3	21 January 1964	The Lead Man Cometh		✓	✓
	4	28 January 1964	Steptoe á la Cart		✓	
	5	04 February 1964	Sunday for Seven Days		✓	
	6	11 February 1964	The Bonds That Bind Us		✓	✓
	7	18 February 1964	The Lodger		✓	✓
4	1	04 October 1965	And Afterwards At...		✓	✓
	2	11 October 1965	Crossed Swords		✓	✓

	3	18 October 1965	Those Magnificent Men and Their Heating Machines		✓	
	4	25 October 1965	The Siege of Steptoe Street		✓	
	5	01 November 1965	A Box in Town		✓	
	6	08 November 1965	My Old Man's a Tory		✓	
	7	15 November 1965	Pilgrim's Progress		✓	✓

***That Was The Week That Was*** (BBC)

Ser.	Ep.	Transmission	Recording	Script	ARR
1	1	24 November 1962		✓	✓
	2	01 December 1962		✓	✓
	3	08 December 1962	✓	✓	
	4	15 December 1962	✓	✓	✓
	5	22 December 1962		✓	✓
	6	29 December 1962	✓	✓	✓
	7	05 January 1963		✓	✓
	8	12 January 1963		✓	✓
	9	19 January 1963		✓	✓
	10	26 January 1963		✓	✓
	11	02 February 1963			✓
	12	09 February 1963		✓	
	13	16 February 1963	✓	✓	✓
	14	23 February 1963		✓	
	15	02 March 1963		✓	✓
	16	09 March 1963		✓	
	17	16 March 1963		✓	✓
	18	23 March 1963		✓	
	19	30 March 1963		✓	
	20	06 April 1963			✓
	21	13 April 1963			
	22	20 April 1963	✓	✓	
	23	27 April 1963		✓	✓
2	1	28 September 1963			✓
	2	05 October 1963		✓	
	3	12 October 1963			✓
	4	19 October 1963			
	5	26 October 1963		✓	✓
	6	02 November 1963		✓	
	7	09 November 1963		✓	

<b>8</b>	16 November 1963			✓
<b>9 (JFK special)</b>	23 November 1963	✓ (Audio)	✓	
<b>10</b>	30 November 1963			
<b>11</b>	07 December 1963		✓	
<b>12</b>	14 December 1963			
<b>13</b>	21 December 1963			✓
<b>14</b>	28 December 1963			